



David's Dying Words

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Think with me for a moment: if you were on your deathbed, with your children standing around you, what would you say? If you knew that you could no longer ward off death but had enough vitality to say a few final words, which words would you choose?

I can think of no better words than those recorded for us in 1 Kings 2:1-9. David is at the end of his forty-year reign and his death is imminent. He brings his Solomon, the future King of Israel, to his side and leaves him with words of wisdom. Read the passage below:

“When David’s time to die drew near, he commanded Solomon his son, saying, 2 “I am about to go the way of all the earth. Be strong, and show yourself a man, 3 and keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do and wherever you turn, 4 that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, ‘If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.’

5 “Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, how he dealt with the two commanders of the armies of Israel, Abner the son of Ner, and Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed, avenging in time of peace for blood that had been shed in war, and putting the blood of war on the belt around his waist and on the sandals on his feet. 6 Act therefore according to your wisdom, but do not let his gray head go down to Sheol in peace. 7 But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai the Gileadite, and let them be among those who eat at your table, for with such loyalty they met me when I fled from Absalom your brother. 8 And there is also with you Shimei the son of Gera, the Benjaminite from Bahurim, who cursed me with a grievous curse on the day when I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to meet me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, saying, ‘I will not put you to death with the sword.’ 9 Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.” (ESV)

I have broken down “David’s Dying Words” into five short commands. Reflection questions are provided at the end of each segment, making it easy for you to use this for personal devotions or with a small group.

1. KNOW YOUR SOURCE OF STRENGTH

“Be strong, and show yourself a man.” (1 Kings 2:2).

David isn’t saying: “Make sure you pump lots of iron, hunt and fish the biggest game, speak with a deep voice, and intimidate people.” This first instruction has nothing to do with being a “macho-man.”

David’s definition of strength and masculinity has everything to do with the Lord. David was a man who knew

where strength was to be found. He was a king who knew where courage was to be found. He was a leader who knew the reason for being decisive. But none of his confidence came from his own strength.

David talked about God being his strength (Psalm 28:7 is one of many examples); he understood the theology of strength. What is that theology? As a child of God, your strength isn't found in the quality of your intellect, the variety of your experience, your physical muscles, or the force of your personality. Your strength is found in the Lord Almighty, who has made you His child.

David didn't just know that theology of strength in his head; he knew it by experience. This is the young man who walked down into the valley of Elah after the army of Israel, for forty days, had been afraid, and said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:37).

What is your definition of strength? I'm not talking about the Merriam-Webster definition; I mean the "rubber-meets-the-road" definition. Is your confidence defined by your own successes and strengths? Or is your confidence shaped by your potential in Christ Jesus?

As David is passing away, he wants Solomon to truly know where strength is found. The next four commands that he gives will not make any sense unless Solomon is strong.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. Spend some time searching for passages about strength. The Psalms are a great place to start.
2. How would your culture define strength? How does that clash with the definition of strength in Scripture?
3. What are some of your own strengths? Are you ever tempted to rely on those instead of Christ?
4. How can you grow in your practical theology of strength?

2. DETERMINE TO OBEY

“Keep the charge of the LORD your God, walking in his ways and keeping the statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses.” (1 Kings 2:3).

There are two parts to this command. First: be faithful to the calling that God has placed on you. For Solomon, that meant his calling as king. David is saying to his son, “Know who you are, know what God has called you to do, and be faithful to the charge that God has placed on you.”

What is your calling? There are many different callings – husband, wife, parent, pastor, elder, boss, employee, neighbor, student. But one thing is constant – if you are God’s child, you have been drafted into His service ... and you didn’t have a vote. It’s not a personal choice – it’s a command. God, in His grace and by His sovereign plan, has positioned you somewhere to be part of what He is doing.

Do you take your calling seriously? I’m deeply concerned about the passivity of the Body of Christ. I’m deeply concerned about Western culture ‘consumerism Christianity’. And sometimes I wonder what an army we could be if we took our calling seriously.

We don’t lack calling. We lack faithfulness; we lack seriousness; we lack willingness; we lack perseverance. Don’t look to the leaders of Christ’s Church as the only ones who are called. Everyone is called to God’s service.

Here is the second part of “Determine to Obey”: live inside the boundaries of God’s revelation. For Solomon, the Law of Moses was the Scripture of the day. David is saying to his son, “Take Scripture seriously; live inside its boundaries.”

Just as we must take our calling seriously, we must take God’s Word seriously. Is God’s Word a practical, functional, “rubber-meets-the-road” street-level guide for everything you do, everything you say, everything you choose, everything you desire, everything you think? Is your life dominated by the Word of God? Is your life a picture of joyful, faithful obedience to His commands?

Everybody keeps the law; the issue is, who writes the law you keep? Are the laws that guide your life God’s laws, or is there a gap between your confessional allegiance to the Word of God and the functional way that you live every day?

David is a father who knew what it was like to pay the price for stepping outside God’s boundaries. There is no way that David could say these words to Solomon without reflecting on his own life. There is no way that he could have said these words without there being a twinge of grief and a twinge of regret, although God had forgiven him. And he longed for his son to follow a different pathway than his own.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think is the calling that God has on your life right now?

2. Are there ways in which you could be taking that calling more seriously than you do?

3. Where might you be straying outside the boundaries of God's law?

4. How can you encourage others to stay inside God's boundaries?

3. KEEP YOUR EYES ON THE LORD'S REWARD

"Keep the charge of the Lord your God, walking in his ways and keeping his statutes, his commandments, his rules, and his testimonies, as it is written in the Law of Moses, that you may prosper in all that you do." (1 Kings 2:3)

I think we need to resuscitate a theology of blessing, or a theology of reward. Everyone who lives and is rational is in pursuit of reward.

Think about it. The employee who does better than most out of his colleagues is promised a reward in the form of a week-long vacation. The child who is well-behaved in the supermarket is promised a reward in the form of a popsicle when they go to the check-out. Even our multi-millionaire athletes are promised additional rewards for top performance.

Human beings are hardwired for rewards, and this isn't necessarily a bad thing. God promises reward. "Keep the charge of the Lord your God ... that you may prosper in all that you do." But, like I've said many times before, a good thing can quickly become a bad thing when it becomes a ruling thing.

The Fall was about a promise of reward, was it not? Satan promised Adam and Eve that they could be like God if they followed his deceitful commands. So Adam and Eve compromised all that was good for the supposed reward on the other side of that forbidden fruit.

People lie for the reward on the other side of the deception. People steal for the supposed reward on the other side of that robbery. People give themselves to sexual immorality, pornography and adultery for the short-term reward they think they will receive.

For 10 out of 10 people reading this devotional, there is in your heart a war for a reward. If you were to Solomon's entire story, you would know that there was a war of reward in his heart. And beware brothers and sisters - the lie of the Enemy is that the real reward is outside God's boundaries.

If you're a parent reading this material, or if you're one who has influence in ministry or friendship with young people, please consider what I'm about to write: I'm gravely concerned for the thousands and thousands of young people in Christian culture who actually feel disadvantaged that they have been born into a family of faith because they think that will keep them from the good stuff.

Publicly they won't declare that, and they are good at parroting the faith, but they are standing at the fence of God's boundaries looking out so longingly that they have fence marks in their faces. They really believe in their soul that what the world has to offer is more fulfilling and satisfying than the Gospel.

So, for parents and youth pastors and anyone else involved with teens, we need, with skill and perseverance, to hold out to them the danger of stepping outside God's boundaries, and the deep and fulfilling rewards that are only ever found in following Christ.

But this war doesn't just rage in our teenagers; it's being fought inside each of us. What your soul seeks cannot be found out there. Fulfilling joy won't be found outside the fences of God's boundaries. Those fences are not meant to restrict our joy – they are there to protect us from the evil things that threaten to steal our joy.

David is commanding Solomon to stay within the boundaries of God's law because it's there that he will prosper. God's way is a way of unique and fulfilling and eternal blessing. There is a beautiful reward, both now and for all of eternity, if we stay within His boundaries.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. What treasures claim your heart? Please don't give a spiritual "Jesus is my treasure" answer, because if you are honest, that isn't always the case.

2. What is a dangerous lie that might accompany your treasure? For example, the lie for a man about to commit adultery with his co-worker is that those 15 minutes of pleasure are more valuable than 15 years of marriage.

3. Search the Scriptures and find some rewards that the Lord promises to those who "walk in his ways and keep his statutes."

4. How can you encourage others, especially teenagers, to stay inside God's boundaries?

4. LIVE WITH THE KINGDOM IN VIEW

"...that the Lord may establish his word that he spoke concerning me, saying, 'If your sons pay close attention to their way, to walk before me in faithfulness with all their heart and with all their soul, you shall not lack a man on the throne of Israel.'" (1 Kings 2:4)

David's counsel to Solomon goes beyond Solomon. It's counsel that begins to look down the generations to see something bigger than just father and son. David wants Solomon to think long-term about the promise of God, that the Messiah will come from the line of David. It's a multi-generational vision.

I don't know how much you think about these things in your own life – but you should. You should live with a multi-generational perspective. You should live with your children's children (and their children) in mind.

But can I confess something? I find it hard to live for something bigger than myself. I find it hard to not have my day dictated by my wants, my needs, and my feelings. There isn't a day that goes by where I don't struggle with a 'me and mine' way of living. I know I'm not alone.

I would imagine that when you wake up in the morning, your mind isn't immediately filled with the grand purposes of the kingdom of God. I would imagine that most of us don't say as our first waking words, "Today I must live for something bigger than me."

It's quite natural for you and me to wake up and have our minds filled with all the things we want to accomplish and all the things we think we need. In many ways, these aren't evil thoughts to have each morning. But your living must be an expression of something bigger than that.

What kingdom structures your life: the Kingdom of God or the kingdom of self? Do you actually have a multi-generational vision? When you think of your city, do you think down the generations of what could happen where you live? When you think of your church, do you envision fifty years from now, or a hundred years from now?

Do you want to be part of something bigger than just this moment? Do you understand that you have been hooked to something vastly bigger than the borders of your own life? David was surely not a perfect man, but in this moment, he gets it. He lives with the Lord's multi-generational vision. David is saying to Solomon, "Look at your son, and his son, and his son, and his son, and his son, and his son, and his son. Live with that care; live with that concern; participate in that plan."

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. When you woke up this morning, what filled your mind?

2. In what ways are you shrinking the borders of your life?

3. How can you live with a multi-generational vision for your city?

4. How can you live with a multi-generational vision for your church?

5. DEAL DECISIVELY WITH GOOD AND EVIL

“Moreover, you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me ... But deal loyally with the sons of Barzillai ... Now therefore do not hold him guiltless, for you are a wise man. You will know what you ought to do to him, and you shall bring his gray head down with blood to Sheol.” (excerpts from 1 Kings 2:5-9)

I would summarize David’s fifth command to Solomon this way: deal decisively with what is evil and be quick to reward what is good.

Joab was a seditious and murderous man; that evil needed to be dealt with. Shimei was a man who had cursed David; that needed to be dealt with. David is saying to Solomon, “Don’t hang around with this evil. Don’t let this evil begin to infect your reign. Don’t open yourself up to the influence of the counsel of these men. This evil needs to be dealt with, and it needs to be dealt with decisively.”

These are harsh words, and they are hard for us. But I wonder if they are hard for us because it’s hard for us to be this decisive - this black and white - with what God says is wrong. How decisive are you with the evil that still remains in your heart?

When I hear these words from David, I hear the echo of Christ’s teaching: “If your right eye causes you to sin,

tear it out and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body be thrown into hell. And if your right hand causes you to sin, cut it off and throw it away. For it is better that you lose one of your members than that your whole body go into hell.” (Matthew 5:29-30).

But it's not just evil that David wants to deal with decisively. He also encourages Solomon to reward what is good. He wants the sons of Barzillai, who were kind to him as he fled from Absalom, to be cared for. David wants see them encouraged, loved, and treated as family.

Do you actively seek ways in which you can encourage God's people? Are you quick to point out evidence of God's grace or the fruit of the Spirit in their lives? Parents, are you equally as good at catching your children doing what is right as you are in rebuking them? Husbands, do you encourage and thank your wives? Wives, do you encourage and thank your husbands?

This final command from David challenges us with an important question: are you committed to a ministry of encouragement, support, faithfulness, and love? That is as important to the work of God's kingdom as being decisive with evil is.

REFLECTION QUESTIONS

1. How can you be more decisive with remaining sin in your heart?
2. Are you afraid to speak out when you witness sin in the lives of others?
3. Do you actively seek out opportunities to encourage those in the body of Christ?
4. How can you reward good in your child, spouse, neighbor, or friend?

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