

Graciously Responding To Rebuke

1 Samuel 25:32-35

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 1-15-2012

Introduction

Last week we saw the gracious rebuke that Abigail brought to David. Today we are going to be examining David's response. One commentator said that his heart melted into repentance, and I think that is a good summary. And I believe that it takes God's *grace* to respond as David did. Our natural response is to defend ourselves and to excuse ourselves. And wanting to save face in front of his 600 men would make it even harder. Josh Billings adds, "It is much easier to repent of sins that we have committed than to repent of those we intend to commit." And so I really do see this whole passage as a genuine work of God's grace in David's life. Three times he says, "**Blessed be... blessed be... blessed be.**" David rejoiced that God had kept him from committing this sin. So we are going to look at ten characteristics of David's gracious response to Abigail's rebuke.

I. Listen and respond; don't withdraw (v. 32a)

First of all, he listened and responded, rather than ignoring her. Verse 32 says, "**Then David said to Abigail...**" He took the time to respond. He didn't allow his pride to discount what she said, and he didn't allow her disagreement with him make him withdraw. He could have left the discussion and slammed the proverbial door on the way out. We sometimes are tempted to do that. How many times have we husbands not responded graciously to a gentle, gentle, reproof from our wives? Scripture speaks of two kinds of inappropriate reactions to rebuke. Several Proverbs speak of abusing the peacemaker and going on the attack yourself in order to justify your behavior. And other Proverbs speak of ignoring the rebuke. Both approaches are considered shameful by the book of Proverbs. In contrast, the wise man is said to listen, to consider, and to take heed to wise rebukes. Look up what the Proverbs say about rebuke and reproof and you will get quite an education.

And whether your personality tends towards fight or flight when you hear something that you don't want to hear, this is a message for you. You could discount the application by saying, "Well of course. David is about to involve himself in heinous murder. Of course *he* should listen." But the point is that David was so blinded by anger that he didn't recognize that

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what he was planning to do was wicked and would have horrible consequences. All sin is irrational, but sin committed in anger has an extra dimension of irrationality to it. We tend to be blinded by anger and bitterness, and it is important to bite our tongue like David did and listen and respond rather than withdrawing.

I had a teacher in seminary who made it a habit of life to search for any grain of truth in criticisms that he received, no matter how off the wall the critics might be. He was doing what the Proverbs command a wise man to do – sifting, considering, and evaluating if there was any truth to the complaint, and asking God to show him if there was any wicked way in him. And that was the prayer of David in more than one Psalm. He prayed,

**Psalms 139:23 Search me, O God, and know my heart;
Try me, and know my anxieties;**

**Psalms 139:24 And see if *there is any* wicked way in me,
And lead me in the way everlasting.**

He was asking God to show him if there was any truth in what his critics had to say. And if you are an angry or a bitter person, you are likely going to have a hard time getting past even point I. And if that is the case, let it drive you to the cross of Jesus Christ. God calls us to these kinds of impossibilities so that we realize that we can't live the Christian life on our own. We need God's forgiveness when we blow it, and we need His strength to do the impossible. So ask God to give you a breakthrough; to give you a listening heart and a teachable heart. It will spare you the bitter fruits of sin that it spared David.

II. Rejoice in God's providence in bringing the rebuke and thank Him (v. 32b)

Second, rejoice in God's providence in bringing the rebuke, and thank God for it. Oooh! This is a hard point too. Verse 32 goes on to say, "...**Blessed be the LORD God of Israel who sent you this day to meet me!**" Exclamation marks are interpretations in translation, but this is one exclamation mark in this passage that I think belongs there. He was thankful. But before we move on, we need to marvel that he was so quickly brought to thankfulness. When someone thinks that you have been involved in heinous sin, and exposes it in front of 600 soldiers, it takes grace to give thanks. You might think this is easy; it is not easy. We don't naturally like to be humiliated in a public way. In fact, I would dare say that any attempt at giving thanks might initially stick in your craw if God has not developed this grace in good measure. Do it anyway. Even if the criticism seems off the

wall, give thanks. This is something that we must practice, and keep practicing so that we don't become like King Saul. Psalm 141:5 says,

**Let the righteous strike me;
It shall be a kindness.
And let him rebuke me;
It shall be as excellent oil;
Let my head not refuse it.**

That was David's heart. He always wanted to be open to rebuke. But he likens rebuke to being struck on the face in that Psalm. No one likes that. And so we saw last week that we need to have tact and graciousness when we bring rebukes. They are more likely to be received. But the ability to thank God for the good that He intends in providentially arranging rebukes is one of the major differences between David and Saul. It prepares our hearts to speak rightly by subduing the anger. And the more you thank God, the more you find the anger beginning to be subdued.

III. Rejoice that a faithful friend has cared enough to rebuke you and thank her for her faithfulness (v. 33a)

The third thing we see in this passage is that David rejoiced that a faithful friend cared enough about him and others to rebuke him, and he thanked *her* for the rebuke. He says in verse 33, "**And blessed is your advice and blessed are you...**" This is not a polite thank you that ignores the advice. We've all experienced that, haven't we? No, he is thankful for both *her* and for the *advice*; for the message *and* the messenger. The Puritan writer, George Swinnock, said, "Oh, that I might never be so void of love to my fallen brother as not to give him a serious reproof, nor so void of love to myself as not to receive a serious reproof." If we can learn to be thankful for both the message of reproof and the messenger, our mind will instantly become more objective. It's just the nature of thanksgiving to give us new perspective. Secondly, it will make it more likely that the peacemaker will be willing to do this again in the future. And you might think, "I don't want that." Yes you do. You do not want to ruin the rest of your life like David almost did. You do not want to so turn off your friends with your angry responses to correction that they leave you in your sin and let you walk over the cliff. It was hard for Abigail to do what she did, and a thank you enabled her to respect David even more.

I'm sure this factored into her later agreement to marry David. He had shown more care for pleasing God than he did for saving face in front of his 600 men. This graciousness and this humility was bound to have had a huge

impact upon her judgment of his character. So even ten days down the road David reaped an unknown blessing from having responded graciously.

IV. Clearly name the sin that you are repenting of (v. 33b)

The fourth thing that I see is that David went on to clearly name the sin that he was repenting of. He did not excuse himself. He did not make the sin seem less heinous than it was. He called a spade a spade, as embarrassing as that may have been at that point. In verse 33 he goes on to say, “...**because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand.**” He repeats back the precise language that she reproved him with, and repented of *that* sin. This is a habit that we tried to instill in our children when they were young. We wanted them to tell us precisely what it was that they were repenting of. That would show to us whether they really understood their sin. It is in clearly understanding our sin that we can overcome it.

Recently some researchers at John’s Hopkins University uncovered the notes of a 19th century neurosurgeon by the name of Harvey Cushing. And they were somewhat surprised at his meticulous self-evaluation and self-criticism. He documented every mistake he made on the operating table. As they pointed out, most people try to hide their mistakes, while Dr. Cushing clearly articulated them and tried to learn from them. And one of the people who read his manuscripts said, “It is no surprise that during his lifetime some of the most profound improvements were made in the field of neurosurgery! One of the first steps toward any improvement is to admit to what needs to be improved.” Now apply that to the science of growing in Christ and I think you will be hugely benefited. Jonathan Edwards and many of the saints of the past did this kind of self-evaluation at the end of every day, and wrote down what specific sins and problems that they wanted to overcome. It should be a habit of life, especially when you have been confronted for a sin. That takes more humility, but it causes us to take our sins more seriously.

V. Be God-centered in your repentance (v. 34a)

The fifth thing I see is that David sought to be God-centered in his confession. Verse 24 begins: “**For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back...**” Some confessions of sin are only enough to get *people* off their backs. And if you have a hard time being thorough in your confession, try praying to God for wisdom to see your error, and do it in the presence of the person who is criticizing you. The moment God is brought into the equation, your mind thinks differently.

Let me try to illustrate this. I remember one time arguing with my father as to why he was wrong and I was right. And my dad couldn't get anywhere with my stubborn thinking. So he said, "Well, let's just stop for a moment and pray about this. Why don't you pray first, and then I will end." As soon as he said that I thought, "This is not fair," because I knew that as soon as I started praying, my perspective would change. And it did. I could see my wrong, and I confessed my wrong in my prayer. Why couldn't I see my wrong before I prayed? It's a little thing called self-deception. It is because we know in our hearts that even though we can deceive ourselves, we can't deceive God. When you bring God into the equation, it is much harder to fool yourself. Of course, by thinking, "This is not fair," I was exposing the sinfulness of my heart anyway, wasn't I? But if there is any way that you can become more God-centered in your thinking during such a confrontation, it will help you and others to respond more fully. There is a third person that has been brought into this situation.

VI. Be sure to clearly affirm the seriousness of your sin (v. 34b)

And of course David did respond more fully. He not only acknowledged the sin that she had confronted him on, but he also told her more than she knew. He confessed fully the wickedness of his intentions and the incredible collateral damage that could have happened. He says in verse 34,

For indeed, as the LORD God of Israel lives, who has kept me back from hurting you, unless you had hurried and come to meet me, surely by morning light no males would have been left to Nabal!"

He is admitting that he would have been guilty not only of taking vengeance on Nabal, but also of genocide. No wonder he had this threefold blessing in verses 32-33. And so point VI says, "Be sure to clearly affirm the seriousness of your sin." Too many confessions that I hear don't take personal responsibility seriously, and don't take the sin seriously. They soft-pedal the confession. "I'm sorry I did that, but" and then they explain why they couldn't help it. Or they will confess the sin, but not make the sin seem quite as serious as it really is. They fail to give God's perspective on the sin. Or they will say, "I'm sorry if you were offended." That's a ridiculous confession, unless of course you have no sin and the other person shouldn't have been offended.

By the way, saying "I'm sorry," is not enough. All that means literally is "I feel bad." And the other person is thinking, "Yeah, you should feel

bad.” But there is no restoration. The ball is still in your hands, and it is burning your hands. When we ask for forgiveness, it throws the ball back into the other person’s court and asks for reconciliation. That’s implied in the actions of verse 35, though it is not explicitly stated. But rarely do we have entire conversations recorded in Scripture. And based on the Psalm that was written much later in his life, Psalm 37, I believe that David did indeed say more. That Psalm is a remarkable description of what was going on in this chapter. In that Psalm David affirms that he should never have gotten angry, should never have tried to take vengeance into his own hands, that he should have been satisfied with very little food and provision if God so willed it, that he should not have gotten envious of what the wicked rich man had, and that he should have let God handle the wicked. It’s a wonderful Psalm that even more clearly expresses the sin that he was putting off. But make sure you give a thorough confession of what made the sin so sinful. It’s one of the biggest gripes that I have about most confessions - they are half-hearted.

VII. Receive overtures of peace and affirmation from others and don’t downplay them (v. 35a)

But let’s go on to verse 35: The first part says, “**So David received from her hand what she had brought him...**” She had extended an olive branch, so to speak, and David is receiving it. To say, “No, no, no, I’m not going to take anything,” would have hindered the peace process. When you are convicted of your sin, it is easy to feel so badly about your sin that you refuse tangible offers of affirmation from others because you don’t feel worthy. But David takes them, and by taking them symbolizes his reconciliation.

In his book on church discipline, Jay Adams points out that many restorations of people go bad at this point. They have been excommunicated, and because they are genuine children of God, God disciplines them so severely that they cry “Uncle,” and come back to the church asking for the discipline to be removed. They are restored to the church, but only in a half-hearted way. People don’t want to talk about sin, so they don’t know what to talk about. They are uncomfortable around the restored person. And the restored person interprets the behavior as evidence that the people are holding something against them, and they feel bad. And after months of not being fully restored, they transfer to another church. Adams says that what should happen is for the restored person to be treated like the prodigal son. The church should literally put on a big banquet, and at the banquet explain that thorough repentance has happened, and this man is not a second-class

citizen, but is fully restored. They can talk about God's discipline that led them to repentance, and talk about anything else that needs to be talked about. And then they can go on to regular fellowship and enjoy the banquet. When that happens, no one needs to tip toe around the issue, and full restoration can occur.

David is the prodigal who is going to eat the feast put on by Abigail. And remember that Abigail did not call this food restitution. She called it a present or a blessing. And it was. And it was received as such.

VIII. Affirm your own willingness to be friends (v. 35b)

The eighth thing that I see is that David reciprocated and made it clear that he wanted to once again be friends. He says, "**Go in peace to your house...**" The Hebrew word for "peace" is shalom, and it is not only inward emotional peace but it also conveys the idea of God's blessing and prosperity in every area. So this was a statement that he no longer held any ill will towards her. To pronounce peace means that any desire to curse or to destroy is no longer present in David.

And honestly, that is where we elders would hope that all efforts at repentance would go. Instead, what sometimes happens is that a person gives an "I forgive you," but still holds bitterness in the heart and doesn't want to fellowship anymore. He is not willing to say, "I wish you Shalom." Though they are civil with each other, there is a continuing iciness between those two people. The book, *The Peacemaker*, by Ken Sande shows that this is not enough. God's grace should restore fellowship and ideally even make it better than before because both of you have been driven even more deeply into the cross of Christ. Obviously David couldn't be restored to Nabal, because Nabal himself had not repented. But David had been brought to a place where he was at peace and wished her to be at peace. It's a beautiful statement. Abigail had offered the hand of friendship and he graciously offered the hand of friendship.

IX. Commit yourself to following through on your repentance (v. 35c)

The next step in David's repentance was to commit himself to following through on his repentance. Verse 35 goes on to say, "**See, I have heeded your voice...**" The ESV translates it, "I have obeyed your voice." However you translate it, David was committing himself to follow through with action. His repentance was not mere words; he would do what she said.

With our children we would have them practice right then and there. If it was a sin in conversation, after the confession of sin had been made, we would have our child practice with the person they had offended the right way to say it. “OK, let’s start this conversation over again, and I want to hear you say it the right way this time.” If it was damage to property, it would be following through on restitution. Or if they were repenting of being mean-spirited, it would be strategizing doing something nice for that other person. Without a commitment to follow through with actions, the repentance is hollow. This is why John the Baptist cried out, “**Therefore bear fruits worthy of repentance.**” And I think Psalm 37 shows that David had that kind of follow through.

X. Maintain a respect for the person who has brought the rebuke (v. 35d)

The final thing that David did was to affirm the fact that he respected Abigail. “**I have heeded your voice and respected your person.**” Some believe this was an acknowledgment that she was a prophetess. Others believe it was simply an affirmation that he respected her very much for what she had done. Either way, it still affirms the same point. It is good after a tense confrontation, to affirm respect for the person who has confronted you. It is a tough job to bring a rebuke. To say, “Thank you for bringing this to my attention; I respect you very much for having the courage to do that,” goes a long ways toward normalizing relationships.

Conclusion

And what David was doing in this speech was not just living his life Coram Deo (before the face of God), but it was also modeling to others what it means to live by grace. I have noticed unbelievers who stand in awe when they see Abigail’s bringing reproof with tactfulness, gentleness, graciousness, and bearing. She was under incredible stress, and yet they saw the grace of God taking over. And I have also seen unbelievers stand in awe of Christians who have the humility to graciously receive a rebuke and to fully repent of their own sins. It may seem like a small part of living out our Christian life before the world, but our attitudes on this subject have more impact than you may think. Though every aspect of our lives should be a light that glorifies God, let’s make a commitment to making sure that our repentance does so as well.

I don’t think it is by accident that it was the *beatitudes* that were followed with the admonition, “**Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.**” The

kind of mourning over sin that the beatitudes speak of is a mourning that only God can produce and only God can be glorified in. That kind of mourning is letting your light so shine. The kind of meekness, hungering and thirsting after righteousness, mercy, peacemaking and other responses are the same. So brothers and sisters, I call you to evaluate your responses to rebukes, and put on the supernatural grace of the Lord Jesus Christ so that you too can glorify God in repentance. Amen.

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