

Leadership Failure and Success
2 Samuel 19.1-15
July 29

I find a survey of the life of David fascinating. As a young man, David survived the intrigue of Saul's court. Although proclaimed king, he survived as an independent warrior – a man without a county – fighting both Saul and the Philistines. After the passing of many years, David united Judah and Israel. The Bible narrates the sad saga of sexual sins, intrigue, and open rebellion within David's family. 2 Samuel recounts the paralysis of leadership that arose due to David's grief after the death of Absalom.

The narrative of David's response to Absalom's death provides believers insight into the grief process as well as principles of leadership during a crisis. What lessons may twenty-first century Christians learn from the narrative of David's grief about leadership? As well, what may we learn about the grief process?

First, leaders should remember to celebrate victories with the people of God (2 Sam. 19.1-4).

From my reading of the text, 2 Samuel 19 opens with a description of David's grief. People respond differently to the death of a family member. Some mourners prefer solitude while other mourners need to be surrounded by family and friends. Apparently, David preferred to mourn alone.

David's prolonged grief affected his leadership as king. His troops had risked their lives for their king. David owed his people a celebration of a victory over the opponent. Leaders in the church need to allow God's people to celebrate achievements within the family life of the church. Leaders need to thank the troops whose faithfulness led to victory.

Second, leaders should listen to unwelcome counsel (2 Sam. 19.5-8). Joab was David's nephew through the king's sister Zeruah (2 Chron. 2.16) and the military commander for most of David's reign. Joab admonished David to "Get up," "Go out," and "encourage" or "speak kindly" to the troops. At times David and Joab experienced times of tension. David needed to hear and heed the challenge from Joab. David, no doubt, did not want to hear Joab's words. David needed to listen to the commander's words to prevent the king's army from abandoning the king. Do you have people in your life that are willing to speak words of challenge to you?

Third, leaders need to practice and model reconciliation (2 Sam. 19.9-15). After serving as king of Judah, David entered into a covenant agreement with the tribes of Israel (2 Sam. 5.1-3). Earlier the tribes of Israel entered into a covenant agreement with David. Biblical covenants included stipulations for both the commitment to the covenant as well as specified punishments for disobedience to the covenant. The Bible does not detail the nature of the covenant relationship between David and the tribes of Israel. The Hebrew term translated "arguing" has a legal connotation. Did the tribes of Israel nullify the covenant with David? Could the parties reestablish the covenant? David sought the path of reconciliation.

David removed Joab from the position of the king's military commander. David had charged Joab with the task of protecting Absalom (2 Sam. 18.5,12). Instead, Joab murdered Absalom (2 Sam. 18.14). In place of Joab, David appointed Amasa, a relative more distant than Joab, to be his new military commander. David's actions won the favor of the men of Judah (v. 14). The animosity between Joab and Amasa led to Amasa's death at the hands of Joab (2 Sam. 20.8-13).