

A Heart For God: A Generous Heart

1 Samuel 30

John Tucker, Milford Baptist Church, 5 November 2006

Our favourite word

We had some friends over this week. They've got a little baby. One of the most amazing moments in the development of a human being is when as a little baby they utter their first words. Parents wait for that moment with bated breath. I've heard of mothers and fathers who spend hours coaching their kids to make sure the first word is "mama" or "dada," depending on the gender of the parent. That's always seemed kind of silly to me, so I've never made a big deal out of the fact that both of our girls said "dada" long before they said "mama." But soon after "dada," children learn the next word: "No." Psychologists tell us it's a very important word. They say it helps the child individuate and set boundaries and assert their own sense of identity. They say it's a good stage, this "no" stage (although most psychologists who say this have never themselves had small children.) And then right after this stage, little kids pick up another word. They use it a lot when someone else wants to play with one of their toys, or taste some of their dessert. It becomes a favourite word. "Mine." "My toys. My food. My stuff. Mine!"

Now some people go to their grave and it's still their favourite word. They may not say it out loud much, but it marks their whole life. They say it about their wallet. Their house. Their car. Their time. Their talents. Their life. "It's mine." We live in a society that trains us to say this word. Listen to this statement from the *Washington Post*: "Consumerism was the triumphant winner of the ideological wars of the twentieth century, beating out both religion and politics as the path millions of [us] follow to find purpose, meaning, order and transcendent exaltation in [our] lives." In other words, in our society we have come to see money and possessions as the key to fulfilment and security. What do you think? Do you agree? Mick Duncan says that for us, as followers of Jesus, this is the one area where our faithfulness to Jesus is tested more than anywhere else.

We're spending a few weeks looking at the life of David, who the Bible says was a man after God's own heart. In the coming weeks we're going to see that he was far from perfect. He got a lot of things wrong. But he got one thing right. Even though, like many of us, he was entrusted with much in the way of material possessions, somehow it didn't get a hold on his heart. He developed one of the most generous hearts in the entire Bible. What we're going to do this morning is to look at one obscure little story where three times you see David giving generously. And as we walk through the story let's see what advice David would give us about developing a generous heart. So turn to 1 Samuel 30 (p.291).

A desperate chase

You may remember from last week that David is on the run from Saul. He has a little community of people around him, men who are "distressed, in debt and discontented" (1 Samuel 22:2). After years living as impoverished fugitives in the wilderness they've settled down in a Philistine village called Ziklag. One day, after a military campaign with the Philistines, David and his men are sent back to their village. This is what happens:

1 David and his men reached Ziklag on the third day. Now the Amalekites [persistent and long-term enemies of Israel] had raided the Negev and Ziklag. They had attacked Ziklag and burned it, 2 and had taken captive the women and all who were in it, both young and old. They killed none of them, but carried them off as they went on their way.

3 When David and his men came to Ziklag, they found it destroyed by fire and their wives and sons and daughters taken captive. 4 So David and his men wept aloud until they had no strength left to weep. [Ever wept until you have

no strength left to weep?] 5 David's two wives had been captured—Ahinoam of Jezreel and Abigail, the widow of Nabal of Carmel. 6 David was greatly distressed [or, as one translation puts it, "was in great danger"] because the men were talking of stoning him; each one was bitter in spirit because of his sons and daughters. [And David's the leader. It was his call to leave the village unprotected.] But [the writer says – and this is a great line] *David found strength in the LORD his God.*

David turns to God in prayer. Using the ephod – a breastplate with special stones that God had given Israel for the purpose of receiving his guidance – David inquires of the Lord (v 8), "Shall I pursue this raiding party? Will I overtake them?" God says, "Pursue them. You will certainly overtake them and succeed in the rescue." Now think about it. David's men are terribly ill-prepared for this rescue mission. They've just finished a three-day march from the Philistine battle front; they're tired. They're demoralised by the loss of their families and their home. They're not trusting David and his leadership. And they have no way of locating the Amalekite raiding party. But, confident of God's will – trusting in God – David leads his six hundred men in pursuit. In v 9 it says that they came to the Besor Ravine. You see it located on the map. This is about 25 km from Ziklag. And two hundred of the men are just too exhausted to cross the ravine. So they stay there. (Remember them; we'll come back to them.) But David and the remaining four hundred men continue the pursuit.

1. Don't ignore little God-given opportunities to show compassion

This is where the story gets interesting. Verse 11 says they happen to come across an Egyptian lying in a field, half-dead. They bring him to David. Now remember, David and his men are trying to run down an Amalekite raiding party. They're in a hurry. And this man is an Egyptian. Who was it that enslaved the Israelites for four hundred years? The Egyptians. They – along with the Amalekites and the Philistines – are Israel's enemies. But what does David do? He calls a stop to the chase – losing valuable time – and orders that this Egyptian be given food and water until he's revived. Why would David do that? Some people have suggested that David was hoping that this man might have seen the Amalekites and point David and his men in the right direction. Maybe. But I wonder if – and a number of commentators suggest that – quite simply, David knew all too well what it was like to be alone and hungry in the wilderness, desperately dependent on other people – on God – for mercy and compassion. And having received compassion, he makes sure he shows it to this poor Egyptian. Now, when he's recovered enough to speak, it turns out that he does know where the Amalekites are:

13 David asked him, "To whom do you belong, and where do you come from?" He said, "I am an Egyptian, the slave of an Amalekite. My master abandoned me when I became ill three days ago. 14 We raided the Negev of the Kerethites and the territory belonging to Judah and the Negev of Caleb. And we burned Ziklag."

15 David asked him, "Can you lead me down to this raiding party?" He answered, "Swear to me before God that you will not kill me or hand me over to my master, and I will take you down to them."

Do you see what's happened? David didn't come across this Egyptian by chance. This was a God-ordained encounter. The God who assured David that he would overtake the Amalekites, placed this man here in David's path so that he could overtake the Amalekites. It would have been so easy for David to have ignored this man and rushed past him, but he didn't. I think this is the first piece of advice that David would give us: If you want to develop a generous heart, *don't ignore little God-given opportunities to show compassion.* [Interview with Reg Saunders].

So the Egyptian guides David and his company to the Amalekite encampment:

16 He led David down, and there they were, scattered over the countryside, eating, drinking and reveling because of the great amount of plunder they had taken from the land of the Philistines and from Judah. 17 David fought them from dusk until the evening of the next day [i.e. 24 hours], and none of them got away, except four hundred young men who rode off on camels and fled. [So obviously there were a lot more than four hundred Amalekites. David and his men were vastly outnumbered. But they triumphed.] 18 David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken, including his two wives. 19 Nothing was missing: young or old, boy or girl, plunder or anything else they had taken.

David brought everything back. 20 He took all the flocks and herds, and his men drove them ahead of the other livestock, saying, "This is David's plunder."

2. Don't assume that everything you have is yours

Just as God promised, the mission is a success. They recover everything they lost plus the "great amount of plunder" that the Amalekites had taken from all of their raids. God transforms this tragedy into a triumph. This sounds like the climax of the story, but it isn't. They get back to the Besor Ravine. By the way, any guesses as to what Besor means? It means "good news." And the two hundred waiting at the ravine receive the good news that their families are safe and all this treasure has been recovered as well. There's laughter and tears of joy. It's a wonderful scene. But, we read in v 22, "all the evil men and troublemakers among David's followers said, 'Because they did not go out with us, we will not share with them the plunder we recovered. However, each man may take his wife and children and go.'" In other words, "Why should we share any of this plunder with those guys? They did nothing. We did the work. We fought the battle. We earned this. It's ours. Mine!" Isn't that the way we think? But look at what David says in response. This his second act of generosity. David says:

23 "No, my brothers, you must not do that with what the LORD has given us. He has protected us and handed over to us the forces that came against us. 24 Who will listen to what you say? The share of the man who stayed with the supplies is to be the same as that of him who went down to the battle. All will share alike."

David realises that everything they have is a gift from God. It was God who sent them on this chase. It was God who provided them with guidance. It was God who gave them victory over superior numbers. In view of how gracious and generous God had been to them, how could they not also be gracious and generous to their brothers? Rather than saying "mine!" they should be saying to God and to their brothers, "yours!" I think if David were talking to us, he'd be saying the same thing: *Don't assume that everything you have is yours*. It's not yours. You haven't earned it. Your upbringing, your education, your natural abilities, your vocational opportunities, your capacity to make money and buy stuff – it was all given to you, entrusted to you, by a gracious and generous God. It's true. And when we realise how gracious and generous God has been to us, it's not so hard to be gracious and generous to others.

A few years ago a film was made about a sweet, but rather simple and naïve man with a delightfully different perspective on life. His name was *Forrest Gump*. In the film a friend of his helps him invest some money in a new start up company. His shares do very well and he becomes fabulously wealthy. Statistics say the wealthier you get, the less generous you'll be. But not with Forrest. Take a look at this. [show DVD: 97:20-98:55]. It was like Forrest didn't really see that money as his. It came almost as a gift. And so he was able to share it generously. The fact is everything we have is a gift from our good and generous Father in heaven, to be shared generously with others.

3. Don't forget to invest for your long-term future

There's an interesting epilogue to this story, a third act of extraordinary generosity:

26 When David arrived in Ziklag, he sent some of the plunder to the elders of Judah, who were his friends, saying, "Here is a present for you from the plunder of the LORD's enemies."

27 He sent it to those who were in Bethel, Ramoth Negev and Jattir; 28 to those in Aroer, Siphmoth, Eshtemoa 29 and Raca; to those in the towns of the Jerahmeelites and the Kenites; 30 to those in Hormah, Bor Ashan, Athach 31 and Hebron; and to those in all the other places where David and his men had roamed.

Now why do you think David shared all this plunder with the elders of Judah? Scholars have come up with several options. Was David:

- (a) providing payment to these people for all the help and generosity they had shown David when he and his men were in need?
- (b) trying to buy their political loyalty so that they'd support his claim to the throne?
- (c) simply showing compassion – giving aid – to a region that had been devastated by these kind of Amalekite raiding parties? or
- (d) all of the above?

Like us, it was probably a mixture of motives. But if you skip across to 2 Samuel chapter 2 you see that the outcome of this generosity was that David is anointed king by these very men, the elders of Judah. Now why was that? Why did they choose him. They trust him. They respect him. They know from experiences like this that David doesn't have a grasping and selfish heart. He has a gracious and generous heart. He won't be like Saul, and oppress or exploit them. And so they appoint him their ruler. David's generosity turns out to be the best investment he could have made. It has significant long-term dividends.

It reminds me of the parable that Jesus once told about a shrewd manager in Luke 16. A wealthy man has a manager to oversee his business interests. One day the manager is accused of financial impropriety and is about to be fired. And so he says to himself, "What am I going to do? I'm not strong enough to work as a labourer. I'm too ashamed to beg like a pauper. I know what I'll do. I'll call in my boss's debtors and write-off a portion of what they owe. Then, when I lose my job they'll look after me." Jesus finishes the parable by commending the manager for acting so shrewdly and says: "I tell you, use worldly wealth to gain friends for yourselves, so that when it is gone, you will be welcomed into eternal dwellings" (Luke 16:9). In other words, in this life use your wealth to help people, so that when it is gone, when you enter the next life, there will be people in heaven who are eternally grateful for what you gave them. Using what you have to help people in this life, is the best investment you can make. It bears eternal dividends. If David were here with us today, that's what he'd say: *don't forget to invest for the long-term*. Don't forget eternity. In a world where everyone grows up saying "Mine!" say to God and to the people he loves, "Yours." In view of God's generosity to you, be generous with your time, your talents, your treasure, and in the future you'll never regret it.

Questions

1. In Romans 12:2 Paul says, "Don't become so well-adjusted to your culture that you fit into it without even thinking." Do you think we in the church are guilty of doing that when it comes to money and possessions?
2. In the fifth century Bishop Augustine acerbically observed that his parishioners were "more pained if their villa is poor than if their life is (spiritually) bad." How do we compare? In the twenty-first century George Barna says that in the United States only 6% of born again adult believers tithe. What do you think of that?
3. Read Matthew 25:31-46. How does this parable of the sheep and the goats impact you?
4. In 1 Samuel 30:22 some of David's men are reluctant to share their plunder because they believe they earned it and it's theirs. Do you see your money and possessions as yours or God's? See James 1:17.
5. Rick Warren says that, "Every time I give it breaks the grip of materialism on my heart. There's no antidote to materialism other than giving." How do you see this principle at work in David's life in 1 Samuel 30? How have you experienced this antidote in your life?
6. Read Proverbs 19:17? How do you understand this promise?
7. What do you understand to be the point that Jesus is making in Luke 16:1-9? Does 1 Timothy 6:18-19 help? How are you investing in eternity? What practical steps could you take this month?

