

# **A Work Of Heart**

## **Understanding How God Shapes Spiritual Leaders**

**Reggie McNeal**

### **Chapter 2**

#### **DAVID -- A HEART AFTER GOD**

Israel's greatest king is one of those larger-than-life characters who captivates our imagination. The David described in Hebrew scriptures reveals many fascinating and sometimes contradictory characteristics. Humble birth. King of the most extensive empire in the Middle East a millennium before Christ. Courageous. Conniving. Loyal. Self-serving. Hero. Fugitive. Military strategist. Architect. Adulterer. Protector. Brutal. Sensitive. Vengeful. Forgiving. Murderer. Lover. Warrior. Musician.

No wonder we find so much in David to admire and so much we wish we could ignore. Yet David's nobler qualities win out and earn him three thousand years of prominence. David's saga reveals a person obviously and genuinely open to the heart-shaping work of God in his life.

#### **Rise of a Nation**

The cultural backdrop of David's early years provided the stage for his entrance into Israel's history. Born the youngest of eight sons to Jesse of Bethlehem of the tribe of Judah, David grew up in a time when the identity of people in Israel revolved around their tribal affiliation. Upon entering Canaan, the twelve tribes of Israel settled in territories assigned to them. This parceling out was done after initial warfare had generally established Israelite dominance in the region. Once secure, the Israelites began to tame their new land for their own use through animal husbandry and farming. Life centered on the village. Threats to peace from the surrounding hostile populations were addressed with the help of neighboring villages and sometimes villagers from other tribes.

Leadership for the loose tribal confederacy was the province of the elders of each tribe and village. They administered routine matters of justice and village operations. Occasionally, special challenges arose that called forth judges, a unique set of individuals anointed by Yahweh to deal with these situations. The judges, because of their anointing and heroic performances, enjoyed a transtribal authority.

The last great judge was Samuel the prophet, a rather mysterious figure who played a crucial role in the selection of Israel's first two kings. The uncertainty and instability of tribalism and regional judgeships gave rise to a yearning for a more centralized government. The elders persuaded Samuel (against his better judgment) to anoint a monarch. He did, being drawn to the charismatic, handsome Saul of the tribe of Benjamin.

The young David suffered the plight of all Israel during Saul's reign. Saul sabotaged his initial success through his impetuosity, pride, and impatience. He ran afoul of the powerful Samuel, so much so that the prophet announced that God would take the

kingdom away from Saul. Obviously, Saul suffered from mental and emotional illness. His dementia, decline, and demise provide the prologue to David's rise. The destiny of the boy shepherd of Bethlehem was inextricably tied to the fortunes and failures of Israel's first king.

### **A Secret Anointing**

Some leaders' calls are gradual. They almost steal up on the person. Rather than an immediate and dramatic burning bush episode, the call for them is progressive. Perhaps it initially comes quietly with little shape to it. It may first be perceived as just a direction toward some major assignment. Clarification may come only after the journey has begun. Sometimes this clarification process takes years. The dynamic of David's call fits this description. It was a long way from Samuel's mysterious and secretive anointing in Bethlehem to the public anointing of David as king over Israel by the elders at Hebron.

The second go-around for Samuel in anointing kings barely resembled the first. Even though the prophet had recently delivered the words of doom to the imploding Saul, he took no pleasure in it and still grieved over the king's condition. His trip to Bethlehem occurred only at God's prodding and chiding for his languishing in grief.

Samuel was the closest thing to a national celebrity in those days in Israel. His visit to the village of Bethlehem caused some stir. The question of the town elders, "Have you come in peace?" (1 Sam. 16:4), reflected their anxiety at his sudden appearance. They knew of no reason for Samuel to visit them. The prophet allayed their fears. Samuel convened a feast as a cover for his secret mission. Saul's discovery of the prophet's real intentions could have rendered the act futile. Saul was, after all, still king, even though his successor was about to be anointed in a revolutionary act by the prophet of God.

In this episode, we are treated to the mystery of God's call. Even Samuel is perplexed and a bit slow on the uptake. He is quite certain that Jesse's tall and good-looking firstborn son, Eliab, is the chosen one. God instructs Samuel not to rely on the outer appearances, because the heart is the most important qualification for service to God. Wasn't Saul enough of a lesson here? His physical prowess and good looks, which provided him a head start, had not been enough to secure a good finish. At the feast in Jesse's home, God demonstrated that he was looking for inner qualities that might not be readily apparent to human perception. David came in last in nominations by his own father, but first in the call of God.

Every age and every organization develop their own list of qualities that form the selection criteria for their leaders. In recent years, personal charisma, motivational prowess, and marketing savvy rank near the top of those qualities that are rewarded by large followings in ministry. But God defines the search parameters of what he is looking for. Future ministry models will increasingly return to a renewed emphasis on models that value heart integrity and spiritual presence for those who lead spiritual communities.

To his credit, Samuel waited for the Lord to give him the right cues at Jesse's house. We do not know what David thought of Samuel's actions that day. What did the prophet say to him? Whatever David thought of the proceedings, two impressions seem to have powerfully shaped his heart. First, he shortly became propelled into the concerns of the young kingdom. A sense of personal responsibility would not let him remain an observer. A lunch run to his brothers turned into the famous encounter with Goliath. The shepherd boy emerged from obscurity to begin building his reputation as a warrior.

Those who experience progressive call dynamics as David did respond similarly to the

way he responded. They sense a growing responsibility that propels them personally into leadership arenas. And as with David, early victories help build the leader's reputation and confidence. The call begins to solidify. Obscurity often begins to give way to recognition, perhaps even notoriety.

A second theme emerged in David's life that reflected the significance of Samuel's actions at Bethlehem. David developed and maintained enormous respect for the office of king, which he often referred to as "the Lord's anointed" (1 Sam. 12:3; 26:9). This reverence influenced David's treatment of Saul, even when the king pursued David to have him killed. David refused to raise his hand against Saul, even when twice he had the chance to kill him. He even put to death the Amalekite who killed Saul after the king's botched suicide attempt. David could not understand why the young man would not be afraid to lift his hand against the Lord's anointed (2 Sam. 1:14).

David possessed a reverential awe of the significance of the anointing. His perspective proves instructive for those who give spiritual leadership today. All of those who have ever experienced the anointing of God to do the work that God has called them to do have encountered a profound mystery and reality. The anointing is the God-part of the leadership equation. It accounts for the leader's effectiveness that reaches far beyond what the leader alone brings to the table. The leader's efforts become multiplied and remarkably sufficient to the challenge. A few fishes and loaves feed five thousand. The experience of the anointing is truly humbling to the leader, who knows that unless God shows up, the crowd goes away hungry.

A case can be made that God never removes his call on a person's life. But he definitely withdraws his anointing. One of the horrors of not following the will of God is the leader's awareness of the lack of anointing. The leader may go on functioning in the leadership role, but minus spiritual power. The leader's heart cannot rest fully. No amount of human exertion or ingenuity will compensate for the loss. The only remedy is a return to obedience, a plea for mercy, and a hope that it is not too late, that the window of opportunity to get in on what God is up to has not closed.

Saul pleaded too little and too late. He played the fool with the call of God. Following his breach with Samuel, the king began to deal with long bouts of depression. Some of Saul's servants knew of David's musical skill, and thinking the shepherd's music might soothe their monarch, they made arrangements for David to play at court.

Saul's "palace" resembled more a fort. His throne room was no larger than a large-sized great room in a contemporary home. David could thus observe at close hand the ravages of Saul's unstable emotional condition. The pathetic state of the king was widely attributed to the withdrawal of the Lord's Spirit from him after Saul had disobeyed the Lord's instructions. David learned that the capacity to rule depended on spiritual power as well as military might. Years later, after his transgression with Bathsheba, David's prayer reflected this early lesson. His plea, "Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me" (Ps. 51:11), represents far more than mere personal piety. The thought of ending up like Saul terrified him. David's early glimpses into Saul's torment convinced him that as king, he must depend on God and maintain fellowship with him.

David decided not to play loose with God's call but to order his life around it. This decision showed up in his determination and patience. The road to being king would lead through the territory of being a hunted fugitive, disenfranchised from home and family. Yet even when circumstances seemed to militate against the call's fulfillment, David remained undaunted in his belief that he would be king. God had promised it. David had

been anointed to that purpose. He trusted God to deliver on his promise.

Christian leaders certain of their call allow it to become the center of gravity for their life experiences. They order their lives around the call of God on them. They exhibit patience and determination to pursue God's call when, as in David's case, circumstances would dissuade them or threaten the call's fulfillment. They are convinced that life will eventually line up with the reality of the call. God has anointed. God will deliver on his promise.

### **The Fight with Goliath**

God's anointed one rose to national prominence through a spectacular conflict involving David's defeat of Goliath, the Philistine's great champion. Several leadership lessons emerge from this event. The first is obvious, yet it cannot be overlooked. It took raw courage, significant "chutzpah," for David to go up against Goliath. Saul had promised to reward Goliath's slayer with the king's wealth, the king's daughter, and a tax break. David inquired about the reward, but no amount of reward could engender by itself the courage it took to face Goliath. This character quality had to come from within; it could not be generated from extrinsic motivations.

Many spiritual leaders do not lead from courage. They lead from fear. Fear drives many ministries. Fear of being disliked, fear of losing income, fear of failure, fear of conflict—these and a hundred other fears form a giant that calls the leader out to a contest. Often the leader resembles more the rest of the Israelite soldiers, who were held hostage by Goliath's threats. Those who are fear dominated may even suit up for battle each day and visit the battlefield to skirmish. However, they are playing not to lose rather than playing to win.

We also learn about the heart of a champion from David's response to his reception at the battle scene. First, he has to contend with the scorn of his older brother. When he heard of David's interest in fighting Goliath, he questioned David's motives, ridiculed his character, and treated him as an embarrassment to the family. Second, David had to persuade Saul to let him fight. The king obviously lacked confidence in David's warrior capabilities. He knew David as a musician. However, Saul did not have many options, so he relented from his objections and wagered the kingdom in a duel between David and the giant. Third, when David approached Goliath, he once again endured scathing remarks.

David refused to accept others' low estimations of his ability. Though we might consider David boastful in his attempts to persuade Saul, he did prove his abilities with the sling and his courage when confronted by danger, just as he said he would. David set out to prove that others' low expectations or belittlement would not be the book on him.

Many great leaders face the same challenge to their self-esteem. Their family of origin may be unaffirming or downright discouraging of their abilities. Early circumstances may not be sufficient to demonstrate the full range of the leader's talent. Authority figures may pigeonhole the leader in ways that constrict the leader's development. The leader faces a similar choice of having to risk, to throw off the lid of others' diminished expectations. David learned what every leader-who-would-be-king must also learn. All the leader's cues cannot come from the external environment. The drive has to be fueled by the call and not dependent ultimately on the opinions of others, even significant others.

David's confrontation with Goliath illustrates another key leadership principle. David

chose his weapons and manner of attack. He refused Saul's armor, preferring instead to engage the giant with a strategy built on his own strengths. The shepherd's prowess with the sling had been honed. This was his best skill. He refused to allow the conflict to force him to abandon his best chance at winning. He did not want to give up the advantage of delivering a preemptive strike from a distance. He could not have prevailed in a toe-to-toe sword fight. His approach caught Goliath off guard, and it brought the giant down to size so David could finish him off.

Spiritual leaders sometimes abandon their strengths when facing conflict. Smart leaders choose to employ weapons that are comfortable and proven to them. Perhaps prayer, or people skills, or persuasion are talents that a Christian leader possesses. Then these are the best weapons in the leader's arsenal against hostile forces. Some leaders mistakenly abandon their spiritual leadership during trials or challenges, to exert power over people or to pummel people to secure victory.

One final leadership lesson presents itself in the story of David and Goliath. For David, the overriding issue was God's honor. Though he inquired about Saul's rewards and was partially motivated by them, his preeminent concern was a jealousy for God's reputation. He did not want the Philistines to conclude that the God of Israel could not be feared or could not win over their giant. God's reputation was at stake.

David had a personal stake too in the confrontation. The God of Israel had called him. Part of their relationship involved God helping David defeat his enemies and the enemies of God's people. The challenge and defeat of Goliath secured the honor of the God of Israel. God's intervention and deliverance also established David as a leader who did battle in the power of the Lord.

David's life project involved living out his call. He did not adopt the goal of becoming the greatest king in Israel's history. His goal was to live out his call, not to have the call serve him. His own reputation would be bound up in his faithfulness to his call. God's purposes, not his own, captured his life efforts. A couple of examples of David's behavior reflect this attitude. When the ark made its way into Jerusalem, David danced before it with abandon. His dance signified to his people that their king had yielded to an even higher King, whom he delighted to praise (1 Chron. 15:25-29). He was in the service of God, not vice versa. Nor did he think the call entitled him to personal fulfillment at others' expense. He refused to drink the water from the well at Bethlehem even though some of his men had risked their lives to get it (2 Sam. 23:13-17). He did not want to signal a belief that his mission was about getting his personal whims attended to. He would not allow the call to become subservient to personal convenience and comfort.

David lapsed on this perspective occasionally. Such instances proved costly. The sordid episode with Bathsheba was set in motion when David sent others to fulfill his assignment (2 Sam. 11:1). He eventually repented but unleashed a family dysfunction that plagued him the rest of his life. On another occasion, he ordered a numbering of his fighting forces, an action that ran counter to trusting God. Though David was pricked in his conscience, the lapse of obedience cost him seventy thousand men, an immediate reduction of troop inventory with no victory to show for it (1 Chron. 21:1-30).

Leaders who are gripped by a call from God do well to remember that they serve the call. The call is not given to serve them. The initiative and substance of the call belong to God. The leader is an instrument in the Lord's hand to help others have the opportunity to live their lives with greater significance and in relationship with God. By following their call, leaders establish kingdoms that enjoy secure borders and domestic tranquility.

Those in the kingdom's realm are able to live peacefully and fully.

### **The Cauldron of Conflict**

David had to fight to become king, not just against Goliath, but against Saul's family, with and against the Philistines, against the Jebusites, and eventually against his own son. Without question, David's life was bloody, so bloody that he was not allowed to construct the Temple. Yet the demands of his situation required gruesome solutions. Kings fought to become and remain kings in those days. Any attempt to retrofit the cultural mores of David's time with those of today will obscure the larger picture. For David to have shied away from these conflicts would have meant an abdication of his life mission. Our interest focuses on how these conflicts shaped David's heart.

David's protracted struggle with Saul played a significant role in shaping his heart into the heart of a king. He determined not to challenge Saul's authority. He could have reasoned that the Lord would deliver Saul into his hands. David could have ended his exile and avoided the anxiety of being hunted by assassinating the reckless king when he had the chance. By refusing this course of action, David elevated the position of king to a level beyond that of simply being a strongman. Had David killed Saul to secure the throne, he would have established a dangerous precedent for succession by bloodshed in Israel.

David's most painful struggle involved Absalom's revolt. The victorious warrior against Israel's enemies was most vulnerable in his own house. David learned the exquisite pain of being betrayed by those closest to one's heart.

David played by different rules of engagement with Absalom than when he confronted others. He was reluctant to fight against his son. He actually abandoned Jerusalem and went into temporary exile. When Absalom was ultimately killed, David despaired as at no other time in his life. His judgment became clouded to the point that he temporarily demoralized his followers by failing to honor their victory over his enemies. Only Joab's sharp rebuke helped David regain his leadership composure to look beyond his own grief to the needs of his followers (2 Sam. 19:1-8). Their sacrificial efforts needed to be legitimized and appreciated.

Like David, today's spiritual leaders face many different kinds of conflict. Some challenges to their leadership come from the outside. The most challenging always arise from within. Many understand the situation of being exiled from their own kingdoms because of a betrayal from within the closest circles. Yet those who follow the leader need for the leader to keep heart. Joab's prescription to David, to "go out and encourage your men" (2 Sam. 19:7), still needs heeding. The need to encourage the followers in the leader's constellation can sometimes, as in David's case, pull the embattled and disheartened leader out of lethargy and despondency.

The cauldron of conflict shapes the heart of the leader. Each instance forces a redefinition of the leader's mission, values, and actions. Through conflict, the leader's heart can grow haughty and hard, ruthless, even punitive. On the other hand, conflict can enlarge the leader's dependence on God for deliverance.

David gained some significant heart lessons through conflicts in his life. Many of them still apply to contemporary spiritual leaders. First, the weak of heart need not apply for leadership. The tumult of these times calls for stout hearts and courageous leaders for the Christian movement. Second, the leader must expect conflict to come as part of the territory. The conflict-allergic leader who shrinks from all conflict and gives in to fear

will fail to preside over an expansion of the kingdom. Third, leadership must be earned. Enjoying leadership by virtue of position is increasingly rare. Fourth, betrayal poses the greatest emotional threat to the leader and the leader's followers. The battle can be lost over disappointment and heart failure. Fifth, the leader needs to secure the blessings of God for the followers. The benefits of David's conflict extended beyond him. His victories brought peace and blessing to those who lived under his leadership influence.

### **Community of the King**

David did not fit the leader-as-loner model. He apparently craved community. As the baby boy in his family, he had been surrounded by older brothers. He was never really alone, except on shepherding assignments. He kept people around him always, people who were close to him, beginning with Jonathan, then Abner, then Joab. These relationships stand out, but scores of others, including the thirty mighty men of valor, created for David a web of people connections.

God used the community around David as a powerful tool to shape his heart. The foundation of David's community grew out of his security in himself. He had been anointed by God. He took this as a sign of favor and blessing. The appointment by God framed David's self-perception. Even when he blew it, David fell toward God. Whether it was with the horrific actions regarding Bathsheba and Uriah or the haughty numbering of the army, whenever David sinned, he repented, learned, and moved on. He did not let his tragic mistakes define him in a negative way.

Contrast David's personal perception of self-confidence to that of Saul's sense of inferiority. Saul's lack of ego strength bred paranoid and schizophrenic behavior. Saul never saw himself as king. He told Samuel the prophet that he had chosen the wrong man because Saul was from a small tribe and an undistinguished family. When Samuel anointed Saul as king, Saul did not tell anyone about it. He had to be coaxed out of hiding on the day of his presentation. This action should not be mistaken for humility. It revealed a self-image problem that eventuated in Saul's incapacity to establish solid relationships. Saul's public failures were perfectly consonant with his internal view of himself.

Spiritual leaders who are fairly intact in their self-esteem can build community. They breed health in their relationships because they themselves possess psychological health. The opposite is also true; dysfunction breeds dysfunction. The contrast of David and Saul teaches us that people can commit themselves to leaders who are not threatened by them. Healthy people tend to avoid being trapped in the leadership constellation of paranoid kings. Sick kings can, however, usually attract those whose own needs for approval keep them tied to dysfunctional systems and relationships. Consequently, sick kings have no one around them who has the strength of character to oppose or to challenge them. Those who do are usually exiled or driven from the king's presence. Insecure leaders make supporting them a litmus test of their followers' devotion to God.

David's security in himself did not lead him into believing more about himself than he should. He did not ever fully believe his press. He knew where his real source of strength resided. His confidence grew out of the security of his own relationship with his King.

David's security in his relationship with God allowed him to entertain others' notions and ideas without feeling in competition with them. He had the benefit of wise counsel because of the community he enjoyed. He did not always have to be right. He was willing to trust others' judgments. He relied on Jonathan's insights early on. He frequently consulted with military commanders in combat situations. Nathan's access to

David extended beyond one incident. The prophet's ability to challenge the king proves the point. David avoided a haughty heart because he did not insulate himself against the community he served. David forged a great kingdom because he captured the people's own dreams and served them.

David created a wonderful legacy in part because he lived an open life that allowed others to find their own destinies in his. He developed a heart after God's because he had a heart that had room for others.

### **A Man After God's Own Heart**

David's passion to pursue God's heart fostered a communion between him and God so powerful that the very words of their conversations still inspire the communion of millions seeking after God's heart themselves. The psalms of David serve as a journal of divine heart-shaping. From them, we learn several key insights into how God molded David through their intimate encounters. First, David's communion with God supported his sense of destiny. Second, David was transparent in his relationship with God. The full range of emotions poured out in David's discourse with his King. Third, he reflected on commonplace experiences of his boyhood shepherding to create new insights into God's heart. Finally, David saw God everywhere he looked.

### **A Sense of Destiny**

Throughout the psalms, David revealed a strong sense of personal destiny. He combined two major sets of imagery to express this theme-warrior imagery and regal imagery.

The God of Israel made David a successful warrior. God revealed himself to David in military terms. Warrior and battle language in David's heart talk include refuge, rock, shield, and stronghold, among others.

Psalm 18 serves as an example of how these military themes express David's connection with God. In this song, David says that God trains him for battle (v. 34), arms him with strength (v. 39), and exalts him above his enemies (v. 48) by allowing him to rout those who oppose him (v. 40). David viewed his success as a soldier as clear affirmation of God's favor: "He gives his king great victories; he shows unfailing kindness to his anointed, to David and his descendants forever" (v. 50).

David's claim as "God's anointed" reflects his sense of connection to God more than any other phrase. David was king because God wanted him as king. His position of being king over Israel represented a personal favor to him by God because the Lord liked David. "He brought me out into a spacious place; he rescued me because he delighted in me" (Ps. 18:19, emphasis added). David not only had ascended the throne over Israel but also had become a significant ruler in the ancient world.

David treasured his position at God's "right hand," a recurring phrase in the psalms (Pss. 16:8; 63:8; 110:1). Eastern kings granted this place of honor and distinction to someone they trusted. Those in this position of prestige and power carried the authority of the king himself. Being at God's right hand secured audience with him. David delighted himself in the presence of his King. (Eastern rulers would have expected the same from those who were privileged to be in their presence in their court.) David did not take this relationship for granted, but he used it to exalt and praise, to petition, and to receive instructions.

God still shapes leaders' hearts with a sense of destiny. They have a place and a role assigned by God in his work on the planet during their lifetimes. They also carry a sense of legacy. They believe God is working through them to influence the generations following them.

So many things vie for the leader's attention. To the degree that Christian leaders nurture their communion with God, they keep sight of the best contributions they can make. If the communion suffers, the mission of the leader is placed in jeopardy, in danger of being lost to trivialities or distraction.

The leader's sense of mission is not a matter of pride. It is a point of privilege and responsibility. If the leader's heart remains in communion with God, then humility graces the leader's life. The leader maintains an absolute awareness of owing the leadership role to God. The leader is king by the design and pleasure of the Almighty.

### **Heart to Heart**

David was honest with God. He did not pretend in his conversations with God, playing games to avoid confronting the truth about life, about his circumstances, and about himself. He felt he had nothing to hide from God; rather, he viewed his life as an open book. For this reason, David did not feel a need to sanitize his prayers. He brought to God the raw stuff of his heart, uncensored, untidied up. He was not afraid that God would be repulsed by his heart, because God, knowing his heart, still wanted communion with David.

David teaches us that honesty is the real currency of heart-shaping communion. "Search me, O God, and know my heart" (Ps. 139:21a) expresses a plea with God to conduct a thorough investigation so that the leader can grow. Humans can be tricked and deceived. They can be misled, and the result can be cancerous to the relationship. Humans can also demand that their leaders present themselves in certain ways in order to unlock the door for approval or sanction. God does not reward posturing. No attempts at wiggling out of the truth will succeed.

This truth has both frightening and thrilling implications. The real breakthrough to heart-shaping communion occurs when the fear of this truth gives way to the thrill of this truth. The leader is set free in God's presence to deal with the hardcore truth without fear of being misunderstood or of suffering negative consequences for sharing true thoughts. The freedom of such heart-to-heart discussions with God are afforded by few human relationships.

Understanding that his life was transparent before God, David enjoyed the full spectrum of emotional release to God. Opening up his inmost thoughts to God proved therapeutic for the king of Israel. In a single psalm, David would sometimes display a huge assortment of emotional expression.

Praise frequented David's communion. "Praise the Lord, O my soul; all my inmost being, praise his holy name" (Ps. 103:1). David celebrated God's goodness, his righteousness, his character, his mighty deeds, and his creative activity. "My soul will boast in the Lord" (Ps. 34:2a) signals this desire to rehearse God's attributes, much as a lover would extol the virtues of his or her beloved.

David also pleaded for deliverance when he was anxious or afraid. "O Lord, do not forsake me.... Come quickly to help me" (Ps. 38:21-22) was a theme that took several

variations. David counted on God's deliverance from the slimy pit (40:2), from guilt of sin (53:14), from his enemies (56:1), from his distresses (55:17). Pride did not get in the way of David's asking for help: "Cast your cares on the Lord, for he will sustain you" (55:22).

The psalms contain passionate outbursts of the hatred David had for his enemies. He wanted God to punish them: "May the table set before them become a snare; may it become retribution and a trap. May their eyes be darkened so they cannot see, and their backs be bent forever. Pour your wrath on them, let your fierce anger overtake them.... Charge them with crime upon crime, do not let them share in your salvation. May they be blotted out of the book of life and not be listed with the righteous"

(Ps. 69:22-24, 27-28). And these verses are not even the most explicit in David's prayer arsenal against his enemies!

Many Christian leaders today might feel uncomfortable praying against others with this much zeal. Perhaps the leader's prayer would be more healing if, like David, the leader were not afraid to say the first thing that comes to mind or bubbles up from the gut. The process of sanitizing prayers cuts God out of the healing loop. God can handle emotional outbursts. He has heard it before. From David.

David also was not above some self-congratulations in the psalms. He exulted in his own performance: "Vindicate me, O Lord, for I have led a blameless life" (26:1). He was also quick to admit his failures and to beg for mercy: "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath" (38:1).

In short, David's psalms are chatty, reflective, celebratory, morose, lofty, punitive, hopeful, dark, loud, quiet-whatever state or states of mind David found himself in as he came to God.

Christian leaders can find a psalm of David to match any mood. David's honest expression still helps the leader give release to thoughts and feelings that are at times immature, contradictory, and even embarrassing to look back on. David depended on communion with God. He was not just developing a discipline. He clung to God because fulfilling his life destiny depended on it. David would not have been David without his singing.

### **The Shepherd King**

Like Moses, David had a leadership curriculum that involved shepherding. Shepherding provided David with some of his richest imagery about God. The commonplace experiences of his boyhood afforded him new ways to talk about the God of Israel. The notion that God looks after us in protection and provision, that we are the sheep of his pasture, provides an incredible dimension to the Old Testament revelation of God. In Moses' time, God lived on the mountain, in fire and smoke. He was unapproachable. No one looked on him lest they die in their tracks. David painted a picture of a God intimately involved with and concerned for his people.

Shepherding themes invoke deeply instinctual human heart emotions. Hope, security, rest, contentment, care—all these categories find expression in the pastoral images of the Davidic psalms. Psalm 23, rife with shepherding imagery, provides the clearest expression of the impact that commonplace boyhood work made in David's heart in terms of understanding and appreciating God. In this psalm, the sheep is nurtured,

provided for, and protected. Green pastures, still waters-these are optimum conditions of provision. Paths of righteousness lead to security. When danger threatens, even shadows cast in the valley of death, the people of God can live without fear, for God protects them. And hope is the final word. The promise of dwelling with God forever represents a powerful statement of belief and faith one thousand years before Christ.

### **God Is Everywhere**

The shepherd of Bethlehem also developed a deep appreciation for the handiwork of God. Waterfalls, mountains, valley streams, still-water ponds, lush vegetation, craggy hillsides, caves, open vistas, snow-capped peaks-all and each of them inspired David and caused him to worship God.

The capacity to see God at work in the common things of life is a hallmark of great spiritual leadership. David serves as a model for turning life assignments into windows for viewing God's heart. The ultimate responsibility of the spiritual leader is to share the heart of God with the people of God. This cannot happen if the leader does not know the heart of God. This kind of intimacy comes from an intentional and frequent cultivation of a personal relationship that draws from every life experience.

David felt very close to God. That was because he looked for God all of the time and in every situation. He lived up to God's assessment voiced to Samuel. He truly was a person who sought after God's heart. His mission reflected God's mission. God has honored his pledge to him. David's kingdom has been established. One from David's line will occupy the throne forever.