

STOOPING TO GREATNESS - PSALM 18:25-36

DAVID IN THE PSALMS #8

The most decorated American war hero in World War 2 was Audie Murphy. He was wounded 3 times in battles; he was credited with personally taking out 240 of the enemy soldiers; of the 235 men in his beginning company, he was one of only 2 who survived the war; he was awarded 27 medals by the time the conflict was over including 3 from the French and 1 from Belgium.

And all this was achieved by a young man who was one of 11 children of a sharecropper in Texas, a young man who actually lied about his age so that he could join the army at the age of 17. Nobody could have predicted beforehand that Audie Murphy would become such an outstanding soldier.

Predictably, Audie Murphy was swept away to Hollywood following World War 2 where he became an instant celebrity and movie star. He played himself alongside James Cagney in the movie version of his autobiography. In just a short while, he had made more than 2 and a half million dollars acting in pictures.

Life couldn't have been better for this young man in his mid 20's who was idolized by everyone as a war hero and rich beyond his wildest imaginations.

But while Audie Murphy was courageous in the heat of battle, he couldn't seem to cope with success. Within a decade after his first hit movie, Murphy was almost destitute. He was forced to declare bankruptcy as a pauper. So when he died in that plane crash in the wooded mountains of Virginia in what should have been the prime of his life, the obituaries mercifully focused on what he had been, not what he had become.

Many people fail to reach their potential in life because of the discouragement of failures. They give it their best shot in life and they fail. So disheartened by their shortcomings, they just give up and quit setting any goals for themselves in the future. It is critical for a person to learn to deal with failure in the positive manner if ultimate success is to be attained - for everyone fails at times in life.

But there are other people who demonstrate the ability to rise to the challenge of failure who cannot handle success. They have the perseverance to get up and try again after failing, to endure trials and troubles. But then when they finally achieve their goal, they don't know what to do. They quit the positive character traits that brought them to success and begin to coast downward. And their final end is worse than their beginning. How many people have we seen who stay on track as long as they are pursuing their goal, but then seem to fall apart after they attain success. Athletes who finally make it to the professional ranks, but then ruin themselves with alcohol or drugs. Businessmen who finally get that position with the company, but then have their families fall apart on them. Even Christian workers who get their eyes off of Christ and fall into some kind of sin which cripples their service for the Lord.

David was a man who learned how to handle success successfully. Now we are not claiming that he was perfect. We are going to see later on in his life a period of spiritual weakness. But David was a man who was generally able to handle success as well as failure.

We have already seen his humble beginnings. David was the youngest of 8 sons of Jesse. Of all the Jesse boys, he was the least likely to be voted most likely

to succeed. The older boys were brave soldiers, but David was the one who was given the job to watching the sheep out on the Bethlehem hillsides. But David had great potential and he honed skills that would be useful to him in the future instead of frittering away his time. David practiced his sharp shooting with the sling until he had the confidence to face the Philistine giant, Goliath, and take him down in one shot hitting a 2 inch square target on the dead run. David developed his musical abilities playing his home-made harp until he became the Palace musician, playing the soothing melodies needed to quit the King's troubled spirits.

And then when that difficult period entered David's life, when King Saul in his madness turned on him venting all of his anger and frustrations, running around the countryside trying to kill him, David persevered and endured with integrity. He trusted in the Lord and waited upon him. He did not strike back and take matters into his own hand when he had opportunity to do so. But he rather developed his leadership skills, building around him a formidable force of skilled and courageous soldiers so that he would be ready when his time came.

Very often in life we find that when God is ready to act, He acts quickly. Sometimes we have to be patient and wait a long time until God's timing is right. But when God's timing comes, critical events can happen in a hurry. This was certainly the case for David. For more than a decade, David was on the run from King Saul. It must have seemed like this difficult period in his life would never end at times for him. But he learned many lessons during this time which we have looked at from some of the Psalms that he wrote.

*David learned to rely upon God for all of his needs and trust in the Lord to

lead and direct his paths as a sheep in a flock relies upon and trusts the Shepherd – Ps. 23.

*David's growth in the knowledge and trust of a Sovereign God whose character would never change so that he would not become disillusioned when the foundations of life appeared to be crumbling all around him - Ps. 11

*David's suspicion of opportunistic people who would try to use and bend situations to their own advantage so that they might climb career ladders dealing with Doeg the Edomite - Ps. 52

*David's ability to endure slander and false accusations that could discredit him - Ps. 57

*David learning not to trust in that little game that so many people in Politics play - trusting in people and favors rather than trusting in God - Ps. 54

*The invaluable lesson of patience that David speaks about in Ps. 13. What important character trait patience would be for David as king.

*And David learned the important lessons from his suffering that can be learned in no other manner as we saw this morning from Psalm 22.

But now when David has learned all of the lessons that God has for him, God is ready to act decisively to fulfill the promise that he made to David through the Prophet Samuel anointing him with the oil of Kingship.

*In one battle with the Philistines, King Saul and his son, Jonathan, who would have been the logical heir to the throne in the eyes of the people, are both killed. Suddenly, the nation of Israel is without any leadership.

It was the most natural process for Judah first, and then the northern tribes

later, to turn to David for leadership. After all, David had been the heir anointed by the respected prophet, Samuel. And David had really been the one who had been protecting the families in Judah from the Philistines anyway. Judah welcomed David first as king because David came from Bethlehem in the tribe of Judah. And the northern tribes of Israel welcomed him 7 years later as they saw his abilities and success as King and after David had outlasted the feeble attempt of Ish-Bosheth, one of Saul's sons, to establish a throne.

*The Philistines were not going to stand by and allow David to assume the throne unopposed. After all, they had the Israelites right where they wanted them now. They had just defeated the Israeli armies in battle. Saul and Jonathan were dead. They wanted Israel to be without any recognized leadership - they would be easier to control. But the Philistines soon found that they were dealing with a different military strategist from Saul when they came to oppose David.

*The Philistine's strength was in their chariots and iron weapons. The Bible clearly states that the Philistines recognized this advantage and wouldn't allow the Israelites to even have a blacksmith in their territory. 1 Samuel 13:19-21 says, *Not a blacksmith could be found in the whole land of Israel, because the Philistines had said, Otherwise the Hebrews will make swords or spears. So all Israel went down to the Philistines to have their plowshares, mattocks, axes and sickles sharpened. The price was two thirds of a shekel for sharpening plowshares and mattocks, and a third of a shekel for sharpening forks and axes and for repointing goads.*

It was with the chariot that the Philistines had perfected their iron artillery.

They would fasten swords to the wheels of the chariots and mow through the opposing armies as if they were harvesting wheat. The Israelites were quite helpless against this superior weaponry. And Saul, for all of his courage and valor, had not shown himself to be a wise military strategist.

*The typical battle against the Philistines would begin with the enemy assembling their chariots in a large plain such as the Valley of Jezreel where Saul finally lost his life. The Philistines would then call the Israelite army down to fight against them. That is what Goliath was doing when David came to visit his brothers on the battle lines. Saul would dutifully lead the Israelite soldiers down onto the battle field where his army would be routed by the superior weaponry of the Philistines. And this scene took place time and time again during the Kingship of Saul.

*But when David became king, the scene changed and changed rapidly. Immediately, the Philistines assembled their chariots in the valley of Rephaim and called David down to fight as recorded in 2 Samuel 5. But David was not foolish enough to fight the Philistines on their home court. David had learned how to fight in the hill country while fleeing from Saul. He had trained his men in this different type of guerilla fighting. In essence, David said to the Philistines, *if you want to fight me, you come to Baal Perazim and I'll be waiting for you.* The Philistines were in a corner now. On the one hand, they felt the need to stop this budding monarchy. But David would not fight them on the plain where they had the distinct advantage. They chose to come up to fight against David and his men which turned out to be a big mistake for them. In 2 quick and decisive battles,

David routed the Philistine armies and confirmed his control of the hill country. Finally, the Israelites were free from their fears of the Philistines.

*David then captured the mountain city of Jerusalem from the Jebusites, making it his capital. It was a perfect neutral sight being right on the border of Judah and Israel and having been a pagan city to this point. And then David brought the Ark of the Covenant to Jerusalem and set up the tabernacle there unifying the country religiously. And within just a short time, David had accomplished what Saul hadn't been able to do in his entire lifetime. David had freed the Israelites from the threat of the Philistines and he had established a capital city where God could be honored and worshipped. And then David just started to defeat the surrounding countries one at a time until he was in control over the whole Middle Eastern region. There haven't been many clearer examples of military success in all of the world's history than that of David who took a nation from being the doormat of the Philistines to being the ruling power of an entire region of the world in just a short period of time.

*So we are coming into a completely different period in the life of David when we come to Psalm 18. We don't know exactly when this Psalm was written, but we do know that it was after Saul was dead, and after David had assumed the throne and had subdued the threats of his surrounding enemies. It could have been later in his reign for there is a passage in 2 Samuel 22 which closely parallels this Psalm. But we can be sure that this Psalm was written after David had become king.

Psalm 18 is a song of Praise and Thanksgiving to the Lord. It is a rather

lengthy Psalm being 50 verses - most of the Psalms are shorter than this one. In this Psalm, David glories in the power of God to deliver him from all of his foes.

Listen as I read Psalm 18:1-50:

PS 18:1 I love you, O LORD, my strength.

PS 18:2 The LORD is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer;
my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge.
He is my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold.

PS 18:3 I call to the LORD, who is worthy of praise,
and I am saved from my enemies.

PS 18:4 The cords of death entangled me;
the torrents of destruction overwhelmed me.

PS 18:5 The cords of the grave coiled around me;
the snares of death confronted me.

PS 18:6 In my distress I called to the LORD;
I cried to my God for help.
From his temple he heard my voice;
my cry came before him, into his ears.

PS 18:7 The earth trembled and quaked,
and the foundations of the mountains shook;
they trembled because he was angry.

PS 18:8 Smoke rose from his nostrils;
consuming fire came from his mouth,
burning coals blazed out of it.

PS 18:9 He parted the heavens and came down;
dark clouds were under his feet.

PS 18:10 He mounted the cherubim and flew;
he soared on the wings of the wind.

PS 18:11 He made darkness his covering, his canopy around him--
the dark rain clouds of the sky.

PS 18:12 Out of the brightness of his presence clouds advanced,
with hailstones and bolts of lightning.

PS 18:13 The LORD thundered from heaven;
the voice of the Most High resounded.

PS 18:14 He shot his arrows and scattered the enemies,
great bolts of lightning and routed them.

PS 18:15 The valleys of the sea were exposed
and the foundations of the earth laid bare
at your rebuke, O LORD,
at the blast of breath from your nostrils.

PS 18:16 He reached down from on high and took hold of me;
he drew me out of deep waters.

PS 18:17 He rescued me from my powerful enemy,
from my foes, who were too strong for me.

PS 18:18 They confronted me in the day of my disaster,
but the LORD was my support.

PS 18:19 He brought me out into a spacious place;
he rescued me because he delighted in me.

PS 18:20 The LORD has dealt with me according to my righteousness;
according to the cleanness of my hands he has rewarded me.

PS 18:21 For I have kept the ways of the LORD;
I have not done evil by turning from my God.

PS 18:22 All his laws are before me;
I have not turned away from his decrees.

PS 18:23 I have been blameless before him
and have kept myself from sin.

PS 18:24 The LORD has rewarded me according to my righteousness,
according to the cleanness of my hands in his sight.

PS 18:25 To the faithful you show yourself faithful,
to the blameless you show yourself blameless,

PS 18:26 to the pure you show yourself pure,
but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd.

PS 18:27 You save the humble
but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

PS 18:28 You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning;
my God turns my darkness into light.

PS 18:29 With your help I can advance against a troop;
with my God I can scale a wall.

PS 18:30 As for God, his way is perfect;
the word of the LORD is flawless.

He is a shield
for all who take refuge in him.

PS 18:31 For who is God besides the LORD?
And who is the Rock except our God?

PS 18:32 It is God who arms me with strength
and makes my way perfect.

PS 18:33 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer;
he enables me to stand on the heights.

PS 18:34 He trains my hands for battle;
my arms can bend a bow of bronze.

PS 18:35 You give me your shield of victory,
and your right hand sustains me;
you stoop down to make me great.

PS 18:36 You broaden the path beneath me,
so that my ankles do not turn.

PS 18:37 I pursued my enemies and overtook them;
I did not turn back till they were destroyed.

PS 18:38 I crushed them so that they could not rise;
they fell beneath my feet.

PS 18:39 You armed me with strength for battle;

you made my adversaries bow at my feet.

PS 18:40 You made my enemies turn their backs in flight,
and I destroyed my foes.

PS 18:41 They cried for help, but there was no one to save them--
to the LORD, but he did not answer.

PS 18:42 I beat them as fine as dust borne on the wind;
I poured them out like mud in the streets.

PS 18:43 You have delivered me from the attacks of the people;
you have made me the head of nations;
people I did not know are subject to me.

PS 18:44 As soon as they hear me, they obey me;
foreigners cringe before me.

PS 18:45 They all lose heart;
they come trembling from their strongholds.

PS 18:46 The LORD lives! Praise be to my Rock!
Exalted be God my Savior!

PS 18:47 He is the God who avenges me,
who subdues nations under me,

PS 18:48 who saves me from my enemies.
You exalted me above my foes;
from violent men you rescued me.

PS 18:49 Therefore I will praise you among the nations, O LORD;

I will sing praises to your name.

PS 18:50 He gives his king great victories;
he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed,
to David and his descendants forever.

Obviously, we are not going to be able to scrutinize the entirety of this Psalm this evening, but I want to look at several verses right in the middle of it that give a clue to 3 characteristics of David that enabled him to handle his successes so successfully. These characteristics are his authenticity, his humility and his faith. And I believe that you will recognize with me that the lack of these characteristics is the major reason why so many people fail to be successful.

1. First of all, notice how authentic David was in verse 25.

To the faithful, you show yourself faithful, to the blameless you show yourself blameless, to the pure you show yourself pure, but to the crooked you show yourself shrewd.

*Now at first glance we are likely to get the wrong impression of what David is saying here unless we are careful. David is not saying that a person must become pure and blameless in order to have any initial relationship with God. He is not saying that a person must clean up his or her life in order for God to accept him, that a person must first become faithful to God before God will be faithful to him, that a person must first present God with a blameless life before God will accept him, that a person must first purify himself before God will show himself to be pure. The Bible is very clear that we are not accepted by God because of what

we do to please him, but rather we are accepted by God on the basis of his mercy and grace, by what he has done so that we might be acceptable to him. David hadn't been chosen by God because he was powerful and mighty. Remember, David was just a young shepherd when Samuel first anointed him to be king. Jesse had to call him in from the fields where he was tending the flocks. And the remainder of this Psalm and the historical context in which it was written demonstrates the fact that David had realized and accepted the grace of God on his behalf. Remember, David is writing as a believer here. He is not writing as one who is becoming a believer in God. The Bible tells us that we are saved only by God's grace, not by good works that we do. *For it is by grace that you are saved through faith, and that not of yourselves, it is the gift of God. Not by works lest anyone should boast. Eph. 2:8,9.* When David had brought the ark of the covenant into Jerusalem, he had done so with much sacrificing. 2 Samuel 6 records that every 6 steps David stopped the procession of the ark to sacrifice a bull and a calf. David was acutely aware of his sin and the sins of the people and realized his need for God's cleansing of those sins.

But having acknowledged the fact that we are not born again into God's family by being blameless or righteous in our own strength, we must not overlook the fact that our continuing relationship with God must be on the basis of authenticity. God is a God of truth. That is one of God's never-changing attributes. Therefore, anyone who is going to have a living relationship with God must have one on the basis of truthfulness.

One of the dangers that success brings with it is the danger of a person

starting to play a role, forgetting his roots, and pretending to be someone that he really isn't inside. Saul fell for that temptation. He started out well, but soon fell into the temptation of thinking that he was more important than he really was. That was the reason for the prophet Samuel reminding him that he was a man who came from humble roots in 1 Samuel 15:17. That was one of the reasons why God rejected Saul. A God of truth cannot have a living relationship with someone who is playing a role, living a life of hypocrisy.

David never forgot who he was. He remained authentic to himself, before his people and with God. He recognized the fact that a person must come to God with a trusting and an innocent and a pure heart if he is to have a living relationship with God. For no human being can ever fool God - God is omniscient. He knows even the innermost secrets of our hearts. If we try to trick God, we will find him to be more shrewd than we can ever be. The Lord Jesus Christ himself echoed a similar message in the 6th beatitude which he gave in his Sermon on the Mount when he said, *Blessed are the pure in heart, for they shall see God.*

2. A second characteristic that David shows in this passage is humility. Notice this trait in verse 27:

You save the humble but bring low those whose eyes are haughty.

*There is an account that Samuel gives in David's life which illustrates David's authenticity and humility very clearly in contrast to the Kingly role that Saul tried to play. This is the account of David supervising the bringing of the ark into Jerusalem that is found in 2 Samuel 6. We pick up this story just after the first failed attempt when they failed to carry the ark in the manner dictated by the law

resulting in the death of Uzzah for reaching out to steady the ark with his hand.

READ 2 Samuel 6:12-23

¹² Now King David was told, "The LORD has blessed the household of Obed-Edom and everything he has, because of the ark of God." So David went down and brought up the ark of God from the house of Obed-Edom to the City of David with rejoicing. ¹³ When those who were carrying the ark of the LORD had taken six steps, he sacrificed a bull and a fattened calf. ¹⁴ David, wearing a linen ephod, danced before the LORD with all his might, ¹⁵ while he and the entire house of Israel brought up the ark of the LORD with shouts and the sound of trumpets.

¹⁶ As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD, she despised him in her heart.

¹⁷ They brought the ark of the LORD and set it in its place inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and David sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before the LORD. ¹⁸ After he had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the LORD Almighty. ¹⁹ Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each person in the whole crowd of Israelites, both men and women. And all the people went to their homes.

²⁰ When David returned home to bless his household, Michal daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, "How the king of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of the slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!"

²¹ David said to Michal, "It was before the LORD, who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD's people Israel -- I will celebrate before the LORD. ²² I will become even more undignified than this, and I will be humiliated in my own eyes. But by these slave girls you spoke of, I will be held in honor."

²³ And Michal daughter of Saul had no children to the day of her death.

*Now isn't this an interesting account. David had been given Michal, the daughter of Saul, as his wife as a reward for a victory over the Philistines. But, Michal, growing up in King Saul's household, had much different expectations of how a king should act. She was used to her father always playing the kingly role with great pomp and circumstance. So when she saw David freely expressing his joy and celebration as the ark was being brought into Jerusalem, she thought, *This is no way for a king to act*. Now David wasn't doing anything wrong. Even though she accuses him of disrobing himself, the Bible clearly says that David was wearing a linen robe - he just wasn't wearing his royal garments, he had taken off his official, kingly robe. Isn't it interesting how David responds to her. He doesn't allow her expectations that had been inbred into her by her upbringing rob him of his freely expressing his praise and celebration to God. David was comfortable being himself. And that humility was pleasing to God.

Now it is critical that we see the spiritual application which is so important in our relationship with God. There are many people who feel that they must put on the garment of spirituality before they come before God. Because they know that God is perfect in holiness and cannot look favorably upon sin, they try to hide

their sins and pretend that they have never sinned when they approach God. Because they know that God is perfect in his strength without any weaknesses, they try to hide their frailties and weaknesses and pretend that they are self-sufficient and strong. Because they know that God is perfect in his love and grace, they try to present themselves as compassionate people when inside they might not feel that way. Because they know that God is perfect in his forgiveness and mercy, they try to present themselves to God as forgiving people when inside there are feelings of anger and bitterness.

Now this approach not only doesn't work, but it is a great insult to God. For it assumes that we have the ability to hide something from a God who is all-knowing. Our innermost thoughts and hearts are an open book before God. He knows what we are thinking, He knows what we are feeling. And, amazingly, He loves and accepts us just like we are. And we desire for us to have a living relationship with Him. But that relationship must begin with authenticity and humility. We must just be ourselves before God. We must admit our failures, confess our sins, and express our feelings openly and freely. It is only then that God will be able to give us his strength, forgive our sins and heal our wounds. David was the model of a person who was after God's own heart. And that model is seen so clearly when he supervised the bringing of the ark into Jerusalem.

3. We conclude with a third characteristic. We will not dwell long on this one for we have seen it before in David's life. David was not only authentic, and humble, but he was also trusting. David was a man of faith in God.

READ Psalm 18:28-36

28 You, O LORD, keep my lamp burning; my God turns my darkness into light.
29 With your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.
30 As for God, his way is perfect; the word of the LORD is flawless. He is a shield for all who take refuge in him. 31 For who is God besides the LORD? And who is the Rock except our God? 32 It is God who arms me with strength and makes my way perfect. 33 He makes my feet like the feet of a deer; he enables me to stand on the heights. 34 He trains my hands for battle; my arms can bend a bow of bronze. 35 You give me your shield of victory, and your right hand sustains me; you stoop down to make me great. 36 You broaden the path beneath me, so that my ankles do not turn.

*There is one phrase in this passage that jumped out and grabbed me as I was studying it this past week. It was the last phrase in verse 35 where David said of God, *you stoop down to make me great.*

*What a summary of what God has done for us. From David's perspective, he saw a God who took the most unobvious person and made him to be King of Israel - a shepherd boy, the youngest member of his family, a young man whom even Samuel wasn't impressed with - God are you sure this is the one you want me to anoint? But God, in his rich grace, took this young man and made him to be a king.

How much more do we see this truth from our perspective? As we reflect upon the coming of the 2nd person of the Triune Godhead into this world - emptying himself and taking upon himself the form of a servant. The Lord Jesus Christ came so that we could be redeemed and adopted into the family of God as

full heirs of God's riches. God stooped down so that we could become great.

David saw this pattern in God - and David modeled it in his own life. That was what made David the king that Saul could never become. And so it is in each of our lives. Just as God has stooped down to make us great, so He desires for each of us to be authentic, to be humble, to be people who believe and trust God, so that thru our service to others, we further the growth of God's kingdom and also grow in our relationship with God.