

Northwest Community Evangelical Free Church

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Sermon manuscript

Sermon Series: God's Life-Transforming Work

(Studies in the life of David)

Legacy-Maker

(2 Samuel 21, 23)

Study #7

Introduction: A silk purse out of a sow's ear...

"You can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear" - which is to say, the physical material you start with determines the end quality of your project.

This is undeniably true in the physical world.

If you start out with utility grade lumber, no amount of sanding and staining will produce a fine piece of furniture.

Your chances of producing a masterpiece increase if you start with oak or mahogany.

Some people and groups believe that the Sow's Ear Principle transcends the material world and applies to the personal.

For instance, in the caste system of Hinduism, people are stuck at a certain level of personal value, either doomed or blessed to remain in the caste in which they were born until they die.

What you are, you are. No chance of change. Sow's ear people can't become silk purse people.

Of course, we reject the caste system and all it implies. We embrace the reality of social mobility - the possibility of upward and downward mobility.

But it can still be tempting to doubt the possibility of personal, internal transformation. Real change.

Especially when our lives *are* or *have been* messy, we might believe that who we are, we are. Change is unlikely. Change is the exception to the rule.

There have been a lot of points in my own life when I have been so impacted with my failures and my sin that I have lost hope of becoming anything like one of God's masterpieces.

Any one of us here today might take an honest look at our own faults and believe that we will never, in the words of the Apostle Paul, ***[2 Timothy 2:21]...be an implement for honor, sanctified, useful to the Master, prepared for every good work.***

But if we were to conclude that we could never become ***"an implement for honor,"*** we would be wrong. Jesus claims to have the ability and the passion to transform sow's ear people into silk purse people.

He is able to take a "utility grade lumber" guy like me and turn me into a fine work of art. He takes diamonds in the rough, like we all are, and creates stunning finished gems. God looks at you and me and sees glorious wrecks. He sees fixer-uppers. His plan is to make something beautiful out of your life.

And not only that. He wants to use you to help someone else's life be beautiful for Him.

This morning we're wrapping up our series of studies in the life of King David. We've gotten to know David well over these weeks.

We'll begin by recapping a painful ten-year period of his life.

David's Army (1 Samuel 22)

The Formation of David's Army

Anointed...persecuted

Early in his life, Samuel anointed David to become the second king of Israel, following King Saul. The problem, of course, was that at the time of the anointing, Saul wasn't ready to step down.

So, King Saul made life miserable for David in the palace. Saul even made attempts on David's life.

Finally, David had had enough. He fled from Saul to begin life as a fugitive in the Judean wilderness.

Fugitive...leader

He escaped to a remote place ([1 Samuel 22:1] *the cave of Adullam*) way up in the hills and was soon joined by his father and his seven older brothers.

Shortly after that, he was joined by others.

The Bible says that David became captain, military leader to these "others." The "others" made up David's wilderness army.

Later on, the Bible will refer to some of the men in David's army by a special term.

When we first meet them, though, that term doesn't at all describe them. When David's army first formed, it was not exactly a world-beater.

Captain of [what] an army!

[1 Samuel 22:2] Then everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. Now there were about four hundred men with him.

That's quite an army.

We are not told what sorts of "*distress*" they were under, but the Hebrew word describes being under pressure. The cares of life were squeezing the life out of them - and they gathered to David.

They were "*in debt*." Nobody likes to be in debt. These guys were all living in fear of a lender calling in their debts - and they gathered to David.

They were "*discontented*." Their lives hadn't quite turned out as they had expected, as they had hoped - and they gathered to David.

David didn't recruit them and there was no draft. They simply began to follow him.

This is not the army David would have chosen if he had been putting together an army.

He never would have thought, "*I'm looking for a bunch of distressed, indebted, discontented men. They'll make up my army.*" No. He wouldn't have planned for this. But this was the army that came to him.

These four hundred men came from a great diversity of cultural and ethnic backgrounds. They weren't even all Jews.

But, from this motley crew there emerged a well-oiled fighting machine. These malcontents became unified under David and battled successfully against Israel's enemies for decades.

In fact, Scripture records an untarnished record of military victories for David's army. As near as I can tell, they never lost a battle.

The Success of David's Army: 11; ENEMIES: 0

- They defeated the neighboring Geshurites and the Girzites.
- They won decisive victories over the hostile Moabites (2 Samuel 8:2) and Ammonites (twice, 2 Samuel 10:6ff; 12:26ff).
- They trounced the Amalekites (twice, 1 Sam. 26:8).
- They defeated the Arameans (2 Samuel 8:5; 10:15-19).

- They fought the troublesome, ever-present Philistines in battle over and over again - and, apparently, never lost. (2 Samuel 5:25)

David's soldiers became a fearsome army made up of some very capable warriors.

So, I hope that you're in the mood for some hero tales today because the Bible records a few stories about David's army. Some of them were giant killers.

David's Soldiers

Giant Killers (2 Samuel 21:15-22)

Abishai

Once, when Israel was at war with the Philistines, King David grew weary. He had gone to war with his troops, but he got exhausted and was attacked by a Philistine named Ishbi-benob.

Ishbi-benob was a descendant of Goliath, the Philistine giant David had killed with his sling. (1 Samuel 17). This giant attacked David with a new sword.¹ Then, just in the nick of time, ***[17]...Abishai the son of Zeruiah helped [David], and struck the Philistine and killed him.***

Abishai killed a giant! So did another hero, Sibbecai.

Sibbecai

[18] Now it came about after this that there was war again with the Philistines at Gob (a minor Philistine city); then Sibbecai the Hushathite struck and killed Saph, who was among the descendants of the giant.

And then, we read of another giant-killer.
Elhanan

¹ With the difficulty of forging weapons in the ancient world, it was evidently a newsworthy event when a warrior fought with a new sword.

[19] And there was war with the Philistines again at Gob, and Elhanan the son of Jaare-oregim the Bethlehemite killed [Lahmi, the brother of]² Goliath the Gittite, the shaft of whose spear was like a weaver's beam.

Here's the last giant-killer listed.

Jonathan

[20] And there was war at Gath again, where there was a man of great stature who had six fingers on each hand and six toes on each foot, twenty-four in number;³ and he also had been born to the giant. [21] When he defied Israel, Jonathan the son of Shimei, David's brother, struck and killed him.

This man "***defied Israel***" - just as Goliath had done years earlier. And Jonathan "***struck and killed him***" - just as his Uncle David had done years earlier.

Four giants killed by four men in David's army. And we're not nearly finished with hero stories.

Mighty Men (2 Samuel 23:8-39)

Heroes of the first degree (23:8-12)

The most valiant of all of David's soldiers was **Josheb-basshebeth**. He was first in rank, and 2 Samuel 23:8 tells us why: He was engaged in a battle in which eight hundred of the enemies of Israel were defeated.

² 1 Chronicles 20:5 adds, "*Lahmi, the brother of Goliath.*" I'm adding those explanatory words here to avoid confusion about who killed Goliath. It was David.

³ I don't believe that these added digits gave any real benefit in battle, but they might have been disconcerting to enemies who came out to fight him.

It appears from the English text that he, personally, slew all eight hundred himself. The Hebrew text suggests that this was not the case. What is clear is that his involvement in the battle was crucial.⁴

Second in rank was a man named **Eleazar** (23:9-10). Eleazar was the son of Dodo the Ahohite.

A funny name - but if you had met Eleazar, you wouldn't have made fun of his father's name. He was a fierce warrior.

On one occasion, he, along with two other courageous soldiers stayed with David after all the other Israelite soldiers had retreated. Eleazar fought so tenaciously that after the battle his sword clung to his hand. His courage and his love for David brought about a great victory for Israel.

The third of David's chief soldiers was **Shammah** (23:11-12). His claim to fame came on a day when all the other Israelites fled from the Philistines.

Shammah decided that the Philistines wouldn't have an easy go of it. So, with the Philistines gathered together in a field of lentil beans, Shammah stood his ground and defeated the entire troop by himself.

And we hear the familiar refrain, **[12] and the Lord brought about a great victory.**

These three men - Josheb-basshebeth, Eleazar, and Shammah - were the cream of the crop in David's army. There were none better. But their stories don't exhaust the exploits of what the Bible calls David's "Mighty Men."

As we keep looking into David's military, we find one incident of heroic proportions performed by three unnamed men.⁵

A heroic act of the first class (23:13-17)

We don't know exactly when the incident recorded in 2 Samuel 23:13-17 took place. My guess is that when it occurred David was not a young man, but we really don't know.

Actually, there are lots of details we might enjoy knowing that are omitted. But the long and the short of it is that David was holed up in the cave of Adullam, again, near the Philistine camp.

The Philistines themselves had temporarily taken Bethlehem captive. You will remember that Bethlehem was David's hometown.

As he and his army lay there in the cave, David was overcome with a memory. He nostalgically remembered drinking from a certain well in the little town of Bethlehem.

So, he cried out, **[15]... "Oh that someone would give me water to drink from the well of Bethlehem which is by the gate!"**

David wasn't issuing a command. He hadn't even called for volunteers to go and get him a drink. He just expressed a *longing*.

But a wish from David was enough to compel three men to take extraordinary military action.

Out of love and loyalty for their king, these three marched toward the Philistines' camp. They marched right into Bethlehem.

They took a water jug with them, broke through enemy lines, filled the jug with water from David's favorite well while surrounded by surprised Philistines. Then, they backed away from the well and delivered the water to David.

David was wise enough to not drink that water, recognizing it as a symbol of intense devotion. He poured the water out on the ground as an offering to God.

The thing to notice, though, is that these soldiers in David's army were so courageous AND so totally committed to David AND had

⁴ His nickname - "Adino the Eznite" - means something like "*the one who swings his spear*," tells us that he was instrumental in a crucial battle.

⁵ Keil and Delitzsch's commentary says that these three are unnamed heroes from the list of the mighty men which follow, and not those three just discussed.

such fierce reputations that they marched right into a Philistine stronghold, and did David's bidding, unopposed.⁶

There were other heroes in David's army, and some of their exploits are recorded for us.

Heroes of the second class (23:18-23)

Abishai (vv. 18-19, the same Abishai mentioned in chapter 21 as a giant killer) was instrumental in a battle in which three hundred enemy soldiers were killed.

And Abishai is followed by my personal favorite of all of David's mighty men: Benaiah! Listen to what Benaiah did.

In battles with the Moabites, Benaiah killed two men of renown.

These two were called "*sons of Ariel*," probably not because that was their father's name, but because of their valor in warfare, as *Ariel* means "the lion of God" in several Semitic languages. Benaiah defeated them in battle.

On another day, Benaiah climbed down into the middle of a pit on a snowy day and killed a lion! What a story that would have made around a late night campfire.

And then, Benaiah battled an Egyptian, **[21] an impressive man**. The Egyptian had a spear with which he intended to kill Benaiah. But Benaiah snatched the spear out of the Egyptian's hands and killed him with it instead.⁷

And, beyond these mighty men we have seen so far, there were others.

Heroes ALL (23:24-39)

[24] ASAH the brother of Joab was among the thirty; ELHANAN the son of Dodo of Bethlehem, [25] and there was SHAMMAH the Harodite, ELIKA the Harodite, [26] HELEZ the Paltite, IRA the son of Ikesh the Tekoite, [27] ABIEZER the Anathothite, MEBUNNAI the Hushathite, [28] ZALMON the Ahohite, MAHARAI the Netophathite, [29] HELEB the son of Baanah the Netophathite, ITTAI the son of Ribai of Gibeath of the sons of Benjamin, [30] BENAIAH a Pirathonite, HIDDAI of the brooks of Gaash, [31] ABI-ALBON the Arbathite, AZMAVETH the Barhumite, [32] ELIAHBA the Shaalbomite, the sons of Jashen, IONATHAN, [33] SHAMMAH the Hararite, AHIAM the son of Sharar the Ararite, [34] ELIPHELET the son of Ahasbai, the son of the Maacathite, ELIAM the son of Ahithophel the Gilonite, [35] HEZRO the Carmelite, PAARAI the Arbite, [36] IGAL the son of Nathan of Zobah, BANI the Gadite, [37] ZELEK the Ammonite, NAHARAI the Beerothite, armor bearers of Joab the son of Zeruiah, [38] IRA the Ithrite, GAREB the Ithrite, [39] URIAH the Hittite;⁸ thirty-seven in all.

Most of these men aren't mentioned anywhere else in Scripture. By and large, we don't know their stories.

But they were giant-killers, lion-killers, victorious underdogs. They were loyal and brave. They defeated Israel's enemies and fought for Israel's God. David's army was filled with men of valor.

And we can see why they were great warriors. They were successful military men because they served under a man who had been there, done that.

David had known a battle or two. There was even that one time when he fought and killed a giant, himself.

Captain David - Been There, Done That...! (1 Samuel 17)

David, the Giant-Killer (1 Samuel 17)

⁶ It reminds us of Jesus' cleansing of the temple in Jerusalem, also unopposed.

⁷ Small wonder David appointed him over the royal guard.

⁸ Mentioned last to draw attention to him? How tragic and ironic that Uriah, the man David had killed by deceit should be one of his most valiant warriors.

On our first Sunday of exploring David's life, we watched as the armies of Israel lined up against the Philistines, preparing for battle.

For forty days the armies camped on opposite sides of the Valley of Elah and faced off against each other.

But they never came to blows because the Philistines' secret weapon - the nine foot tall Goliath - had challenged the Israelites to fight him, *mano a mano*.

Goliath's challenge required that whoever won, his people would be the masters and the loser's people would be slaves.

There wasn't one Jewish soldier willing to take that bet - until the teenaged David showed up.

David couldn't believe that Goliath had the gall to stand against God's army. And he was just as stunned that nobody in Saul's army had offered to fight Goliath.

So, David, the youngest of eight brothers, the shepherd, told King Saul that he would fight for Israel.

Everybody doubted David. His oldest brother, Eliab, ridiculed him. King Saul dismissed him.

But David told Saul, **[37]...*"The Lord who saved me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will save me from the hand of this Philistine."***

And Saul commissioned David to be Israel's representative against Goliath.

And then, rather than put on Saul's sword, shield and spear - or anybody else's sword, shield and spear - David **[40]...took his staff in his hand and chose for himself five smooth stones from the brook, and put them in the shepherd's bag which he had, that is, in his shepherd's pouch, and his sling was in his hand; and he approached the Philistine.**

David ran toward Goliath, fit a stone into his sling and let fly, hitting the one vulnerable spot on Goliath's body - his forehead - killing him on the spot.

So...if we wonder where the men in David's army ever got the idea that they could fight and defeat giants, we now know. They got that idea from David.

And where did they ever get the idea that they could stand against overwhelming odds and defeat multitudes of enemies in battle where they were at huge numerical disadvantage?

David had been there and done that, too.

David - the Winning Underdog (1 Samuel 18)

By killing Goliath, David earned the right to marry King Saul's oldest daughter, Merab. When David didn't step up to take Merab as his wife, Saul gave her to another man.

But Saul did offer to give his younger daughter, Michal, to David if he wanted to marry her.

Saul agreed to let David marry Michal IF AND ONLY IF David could kill one hundred Philistines.

So, what did David do? With some help from a few friends, David went out and killed two hundred Philistines.

It is small wonder that Josheb-basshebeth and Eleazar and Shammah had the confidence to go up against overwhelming odds in battle. Their captain had long been a winning underdog.

Conclusion:

Over the weeks of our studies in the life of David, we've focused on his successes and failures, his trials and tribulations.

Here at the end, we're considering his influence, his impact.

The group of men who joined themselves to David in the wilderness began as a rag-tag band of the distressed, the indebted, and the discontented.

That group morphed into an army of heroic giant-killers.

How did that transformation occur? What did God use to bring about the change from a bunch of sow's ear troubled men to silk purse heroes?

There were likely a lot of factors involved in the change process. There always are.

Family, friends, money, and health are all factors in life change. But the one factor that all these guys had in common was David.

You and I know enough about David to not put him on a pedestal. He was far from perfect. He sinned badly and fell hard more than once.⁹

But David was courageous, and his men became courageous. David was all about God and his men became faithful warriors for God.

Like produces like. We reproduce according to our own kind.

And here at the end, I'm pulling a fast one on you.

We're not going to wrap up our study of David with an exhortation to grow through your trials and successes and wilderness wanderings like David did.

Today's theme is legacy. And I'll admit that David's legacy is... complicated.

His longest-term legacy is amazing. God promised that He would establish David's house and kingdom "*forever.*"

⁹ In addition to the adultery and murder recorded in 2 Samuel 11, we also read of David's sin of numbering Israel, a sign of independence and pride (2 Samuel 24) which resulted in God's severe judgment.

Now, we understand that the ultimate fulfillment of that promise is Jesus, David's greater Son, who will reign forever and ever. (2 Samuel 7:8-17)

But David's mid-term legacy was amazingly horrible. After his sins against Bathsheba and Uriah (adultery and murder), the prophet Nathan pronounced a judgment of violence and sexual sin in the generations following David.

And all we have to do is read the history of Israel through the books of 1 and 2 King to see the literal fulfillment of that prophecy.

David's immediate legacy, though, the deep impact he made on those who knew him well, is soul-stirring. It's impressive.

It is also impressive to see the space that the author of 2 Samuel gave to that legacy in the concluding chapters of that book, which is why I'm focusing the remainder of our time here, on David's immediate legacy.

And here is what I think the main message of David's immediate legacy is to you and to me:
As God used David to influence those around him, He now wants to use you to influence the people around you.

It's the Old Testament prelude to Matthew 28.

At the very end of Jesus' time on earth, after He had been crucified and resurrected and after having appeared to His followers numerous times in different settings, the time came for Him to return to His Father in Heaven.

Here are His final words to the first disciples and to us:

[Matthew 28:18] And Jesus came up and spoke to them, saying, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to Me. [19] "Go, therefore and make disciples of all the nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and the Son and the Holy Spirit, [20] teaching them to follow all that I commanded you; and behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age."

The message behind the commission is that Jesus wants you, His child, to be maturing into a committed, loving, disciple.

Before David was a captain of men, he was the LORD's lamb. Before he was the king of a nation, he was the LORD's servant. Before David became anything else, he was God's man.

But, for David, being God's man wasn't "mission accomplished." The LORD then used David to be His change agent in the lives of others.

That pattern holds for us, today.

Jesus' plan is to first change and to grow you and then to use you as a change agent in the lives of others.

BE a disciple; MAKE a disciple. Take a next step with Jesus; help someone else take a next step with Jesus.

David became the man after God's heart as he spent time with the LORD, out in the fields around Bethlehem. He prayed. He reflected on Scripture.

Then, David's connection with God and His purposes rubbed off on those distressed, indebted, and discontented men who came to him.

With sanctified imagination, here is how Gene Edwards puts it in his powerful book, [A Tale of Three Kings](#) (a book I read every year):

"Those who found him and decided to be his fellow fugitives were a sorry, worthless lot...David did not lead them...Yet, unsolicited, they began to follow him. He never spoke to them of authority. He never spoke of submission. But every one of them submitted. He laid down no rules...Nonetheless, they cleaned up their outward lives. Gradually, their inward lives began to change, too. They didn't fear submission to David or David's authority. Then why did they follow Him? Because, well, he was David. And so, for the first of two times in human history, true kingship had its nativity."

David welcomed them. He hung with them. And they changed because of the influence of their captain's life.

As you walk *with* Jesus and grow in...

- ...the practice of dependent prayer
 - ...commitment to Scripture,
 - ...genuine, transparent relationships
 - ...eternally focused generosity,
 - ...grace-based evangelism
 - ...unleashed service
- ...you'll soon be walking more *like* Jesus.¹⁰

And once you have started, once you have taken your first "next steps" on the Jesus-following road of discipleship, you can invite someone along with you for the ride.

Invite them to serve with you, to pray with you, to study with you, to share a meal with you.

God's plan has always been that transformation would happen life-on-life. That your legacy would that of a legacy-maker. That's how He worked in the days of King David. He's still doing it today.

¹⁰ Once, Jesus said, [Luke 6:40] *"A student is not above his teacher. But everyone, when he has been fully trained, will be like his teacher."*