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WHEN DAD PLAYS
2 Samuel 1

This week one night Laurie and I had a dinner that involved a little chicken but also salad and artichoke. It occurred to me again that I'm not sure I've ever encountered a less likely food item than an artichoke. It's actually a little menacing looking. Can you imagine how hungry and desperate someone must have been to try eating an artichoke for the first time? I envision some cave man who was nearly as useless as I am, getting near starvation because he hasn't been able to kill anything in his hunting expeditions. He encounters an artichoke plant and thinks, "this will probably kill me, but if I don't eat something I'll die anyway." I bring this up because as I reflected on the meal Laurie and I had I realized how different it was from my natural tendencies. My mother tried to feed us a healthy diet, but especially in my single years I lived on the major food groups of meat, potatoes (especially fried), pizza and Mexican food. Now I find myself eating things like salads, artichokes, asparagus, and all manner of vegetables. This is not just a function of growing up. It's a result of having been married to Laurie. She has changed the way I eat, for the better. Being married to her has changed me.

Recently Laurie and I were thinking of going out to a movie one Friday night, but in the end we decided to just stay home because we figured we'd enjoy that more. I reflected on that and saw a big contrast with young, single me. I remember that in those days I seriously wanted to avoid staying in my apartment on a weekend night. Like most of my friends, I was anxious for "something to do." Get a group together and go out for pizza, go to a movie, gather for a party, go bowling, go to a baseball game, or do anything other than just stay at home. What happened to me? The difference was I got married.

Oh, so being married makes you boring? Not really. Being married changed me. I suppose you could say that I'm more boring, but I'm not bored. I married Laurie because I've never enjoyed anyone anywhere close to as much as I enjoy her. What I want to do most when I have free time is be with her. I enjoy that more than anything else I could do. There are lots of things I can do to entertain myself, but if Laurie's not a part of it then it is not nearly as much fun as just doing nothing but being with Laurie. So we can do things together and that's fine, but it's not all that much better than just being at home because the most fun part is being with her.

That is just one aspect of the fact that being married has changed a lot of things about me. I am a different person because I married Laurie. I laugh more because I'm married to Laurie. Last night as we were going to bed Laurie got tickled about something and started laughing, and couldn't stop. Have you ever been around someone who is laughing uncontrollably? It's contagious. I tell you this because it is an example of the fact that there are some things that happen in our lives that will inevitably make us different people. Just as there are numerous things that are different about me purely because I am married to Laurie, there is something else that has happened to me that makes me a different person. Today I want to direct your attention to something that has happened to all of us who are believers in Jesus and to the fact that it makes us different. We will see this in David's life as we look at 2 Samuel 1, a crucial pivot point in David's life.

DAVID GOT NEWS OF SAUL'S DEMISE

After David and his men returned to Ziklag from their mission to rescue their families from the Amalekite raiders a disheveled man staggered into town with news from the camp of the Israeli army that had been fighting yet another Philistine incursion. King Saul and his sons had been killed and the Israeli army had been routed.

David asked the man to give details. The eyewitness, who was actually an Amalekite living with the Israelis, explained that during the battle he had come upon a gravely wounded Saul. He said that Saul knew his wounds were fatal, but the Philistines were closing in and he knew they would torture him, so he asked the Amalekite to kill him. The eyewitness said he obliged him, knowing that the king could not survive his terrible wounds. He picked up Saul's crown and royal arm band and ran, bringing them along with the news to David.

There is a problem when we compare this account of events with that of 1 Samuel 31:3-5, which describes the death of Saul. "The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically. Saul said to his armor-bearer, 'Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me.' But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him."

Some critics of the Bible jump on this as one of those much ballyhooed contradictions in the Bible. These two accounts of Saul's death do not agree. There is no contradiction. What we have is the writer's account of what happened to Saul

and his account of what this Amalekite said happened. The first account tells what actually happened while the second accurately reports what the Amalekite claimed happened. He was lying.

This man did witness Saul's last moments. Maybe he thought he was the only one who saw it and escaped. As it turned out he was not the only one. Someone else apparently reported what actually happened. But this guy put himself in the scene in place of Saul's armor-bearer. He became the one Saul asked to finish him off. Only he was not Israeli and he had no great reverence for the Lord's anointed. So he claimed he did Saul a favor and killed him.

He thought David would be thrilled. Everyone knew Saul and David were enemies. This guy had finally ended David's long ordeal. Saul would no longer be a threat to him. In the parlance of today's television commercial, at last after all the running and hiding from Saul, David was free to move about the country. The Amalekite was certain that this was going to put him in good standing with the next king of Israel.

This is a case of a man seizing an opportunity to enrich himself. At least that's what he thought was going to happen. Surely David would be grateful to him for getting rid of the man who had been his tormentor for so long and thus paving the way for him to take the throne of Israel.

DAVID GRIEVED OVER THE DEATH OF SAUL

David's response to the news about Saul was a total shock to the Amalekite. First according to verse 11 "David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the nation of Israel."

That was the last thing the Amalekite witness expected. Suppose you work for an ogre, a boss who was impatient, unkind, rude, insanely demanding and downright abusive. And suppose that one day an executive from higher up the chain shows up, reads your horrible boss the riot act and summarily fires him in front of all of his employees. How would you feel? You and all your employees would rejoice and throw a party to celebrate. That's what anyone would have expected to be David's reaction to the news of Saul's death.

David genuinely was saddened by the death of Saul. My suspicion is that his men were not all that sorry to hear about his death. However, they were deeply grieved by the death of Jonathan and by the defeat of the Israeli army. In one sense the

death of Saul was sad for them. For all his faults, Saul had united Israel. With his death there was now a huge cloud of uncertainty over the nation's future. Jonathan was the heir apparent, but he was also gone. Many knew David had been anointed to be the next king, but it was far from a sure thing at that point that all would acknowledge this. There was concern that Israel might fracture or that there would be a free for all as people scrambled for power.

David's reaction to the Amalekite is shocking. The eyewitness expected that he would be rewarded for helping David. His reward was a death sentence. That seems extreme. However, there were some extenuating circumstances. First, he was an Amalekite. Throughout the stories of David's life they come across as a violent and untrustworthy tribe. David's people had just had a nasty run-in with a bunch of them. But beyond that this guy put David in a bad situation. By coming to him with his tale of killing Saul and bringing the crown to him he gave the appearance that David had a hand in Saul's death. Since the crown was in his possession it might have appeared that David had arranged Saul's death as part of a power play effort to seize the throne.

We know that's the farthest thing from the truth, but imagine what people would do with this incident. Many times it is not what actually happens but what it might look like and what people perceive it to be that are the crucial factors. You can imagine how the rumors might fly that David was connected to the guy who supposedly finished off Saul and he already possessed the royal crown. David wanted no part of that. He didn't know the Amalekite was lying. He just knew that by his claim he had killed the Lord's anointed king, therefore he deserved to die.

Then David composed a poem in honor of Saul and his son, Jonathan. Its theme is seen in verse 19, "how the mighty have fallen." That phrase appears again in verses 25 and 27. We use it as a taunt when some proud person has been humbled, but David used it as an expression of great sorrow. It was a lament. It is surprising how David described Saul. Verse 34 says, "Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold." This was a poetic, figurative way of saying that Saul had done great things for the people of Israel. He had been a great leader. We might easily suspect this was just David saying the right things for a fallen leader, things he didn't believe for a minute. But all indications are that while we might expect David to have a very negative attitude toward Saul, in fact, despite everything, David still regarded him with deep respect. In 1 Samuel 26:20 David said to Saul, "The king of Israel has come out to look for a flea – as one hunts a partridge in the mountains." He view himself as a flea compared to great King Saul.

IMPLICATIONS

DAVID WAS DIFFERENT

It was obvious in this story that David did not respond to a number of situations the way most people would. He did not do what anyone expected. We can see two aspects of this in the story of his life up to this point.

David Waited For God's Plan

We have seen that twice David had golden opportunities to kill Saul and passed up those opportunities. Once in a cave David snuck up on Saul, who never knew a thing about it, then again when Saul was asleep in his camp David was able to infiltrate his defenses. In the eyes of everyone David had the right to kill Saul. After all, Saul was trying to kill him when David had never done anything wrong.

Both times David refused to inflict any harm whatsoever on Saul. In 1 Samuel 26:9-11 after Abishai, his buddy, wanted to kill Saul on the spot, David said, "Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless? As surely as the Lord lives, the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish. But the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed." David knew that God had chosen him to replace Saul. But he was totally committed to the idea that if God wanted him to be the king then God would have to make it happen.

David refused to strike at Saul. Saul had been obsessed with killing David. He had used all of his authority and his resources as king, which were considerable, to pursue him. He had spread lies about David plotting to kill him. He had put David's family in jeopardy. Something we didn't look at earlier but we need to know is revealed in 1 Samuel 25:44. "Saul had given his daughter Michal, David's wife, to Paltiel son of Latish." There's a great deal one could say about how unfairly women were treated back in that day. I suppose it's possible that Michal was fine with trading in David for Paltiel, but I'm pretty sure what Michal wanted was not a factor. Saul, who had previously given his consent for Michal to marry David, now decides to take her away from David and give her to another man.

That's just mean. That's just one example of how Saul was treating David. The bigger issue is that Saul was trying to kill him. And God has already informed Samuel, Saul and David that God wanted Saul out and David in. The most logical thing in the world would have been for David to make that happen. But through all those weary months and years, David waited and trusted God. He insisted on letting God work out his plan his way in David's life.

In Psalm 25:5 David wrote, “You are God my Savior, and my hope is in you all day long.” The English Standard Version translates that last phrase, “for you I wait all the day long.” David didn’t just write that, he lived it. He waited for God and trusted in his deliverance rather than trying to do it his own way.

When Laurie and I decided that we wanted to marry each other I talked to her Dad and asked for permission, which he granted. Her mother was not happy about our plan, but grudgingly went along. We planned a wedding for 5 months later. A month or so later her Mom shocked us by objecting to our plans and saying we were defying them, that they had never agreed to our plan to marry. We were terribly upset. We were getting counsel from a wise pastor at our church who met with Laurie’s parents. We still remember vividly the day we met with this godly man and he told us that he believed the right thing for us to do was submit to Laurie’s parents. We objected that Laurie’s parents had already given their permission. It wasn’t fair to suddenly claim they hadn’t. On top of that, we were grown adults. We had every right to make decisions for ourselves. If they didn’t want to pay for our wedding that was their business, but who we married was our decision. That was absolutely true, especially in our society. Nevertheless, our friend insisted that the godly thing to do was to submit to their authority and to wait on God. This was the way we could show love and respect to them. The idea was galling to both of us. Let someone else decide whether we could marry or not? That felt just awful. But as we prayed about it we got a sense that our pastor was right. Though it went against everything we felt inside, we told Laurie’s parents we would comply with whatever they wanted us to do. We had to trust God to work out the situation. We had the ability and the desire to take matters into our own hands. Most everyone would say we had the right to do so. But we chose to forego our right and wait for God to work. That was a little like what David did, and he did it for years. Let me tell you, it was hard to do.

I’ve gone through other situations in which I faced the temptation to take matters into my own hands, to determine what happened in my own life, to fight against people who were opposing me. In every one of those situations God wanted me to focus not on making life go the way I wanted, but on living as God would have me live and let him decide the outcome.

By the way, as you may have guessed by the fact that Laurie and I have been married for 37 years, though when we informed her parents that we would do whatever they wanted they began explaining why getting married wasn’t a good

idea for us, only a few minutes later they gave us their blessing. I asked them to put it in writing. Just kidding.

David Genuinely Respected His Tormentor

The second way we see how different David was is in his attitude toward Saul. David had every right to despise him. The man had been cruel, unfair and despicable toward him. He had done him serious harm for years. David deserved none of it. The natural human reaction would be to hate him. It would be to lay awake at nights and dream of ways to get revenge. The normal human response would be to have nothing good to say about that man, and to be eaten up with resentment toward him.

Did David always feel a warm sense of affection for Saul? Probably not. He undoubtedly felt the hurt and the frustration over Saul's treatment of him. He no doubt struggled at times with anger toward him, felt the pull of bitterness that wanted to well up and spill over. I believe David deliberately chose to focus on the fact that Saul was Israel's king and that he was God's choice to be king. He chose to see the great things that Saul had done as a leader and to let that form his responses to Saul at all times.

THE DIFFERENCE DERIVED FROM AWE OF GOD

What caused David to be different like this? He had enormous reverence for God. We have seen this in the fact that even cutting the robe of Saul, God's anointed ruler, caused David pangs of guilt. Things have really changed since Laurie and I first planted a church in this area as a young newlywed couple. Our first church met in a school, much like we do now. But back then we actually used hymnbooks to sing from. Before the service several of us would put the hymnbooks out on the seats of the chairs. Since we didn't have a lot of people coming it didn't take long. One Sunday one of our leaders brought a friend, a devout Jewish man, to church. They came early and his friend volunteered to help us pass out the books. But when he saw what we were doing he was appalled. Aghast, he said, "You put the books on a place where people *sit*?" He saw these books as holy books, and he had such huge reverence for God that he was shocked at the idea of what he perceived to be showing such disrespect. I have never forgotten his reaction. David had something similar. Hey David, it's just cutting a piece of cloth. Maybe so, but it's cloth belonging to the Lord's anointed, so it deserves great respect!

In 1 Chronicles 29:10-13 David said, "Praise be to you, Lord, the God of our father Israel, from everlasting to everlasting. Yours, Lord, is the greatness and the power

and the glory and the majesty and the splendor, for everything in heaven and earth is yours. Yours, Lord, is the kingdom; you are exalted as head over all. Wealth and honor come from you, you are the ruler of all things. In your hands are strength and power to exalt and give strength to all. Now, our God, we give you thanks, and praise your glorious name.” He went on in verse 14, “But who am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

In Psalm 139:17 David wrote, “How precious to me are your thoughts, God! How vast is the sum of them.” David had this enormously high view of God, and that view included believing that God is present and active in this world, that he is wise and good in all he does, and that the most important thing one can do is to live as God desires that we live. If God willed that Saul, though cruel and bordering on insane, should be the king, and that he should be so overcome with jealousy and fear of David that killing him became his obsession, then David needed to live with that and make the best of it. He had to accept it and even embrace it, because it was the will of Almighty God.

THOSE WHO KNOW GOD WILL BE DIFFERENT

Last month I had a platelet rich plasma injection that is supposed to cause the torn tendon in my elbow to heal. It’s been 6 weeks and so far I’ve seen exactly zero improvement. The doctor insists that it is working. I have to tell you that if they insist it has worked but my elbow doesn’t get any better I won’t be happy. The point of the treatment is to change my condition. If having God work in our lives supposedly heals us but it doesn’t actually make any difference, something is wrong. The consistent message of the Bible is that knowing God will bring about change, it will make us different.

They will care more about obedience than outcome.

Had David been focused solely on the outcome, that he would become the king of Israel, rather than on obedience, his life would have been quite different David would have seized his chance to kill Saul and grab the throne. Instead, David was concerned about obedience to God, about showing respect to God and to his anointed one, the current king. That dictated his action rather than some goal he felt he needed to achieve.

Our world is very much an outcome focused world. I am not making a political statement here, but I want to relate a bit of a conversation Laurie had with a friend. This friend is an avid supporter of one of the presidential candidates. Laurie asked her, “Doesn’t it bother you that your candidate has proven totally untrustworthy,

having often lied?” Her friend did not dispute that point, she merely said, “I don’t care about that. I just think this person can get the job done and that’s all that matters to me.”

All she cares about is that someone can “get the job done.” Only the outcome matters. She has an outcome in mind and she doesn’t care what it takes to get it, she will vote for the person that she thinks can achieve it, regardless of the methods that person might use. Even a little bit of thought will reveal that at some point there is a terrible price to be paid for that mindset. Anything can be justified, even the most horrifying atrocities can be committed, because all that matters is achieving the outcome. The 20th century with its concentration camps, its gulags, its killing fields in Cambodia, stands in loud testimony to the fact that the ends justifying the means creates unlimited evil and suffering.

In Matthew 4 Jesus was in the wilderness for 6 weeks. He did not eat the entire time. Verse 3 tells us, “The tempter came to him and said, ‘If you are the Son of God, tell these stones to become bread.’” The Greek grammar of that sentence tells us it could be translated, “Since you are the Son of God.” Hey, you’ve got the power to do this. If you don’t eat something you’ll die. You have a legitimate need for food, so use your power and make yourself some nice sourdough bread. Was there anything wrong with the outcome of getting some food to eat? No, there is nothing sinful about eating food. Was there anything wrong with Jesus using his power to produce food? No, later he would turn water into wine and would make one boy’s lunch expand to provide a meal for thousands of people. Jesus answered, “It is written man shall not live on bread alone, but on every word that comes from the mouth of God.” The Father had instructed him to fast and trust in him to provide him with what was necessary to sustain him. So that is what he did. He focused on obedience rather than outcome. Later in verses 8-9 Satan showed him the kingdoms of the world and said he would give him rule over them all if Jesus would bow to him. Is the outcome of Jesus ruling over the world wrong? No, in fact it is the will of God. But what mattered was how that would come about. Obedience was what mattered more than the outcome.

In our society we tolerate pastors who neglect their families and often are proud, domineering, controlling leaders because they get the outcome many want of producing the result of big churches. We extol leaders in business, entertainment and government who are selfish, unkind and sometimes even abusive people because they achieve “success.” The focus is on the outcome. But a person who knows God will be focused on obedience.

Carey Lohrenz is an unusual woman, a former Navy pilot who flew the F14 fighter jet. Today she gives motivational talks. Often she describes the amazing reality of a Nimitz class aircraft carrier. There on 5000 people on board one of these massive floating cities. But every 9 months half of them leave to go to another assignment, so in the space of 18 months the entire crew turns over. The average age of the people on board a carrier is 19.5 years! These ships must launch and recover supersonic aircraft 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days a year. How do they do it given the youth, inexperience and turnover? Training is huge, of course, but Ms. Lohrenz says it starts with the fact that they have one mission. All of them are focused on launching those airplanes and having them return safely. They are all committed to that one thing, and they all understand that to accomplish that one thing each one of them must do his or her job diligently and correctly. Aircraft mechanic, cook, ship's navigator, nuclear engineer in the engineering department, laundry or supply officer, pilot, helmsman, ship's captain, plane handler, ordnance man, landing signals officer, all of them must focus only on doing their job to accomplish the mission. They don't have to worry about whether the President is using the task force the right way. They don't have to concern themselves with the captain's decisions. They don't have to get tied up in knots over whether a pilot is flying the plane properly. They just need to focus on the process of doing their job well and leave the outcome to those who are responsible for it. And that is what we must do as well. God is the one who rules. We merely need to focus on the process of doing our job in his plan, on obeying him today, and leave the result to him.

They will live in peace

What enables us to focus on obedience is knowing that the outcome is in God's hands. When David believed that God could and would keep his promise, that God would indeed make him king regardless of what Saul or anyone else tried to do, he displayed remarkable character. He lived in peace. But when he quit believing that and started thinking that it was by his own ability that he would remain safe and become king, then bad things happened and people started dying.

Psalm 91:1 says "Whoever dwells in the shelter of the Most High will rest in the shadow of the Almighty." Those who know God will rest. They will be at peace, because they are in the shadow of the Almighty. David mostly lived in the reality of that. When he didn't, he panicked. He became afraid, he got stressed, he began scheming and lying, and invariably terrible things happened. But when he did live in the shadow of the Almighty he could rest and wait.

The street out in front of our house was like a playground when our kids were young. Our street is a block long dead end, so few cars travel it. Our area is hilly,

but the portion of the street right in front of our house is flat. Combine that with the fact that our house was kind of Kid Central in the neighborhood in those days, and the result was that neighborhood kid games took place in front of our house. Football, baseball, hockey, and basketball all happened right there. Many days when I got home from work I was instantly presented with pleas to join in the game. Often I did, and when I did I almost always noticed that the kids didn't mind if the teams were lopsided. If they ended up on my team invariably we were seriously outnumbered, but they didn't care. They were at peace with that, because in those days I was bigger, stronger, faster and more skilled by a lot than they were. They knew if Dad decided our team should win, we would win because I was so much better than them that I could control play. In other words, regardless of the teams, I controlled the outcome.

They will relate to others differently

Every time I read the story of David's life I marvel at how David related to Saul. Frankly it is not normal. Normal would have been to become an enemy. It would have been anger, hurt, resentment and an overwhelming desire to strike back, to defeat his enemy. But David consistently saw Saul not as an enemy, but as the Lord's chosen leader of his nation, as someone to whom he owed respect.

The people who know God, who live in his presence, who are in awe of him, will relate to other people in a way that is not natural for human beings. The ultimate example of this is, of course, Jesus. Look at Matthew 27:39-43. Jesus has been through several "trials" that were travesties, he has been beaten and tortured, and now he is hanging on a cross. Here's what was happening. "Those who passed by hurled insults at him, shaking their heads and saying, 'You who are going to destroy the temple and build it in three days, save yourself! Come down from the cross, if you are the Son of God.' In the same way the chief priests, the teachers of the law and the elders mocked him. 'He saved others,' they said, 'but he can't save himself. He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will believe in him. He trusts in God. Let God rescue him now if he wants him.'"

I get angry just reading those words. What a bunch of cruel... Well, never mind, but you get the idea. Those people deserved to be humiliated and hurt badly. They were arrogant and awful toward the best person who has ever lived. They weren't worthy to even share the same air with him. Do you know what Jesus' reaction was to their mean, proud taunts? Luke 23:34 says Jesus said, "Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they are doing."

That's not natural. My reaction is natural. I want those people to pay for their ugliness. I want them to feel the pain. I want them to see their wrong and to be humiliated and afraid. I want them to pay. Jesus wanted them to be forgiven. That's because he knows the Father way better than I do. The better I know the Father, the more I live in his presence, the more I am in awe of his greatness, his love, his mercy and his grace, the more I am astounded by the love he gives me that I absolutely do not deserve, the more my way of relating to others will look like Jesus' way, regardless of what they do. No one has ever done anything to me that is even close to what they did to Jesus. I am confident that as I live as he lived, I will also love as he loved.

Perhaps you've heard of Mosab Hassan Yousef. His father was one of the founders of Hamas, the militant Palestinian organization. He grew up a devout Muslim. He has written a book entitled *Son Of Hamas*. In it he describes how a man gave him a New Testament. He read it, seeking to know the enemy, but he wasn't ready for what he encountered. He ran into Jesus commanding us to love our enemies. All religions tell us to love our neighbors and our families and friends. But love your enemies? He was thunderstruck, and eventually he became a believer in Jesus because of his radical way of living.

Dr. Martin Luther King preached a sermon in Montgomery, Alabama in 1957 on the topic of "Love Your Enemies." How badly our nation needs that message today. He said that the cross of Jesus tells us what love looks like in a world filled town hatred, mistrust, bitterness, mistreatment and abuse. It's message is "I love you. I would rather die than hate you."