

A MAN AFTER GOD'S HEART?

1 Samuel 13:13-14

In August of 2018, Bill Hybels, the well-known lead minister of the Chicago-area megachurch Willow Creek, stepped down as part of a response to numerous allegations of sexual harassment. The announcement drew comparisons to the fall of Jimmy Swaggart, the famous televangelist who, between the late 1980's and early 1990's, lost his status and his ministry over scandals involving prostitutes. Those well-publicized failings represent a small number of similar events that have occurred in religious communities around the world and throughout history.

While fears of fallout including the loss of the dignity and trustworthiness of religious institutions have led people to try and hide or downplay those scandals, we find God taking a different approach with people in the Bible. The books of the kings, for example, hold out David as the model of a godly king against whose reign it measures other kings (cf. *1 Kings 14:8; 15:3, 11; 2 Kings 14:3*). David became a model not only because he was the nation's first godly king, but also because God called him a man after His own heart (*1 Samuel 13:13-14*). But the Bible's record of David's reign showcases his failures and shows the serious and far-reaching consequences they created. Let's therefore consider some of the things God records about David's reign to see what it reveals to us about failure and faithfulness.

David did what was right...except

- Saul's failures as Israel's first king led God to strip the kingship from him and to give it to "a man after [His] own heart"¹ (*1 Samuel 13:13-14; 15:17-29*).
- God identified David as that "man after [His] own heart" (*1 Samuel 16:1-3, 7*) and, as a result, both empowered him and gave him success in his activities (cf. *1 Samuel 16:13; 17:45-46; 18:12, 14, 28*).
- In addition to showing the ways in which God blessed David, the Bible reveals David's qualities that contributed to God selecting him. For example:
 - David possessed a good heart (*1 Samuel 26:6-11; 2 Samuel 6:12-21; 7:1-17; 24:18-2; cf. 1 Samuel 23:2, 4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23; 1 Kings 13:3*).
 - David devoted himself to God with a rare single-mindedness (*Psalms 27; cf. 2 Samuel 6:12-23; 7:1-3; 24:24*).
 - David's trust in, and devotion to, God led him to continually seek God's guidance (*1 Samuel 23:1-4; 30:8; 2 Samuel 2:1; 5:19, 23; 12:16; 21:1*).
 - David's trusting devotion to God even led him to respect king Saul (*1 Samuel 24:5-6; 26:8-11*).

¹ All quotes from the Bible come from *The Holy Bible, English Standard Version* (ESV Permanent Text Edition, Crossway, 2016) unless otherwise noted.

- Despite his devotion to God, the Bible's account of David's life also reveals a number of problems.
 - He 'multiplied wives' (*Deuteronomy 17:14-17; 2 Samuel 5:13; 1 Chronicles 3:1-9; 2 Samuel 20:3*).
 - David had an affair with Bathsheba, the wife of one of his elite soldiers, and ordered a cover-up that involved murdering Bathsheba's husband Uriah and then marrying Bathsheba (*2 Samuel 11*).
 - David repeatedly failed to address the wrongs committed by his family members.
 - He failed to address the wrongs committed by his general and cousin Joab (*2 Samuel 3:26-38; 19:11-13; 20:4-13*). Instead, he asked his Solomon to kill Joab after he became king (*1 Kings 2:1-9*).
 - David did nothing when his son Amnon raped his half-sister Tamar (*2 Samuel 13:1-23*).
 - He did nothing when his son Absalom murdered his half-brother Amnon (*2 Samuel 13:23-39*).
 - David did not allow Absalom to see him after he permitted Absalom's return from his self-imposed exile (*2 Samuel 14:21-28*).
 - He did not nothing while Absalom publicly worked to steal the kingdom from him (*2 Samuel 15:1-12*).
 - David ordered a prohibited census that resulted in the death of 70,000 of his countrymen (*2 Samuel 24:1-15*).
- Even though the Bible clearly records a number of David's failings in tragic detail, God only held out David's sin with Bathsheba as a break in His relationship with David (*1 Kings 15:5*).
 - An uncharacteristic hard-heartedness defined David's involvement with Bathsheba that blemished his otherwise good identity (*2 Samuel 11; cf. Numbers 15:30*).
 - While the Bible does not always record David's motives or attitudes in all of his other recorded sins, the comment in *1 Kings 15:5* pairs with passages that reveal David's own recognition of his sins to indicate that a tender and confessional heart characterized the majority of his life (*cf. 2 Samuel 24; Psalms 25:6-7, 11; 32:3-5; 38:1-4*).

Applications

- Even the best of us struggle. Our failures and the failures of our leaders remind us of our need for Jesus.
- We have a tendency to either exalt or debase leaders rather than deal with them as flawed humans.
- Character matters most. For David, character followed the outline of God's revealed identity. For us, character follows the pattern of Jesus' life.
- God provides grace and so should we.
- Grace, however, should be paired with thoughtful and compassionate accountability.
- David's psalms reveal the struggles that characterized him and illustrate for us the place of worship in the life of a person struggling; worship provides an anchor that can help secure us in the midst of troubles.