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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 young, shepherd boy.

If David was divinely destined to be a king, is it possible that he also was destined to first be a shepherd? Or did God leave the first thirty years of David's life up to chance? Was the Lord just waiting until the shepherd boy reached the age when he would fulfill his divine destiny to be king?

When we look at his story, we soon realize that *all* of David's life was a preparation for kingship. Beginning as a shepherd was certainly appropriate training for one who would one day shepherd the flock of God.

Let's apply this to ourselves. Often, what we perceive as wasted periods are actually part of God's training process—periods that prepare us for His ultimate purpose for our lives. They, too, are divinely-destined. They are not wasted. God can use even our mistakes to better equip us for the “good works which [He] prepared beforehand” (Eph. 2:10).

So how did God prepare David for the big challenges he would face one day as king? Just as you may have guessed. He used 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 had an opportunity to exercise his faith at least twice when he fought with a lion and a bear to protect his flock (see 1 Sam. 17:34-36). Could God have stopped that lion and bear before they got near enough to stalk David's sheep? Of course He could have, but He didn't because He was preparing David for the greater challenges that He would ultimately face.

David's next trial recorded for us in Scripture was a giant one—literally! It wasn't so much his skill with a sling and stone that brought down Goliath. Rather, it was his faith. Every challenge we face can serve as a stepping stone or a stumbling block. It all depends on if we will trust God or not.

Learning From the Mistakes of a King

David was providentially placed in service at King Saul's palace 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 in the wilderness running for his life from Saul. He learned more valuable lessons about trusting God and the corrupting influence that power can possess. All these things "worked together for good" to prepare David to fulfill his divine destiny.

In God's sovereign plan, David suffered significantly during those years, and the majority of his sufferings were entirely unjust. David didn't deserve the relentless, unkind treatment he received from Saul, whom he had served so well. But did God have a purpose in permitting it? It must be that David was being prepared. Once we've suffered under corrupt leaders, we're more apt to be incorruptible when God promotes us to a place of leadership.

I have many friends who are ministers, and most of them it seems have a story to tell about suffering under the power of some semi-corrupt church board or senior pastor 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 fully knew that God had promised to exalt him one day to be king, we read of 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 important 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).

Again, let's apply this to ourselves. When we error, we sometimes feel as if we've 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 his mistake before he was even born, and God could have easily prevented it, but He didn't. God would use David's error to better prepare him to fulfill his divine destiny. David would learn and grow and ultimately be a better king for it.

Our mistakes are no different. God knew we would make them, and He could have prevented them. 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. God’s promise was fulfilled. He, like Joseph, was exalted at age 30 after approximately 15 years of preparation, 15 years of M.I.T.s (Maturing/Testing Intended Trials) and S.I.T.s (Self-Inflicted Trials), as we defined those different kinds of trials in an earlier chapter. David testified 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 wrote 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 this apply to your life? You may not be called to be a king, but you are called to do something 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).

Wouldn’t it be tragic to stand before the judgment seat of Christ and hear Him 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 will indeed reward us according to our faithfulness. What does it mean to be faithful? It 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 sinned so grievously, committing adultery with Bathsheba and arranging for the murder of her husband. It cost him dearly as God brought him to repentance and disciplined him. Hopefully many other people have avoided D.I.T.s from reading about the consequences of David’s sin. That is, no doubt, the reason so many D.I.T.s are recorded in Scripture. 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 (Self-Inflicted Trials)? By always using godly wisdom. But is there any way we can avoid facing M.I.T.s? No, as long as God loves us and we are on the earth, Maturing/Testing Intended Trials will be part of our experience.

The Pruning of the Father

Before I close this chapter, let's take a look at a very applicable passage of Scripture, 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 convey. We want to be careful that we don't take the symbolism too far 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. It may seem that, 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.

And for that very reason, we must be pruned. When we are, it may look at first 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 is doing. The process will result in greater fruit in our lives.

There are probably a thousand different ways through which God accomplishes His pruning process in the lives of His children. If you've read all of the previous chapters in this book, you have at least some idea as to how He might do it. He is dedicated to our spiritual growth, and He 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), and "He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6). Pruning is part of that process.