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## God's Tests

By David Servant

# FIFTEEN

## David's Destiny

David, the son of Jesse, was divinely destined to be king of Israel, and God revealed His plan to him when he was just a shepherd boy. If David was divinely destined to be king, is it possible that he also was destined to be a shepherd first? Did God leave the first years of David's life up to chance? Was God just waiting until the shepherd boy reached the time when he would fulfill his divine destiny to be king? I don't think so. All of David's life was a preparation for kingship. Starting off as a shepherd was certainly appropriate training for one who would one day shepherd the flock of God.

Often what we perceive as wasted periods of our lives are part of God's training process—periods to prepare us for His ultimate purpose for our life. God can use even our mistakes to better equip us for the “good works which [He] prepared beforehand” (Eph. 2:10).

How did the Lord prepare David for the big challenges he would face one day as king? Just as you may have guessed—by the same method He used to prepare Israel to take Canaan and by the same method He used to train Jesus' twelve disciples. God permitted small difficulties to challenge David as a shepherd. He was tested.

We know that as a boy David exercised his faith at least twice when he fought with a lion and a bear to protect his flock (1 Sam. 17:34-36). Do you suppose that God could have stopped that lion and bear before they ever got near enough to stalk David's sheep? I'm sure He could have, but He didn't because He was preparing David for the greater challenges He would ultimately face.

His next trial came when he stood against Goliath, whom he killed with a single stone from his sling. It wasn't so much David's skill with a sling and stone that brought him victory as it was his faith, which continued to grow stronger. Every challenge we face can serve as a stepping stone for promotion in God's kingdom. Too often those potential stepping stones wind up being stumbling blocks when we fail to trust God.

### Learning From the Mistakes of Saul

David was providentially placed in service at King Saul's house so he could learn firsthand the evil effects of unrestrained jealousy and the corrupting influence that power can have on those who are not submitted to God. No textbook or university education could compare with what David learned by watching King Saul in action.

On several occasions, David barely escaped with his life as jealous Saul tried to pin him to the wall with his spear. Only those who know danger can learn to trust God for protection in danger. Later, David spent years running for his life from Saul in the wilderness. During that time, he learned more valuable lessons about trusting God and the corrupting influence power can possess. All these things “worked together for good” to prepare David to fulfill his divine destiny.

In God’s sovereign plan, David was permitted to suffer a great deal during those years, and the majority of his sufferings were entirely unjust. David didn’t deserve such relentless, unkind treatment from his king whom he had served so well. What was God’s purpose in permitting Saul to persecute David? The answer must be that David was being trained. Once we have suffered under corrupt leaders, we are more apt to be incorruptible when God promotes us to a place of leadership.

I have many friends who are ministers, and quite a few of them have a story to tell about suffering under the power of some semi-corrupt church board or leader during the early years of their ministries. Only God knows of the many men and women who are not in the ministry today because they grew bitter over being mistreated early in their ministries. They disqualified themselves from being promoted because they quit when the going got rough. *If God has permitted a corrupt person in authority to mistreat you, it may be because He is preparing you for leadership.* Perhaps God is teaching you not to be corrupt when your time of promotion arrives.

### **Character Tests and Blunders**

David was given the opportunity to take his own revenge against Saul on two occasions when he was fleeing in the wilderness. Both times, however, he mercifully spared Saul’s life, returning good for evil. What a test of his character those incidents were! We, too, are commanded to be merciful, just as God is merciful (see Luke 6:36). How can we expect God to promote us if we are not?

David wasn’t perfect, of course, and he once doubted God as he grew weary of running from Saul. Even though David knew full well that God had promised to exalt him one day to be king, we find him once saying, “Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul” (1 Sam. 27:1). That doesn’t sound like faith, does it? David then made the mistake of going to live in the territory of the Philistines for a year and four months. The resulting troubles he faced taught him valuable lessons about compromising his faith in God. He also learned about God’s abundant mercy (see 1 Sam. 27:1 - 30:20 for all the details).

When we make mistakes, we sometimes feel as if we have ruined all of God’s plans for our lives. As a result, we carry regrets with us for years. David’s blunder, however, did not thwart God’s plan to make him king. God knew David would make that mistake before he was even born, and God could have easily prevented David’s mistake, but He didn’t. God would use David’s mistake to better prepare him to fulfill his divine destiny. David would learn and grow and ultimately be a better king for it.

Your mistakes are no different. God knew you would make them, and He could have stopped you. Even before you were born, however, He prepared a plan to redeem your mistakes and use them to ultimately help you fulfill your divine destiny. Bury your regrets and thank God that He is causing “all things to work together for good” (Rom. 8:28).

### **Pass the Test, and be Blessed**

Finally, after the death of Saul, David was exalted to be king of Israel. The promise was fulfilled. He, like Joseph, was exalted at age thirty after approximately fifteen years of preparation, fifteen years of M.I.T.s (Maturing/Testing Intended Trials) and S.I.T.s

(Self-Inflicted Trials). David himself testified with his own writing that the Lord had tested him:

Thou hast tried my heart; Thou hast visited me by night; *Thou hast tested me* and dost find nothing (Ps. 17:3, emphasis added).

David also said in another psalm that God tests all of us:

The Lord is in His holy temple, the Lord's throne is in heaven; His eyes behold, His eyelids *test* the sons of men. The Lord *tests* the righteous and the wicked (Ps. 11:4-5a, emphasis added).

How does all this apply to your life? You may not be called to be a king, but you are called to do some task that is uniquely yours to fulfill. Paul wrote in his letter to the Ephesians:

For we are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand, that we should walk in them" (Eph. 2:10).

God has prepared beforehand certain good works for all of us to fulfill. Wouldn't it be tragic to stand before the judgment seat of Christ (which we all will) and hear the Lord say, "You never fulfilled My plan for your life. Certain specific good works that I called you to walk in were left undone. Had you obeyed, it could have resulted in blessings for yourself and others."

Ideally when we stand before Jesus, if we have obeyed His calling upon our lives, we will hear Him say, "Well done, good and faithful slave; you were faithful with a few things, I will put you in charge of many things, enter into the joy of your master" (Matt. 25:21).

God is going to reward us according to our faithfulness. What does it mean to be faithful? To be faithful means to keep going even when you feel like quitting. No one ever said, "I've been faithful to enjoy ice cream for my dessert every night for a week!" No, being faithful implies a temptation to be unfaithful. It means hanging in there when you feel like abandoning ship.

### **David's D.I.T.**

David later experienced a D.I.T. (Disciplinary Intended Trial) when he committed adultery with Bathsheba and arranged for the murder of her husband. It cost him dearly as God disciplined him. Hopefully many other people have avoided D.I.T.s from reading about the consequences of David's sin. That is the reason so many D.I.T.s are recorded in the Bible. They are "written for our instruction" (1 Cor. 10:11).

How can we avoid D.I.T.s? By simply being obedient. How can we always avoid S.I.T.s? By always using godly wisdom. But there is no way to avoid facing M.I.T.s. As long as God loves us and we are on the earth, "Maturing/Testing Intended Trials" will be part of our experience.

When you face a M.I.T., what should you do? You should do whatever the Word of God says you should do. If it's sickness or disease, you should trust God for healing. If it's lack, you should trust God to supply your needs. If it's depressing circumstances, you should rejoice in the Lord. If it's hatred against you, you should do good to your enemies.

Everyone knows that negative circumstances come to everyone, and from a divine standpoint, these trials offer us an opportunity to grow. By successfully passing the tests of life and growing during the times of difficulty, we (just like Joseph and David) put ourselves in a position to be greatly blessed—and to be a greater blessing to others.

## The Pruning of the Father

Before I close this chapter, let's take a look at a very applicable passage of Scripture, recorded right from the lips of Jesus:

“I am the true vine, and My Father is the vinedresser. Every branch in Me that does not bear fruit, He takes away; and every branch that does bear fruit; He prunes it, that it may bear more fruit” (John 15:1-2).

If we are going to mature spiritually, we are going to be pruned by the Father, because as we just read, He prunes *every* branch that bears fruit.

What does it mean to be “pruned by the Father”? Obviously there is some symbolic meaning that Jesus is trying to get across to us. We want to be careful that we don't take the symbolism to an extreme by saying that our pruning always happens once every spring, and so on. At the same time, we don't want to ignore the Lord's obvious reason for choosing the analogy of the vine and vinedresser.

At bare minimum, Jesus wants us to understand that to prune a vine, branches must be cut off if the vine is to reach its greatest potential to bear fruit. The untrained observer who watches the vinedresser and who has no understanding of the pruning process might think the vinedresser is making a big mistake. To the untrained it seems as if by cutting off branches, the vine will bear much less fruit. The vinedresser, however, knows better. An unpruned vine will produce fruit, but a pruned vine will produce more fruit and fruit of higher quality.

If we're going to produce more fruit and higher quality fruit than we are at present, we must be pruned. When we are, at first it may look as if we are going to bear less fruit than in the past. If, however, we will patiently trust God, we will eventually understand what God has been doing. The process will result in greater fruit in our lives and ministries.

There are probably a thousand different ways whereby God accomplishes His pruning process in the lives of His children. If you've read all of the previous chapters, you have at least some idea as to how God might prune us. I'm not going to discuss the methods—I just want to make you aware of something that too many Christians are missing: God prunes all of us who are bearing any fruit. The Bible promises, “It is God who is at work in you, both to will and to work for His good pleasure” (Phil. 2:13).