

Born to Win

Leadership Found

by Ronald L. Dart

In all of the Bible, who is the greatest example of leadership (apart from Jesus, of course)? Without a doubt, it's David. Now, when you speak of David in a biblical context, the name needs no modifier. You don't have to call him "King" David for a Bible-reader to know exactly who you're talking about. His name occurs more than *1,000 times* in the Old Testament alone. And there's a curious fact connected with that: No one else [in the Bible] was ever named David—not back in those days. This is, I think, very unusual given the human proclivity for naming kids after famous people. But yet, with David it didn't happen. It's almost as though God intended for David to be, and always be, one of a kind.

Names in Hebrew means something, and until recently I had never looked at the *meaning* of David's name. Nor had I ever thought much about the characteristics of this man that made him such a great leader and such a dominant figure. He is easily the most influential and dominant figure in the Old Testament. He was the youngest of eight sons. His brother thought he was arrogant. The key story in David's work is familiar, but I'd like to extract from it the elements of leadership in David that emerge from it.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²⁰ Early in the morning David left the flock in the care of a shepherd, loaded up and set out, as Jesse had directed. [...]

His father Jesse had told him to take some food up to his boys on the front lines.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²⁰ [...] He reached the camp as the army was going out to its battle positions, shouting the war cry.

You know, shouting in battle like that is half the thing.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²¹ Israel and the Philistines were drawing up their lines facing each other.

²² David left his things with the keeper of supplies, ran to the battle lines and asked his brothers how they were.

²³ As he was talking with them, Goliath, [*that great giant of a man*] the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it.

Now, this is typical of some ancient warring traditions. "Let two champions fight this thing out and decide the outcome. No point killing a lot of men. We'll just get two guys out there, let them fight, and

then that's that." It's a rather bloody form of binding arbitration.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²⁴ Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear.

They were afraid of him. He was *huge*.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²⁵ Now the Israelites had been saying, "Do you see how this man keeps coming out? He comes out to defy Israel. [*And the muttering was going around.*] The king will give great wealth to the man who kills him. He will also give him his daughter in marriage and will exempt his family from taxes in Israel."

²⁶ David [*a kid*] asked the men standing near him, "What will be done for the man who kills this Philistine and removes this disgrace from Israel? Who is this uncircumcised Philistine that he should defy the armies of the living God?"

It's almost as though he's saying, "What do you mean, 'This will be done.' Why should anything have to be done?" He seems shocked that any special reward should accrue to the man who would fight for Israel. Now, David was a very *uncomplicated* man. He was able to see the issue clearly. He was able to go straight to the heart of the matter *and act on it*. In my experience, complicated men do not make the best leaders. And I don't mean to suggest that David was simple-minded; rather that he was *single-minded*. He *immediately* saw what was that issue and that it was simple: Someone has to fight this man and win. Analyzing him was not going to make it a bit easier—and the quicker, the better. I recall something James said in his letter. He said:

James 1

AKJV

⁸ A double minded man is unstable in all his ways.

And the double-minded man is likely to consider the single-minded man as reckless, stubborn, arrogant, and rash. A double-minded man doesn't want to rush into anything. He wants to analyze the problem, think it through, get advice and perhaps some help in solving the problem. The single-minded man, once he sees the problem, attacks it. So I derive from David a principle of leadership: The best leader is single-minded.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²⁸ When Eliab, David's oldest brother, heard him speaking with the men, he burned with anger at him and asked, "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the wilderness? I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle."

Eliab saw David as arrogant and conceited. People who know their own mind, and who speak it plainly, are *often* seen that way.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

²⁹ "Now what have I done?" said David. "Can't I even speak?"

Have you ever heard anything that sounded more like two brothers.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

³⁰ He then turned away to someone else and brought up the same matter, and the men answered him as before.

³¹ What David said was overheard and reported to Saul, and Saul sent for him.

³² David said to Saul, “Let no one lose heart on account of this Philistine; your servant will go and fight him.”

It’s interesting that the expression of the time wasn’t “I will go”; you said, “I’m your servant. Your servant will go and fight him.” Cocky, isn’t he? At least his brother thought so. Saul looked at him and said:

1 Samuel 17

NIV

³³ [...] “You are not able to go out against this Philistine and fight him; you are only a young man, and he has been a warrior from his youth.”

³⁴ But David said to Saul, “Your servant has been keeping his father’s sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock,

³⁵ I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it.

³⁶ Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear;” [...]

Think that that. Hand-to-hand, David had killed a lion and he’d killed a bear. Anyway, he just said:

1 Samuel 17

NIV

³⁶ [...] this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God.

He may be cocky, but this boy has got *guts*. He was willing to go out and fight. For David, the equation was simple: When you are faced with danger, you face up to the responsibility and you *fight*. And you do it sooner rather than later. To quote Patton (who was quoting someone else), “*L’audace, l’audace, toujours l’audace!*”—*always* be audacious. The definition of audacity is: “intrepidly daring; adventurous: ‘an audacious mountain climber’; recklessly bold”. So there is some justification in accusing the bold leader of *appearing* reckless—he’s audacious. Sort of like the Normandy invasion—it was an audacious scheme. It was something that was dangerous, it was risky, and yet it had to be done. And Eisenhower said the sooner we get this done, the better.

So, continuing to learn from David, my second characteristic in the list of these leadership principles is: Courage. But it’s more than courage; it’s audacity, which implies *active* courage. There is such a thing as *passive* courage, but passive courage doesn’t *lead*. Then there was something else driving David here. He said:

1 Samuel 17

NIV

³⁷ “The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” [...]

You know, faith is, in the end, a simple proposition. Either you trust God or you don't. And Faith involves trust *regardless of the outcome*. Job said:

Job 13

AKJV

¹⁵ Though he slay me, yet will I trust in him[...]

The Hebrew children in the fiery furnace said, "Even if God does not deliver us":

Daniel 3

AKJV

¹⁸ [...] be it known to you, O king, that we will not serve your gods, nor worship the golden image which you have set up.

So we've managed to pull three important characteristics of leadership from what David has done so far: He is single-minded. He is audacious. He is a man of faith. But there's more.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

³⁷ [...] Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you."

³⁸ Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armor on him and a bronze helmet on his head.

³⁹ David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off.

Now, what do you take away from this? A leader is *realistic*. He is *practical*. He knows his limitations. He engages in no pretense. A man of *ego* would have worn the king's armor...and died.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴⁰ Then he took his staff in his hand, chose five smooth stones [*Not one. Five.*] from the stream, put them in the pouch of his shepherd's bag and, with his sling in his hand, approached the Philistine.

Five stones. Why five? A leader is prepared; he came to *fight*.

When David walked out of the Israelite lines, and Goliath saw who was coming out to fight him and moved forward:

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴² He looked David over and saw that he was little more than a boy, glowing with health and handsome, and he despised him.

David came out there and he was unscarred. (By the way, if you're following along in the Bible, and here you're muttering that I haven't told you where we are, this whole story is in 1 Samuel, chapter 17.) So Goliath looks David over and he said:

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴³ [...] “Am I a dog, that you come at me with sticks?” And the Philistine cursed David by his gods.

⁴⁴ “Come here,” he said, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds and the wild animals!”

⁴⁵ David said to the Philistine, “You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom [*not the armies, the God*] you have defied.”

A leader carries *authority*. What I mean by that? Well, David wasn’t out there because he was a good shot. He was out there because of, and he was coming in the name of, God. *That* was his authority. And this authority can cause some people to call him arrogant—because he knows what he’s doing, knows why he’s doing it, he knows whose authority he’s doing it in. David said:

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴⁶ This day the LORD will deliver you into my hands, and I’ll strike you down and cut off your head. This very day I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds and the wild animals, and the whole world will know that there is a God in Israel.

Wow, what a speech; what a *bold* speech!

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴⁷ “All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the LORD saves;” [...]

Now, *this* is *crucial* to any Christian leader. You’ve got to prepare. You’ve got to be ready to fight. You know you’ve got to have your stuff with you. But you’ve also got to know it’s not your weapons that save, it’s God.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴⁷ [...] “for the battle is the LORD’s, and he will give all of you into our hands.”

A leader assumes victory.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴⁸ As the Philistine moved closer to attack him, David ran quickly toward the battle line to meet him.

No hesitation; he acted *immediately*.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁴⁹ Reaching into his bag and taking out a stone, he slung it and struck the Philistine on the forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell facedown on the ground.

David threw that *hard*.

1 Samuel 17

NIV

⁵⁰ So David triumphed over the Philistine with a sling and a stone [*just one*]; without a sword in his hand he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

⁵¹ David ran and stood over him. He took hold of the Philistine's sword and drew it from the sheath. After he killed him, he cut off his head with the sword.

⁵² When the Philistines saw that their hero was dead, they turned and ran.

David was not afraid to draw blood. He was not afraid to kill. He was not even afraid to take off his enemies head. There *are* people in this world who need killing, and it's one of the characteristics of a leader—whose job is to defend people and to defend the weak—a characteristic is: He is not afraid to kill. How shall we phrase this in terms of leadership? He is able to do what he must, even when he would rather not. He is not squeamish. He knows when it is time to kill. It was King Solomon who said it—Ecclesiastes 3:

Ecclesiastes 3

AKJV

¹ To every thing there is a season, and a time to every purpose under the heaven:

² A time to be born, and a time to die; a time to plant, and a time to pluck up that which is planted;

³ A time to kill, and a time to heal; a time to break down, and a time to build up[.]

So we've learned a lot about leadership in this *one day* of David's life. Think about this list, if *you* were a follower of the man: He's single-minded, audacious, a man of faith. He's realistic, prepared. He was authoritative. He assumed victory. He acted quickly and decisively—a leader comes to fight, not talk. And he knows when it is time to kill. This is a man that can inspire confidence, *if you are not afraid of him*. In a way, it describes the sort of person we might describe as “charismatic”.

Now, there's one thing that may be troubling to some Christian folks when they hear this kind of discussion of David, and of leadership in general, and the realization that there is a time to kill. You may say, “Well, *Jesus* didn't do that.” No, he didn't. However, when Jesus came upon this earth, he did not come as king. He came as a carpenter. He came as a prophet. He came as a preacher of righteousness and he came to heal. When Jesus was here in his earthly ministry he came to *heal*. When he comes again he will be riding a horse, not a donkey. A horse is a weapon of war. He will have a *sword* with him when he comes again, and he is going to come to *kill*. When he came before, it was a time to heal. When he comes again, it will be a time to kill. But there's more than this to be learned from David. 1 Samuel 18, verse 14:

1 Samuel 18

AKJV

¹⁴ And David behaved himself wisely in all his ways; and the LORD was with him.

¹⁵ Why when Saul saw that he behaved himself very wisely, he was afraid of him.

Three things arise from this: A leader manages his behavior, his conduct. A leader of values wisdom. And, finally, he can be intimidating to a fearful person. I'm sorry, that's just the way leaders tend to be. They can intimidate people who are already afraid. In one way, Jesus, also, was intimidating to the Pharisees who feared him greatly.

1 Samuel 18

AKJV

²⁵ And Saul said [*He was afraid of him, remember.*], Thus shall you say to David, The king

desires not any dowry, but an hundred foreskins of the Philistines, to be avenged of the king's enemies. But Saul thought to make David fall by the hand of the Philistines.

Saul actually thought, "I'll send him down there to do this and the Philistines will kill him for me."

1 Samuel 18

AKJV

²⁶ And when his servants told David these words, it pleased David well to be the king's son in law: and the days were not expired. ²⁷ Why David arose and went, he and his men, and slew of the Philistines two hundred men; and David brought their foreskins, and they gave them in full tale to the king, that he might be the king's son in law. And Saul gave him Michal his daughter to wife.

Think about that. This guy comes in, plops down two bags—100 each—soggy bags of Philistine foreskins (and I don't even want to *think about* what he had to do to get them). So we can take away one more characteristic: A leader is a *fighter*. Now, I have noticed that a lot of politicians like to *talk* about being fighters. What I'm saying should not be construed as an endorsement of anyone or in an un-endorsement of anyone, but think about it. "I will fight for you" is a favorite line of some politicians. What they mean is they will argue on your behalf, they will trade votes on bills on your behalf, they will talk a man to death for you. The important question is whether they are prepared to *shed blood* in defense of the country, or would they rather talk endlessly to diplomats while killers roam at large? I know these politicians will talk a good fight for me, but which of them is prepared to bring 200 foreskins of the Philistines for me. Which, by the way, was *double* what Saul required.

Oh, yes. I mentioned earlier that I had finally remembered to look up the meaning of David's name. David's name in Hebrew [דָּוִד, Strong's H1732] means "loving". To give you an example of where this comes from, as far as an example of leadership...this is in 1 Samuel 18. Saul had a son named Jonathan. Jonathan was, himself, a *fine* man; a good example of leadership; a man of considerable character.

1 Samuel 18

AKJV

¹ And it came to pass, when he had made an end of speaking to Saul, that the soul of Jonathan was knit with the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.

You know, if you've never really been in combat with men—people like us who never had to fight like these men had to fight. We may not understand the brotherhood that develops between men who fight together. They *do* become knit together in a way that failing to face adversity together just does not accomplish. Men learn this a little bit when they are in survivor situations in the world, and they have to depend on one another to make it. But men in combat learn it in a special way.

1 Samuel 18

AKJV

² And Saul took him that day, and would let him go no more home to his father's house.

³ Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.

The capacity that men have to love one another is something, I think, some people never really experience and maybe don't understand. That has nothing to do with sex; it has *everything* to do with character, commonality, shared danger, shared responsibility, accomplishment together—that's where all this stuff comes from. Later on, there's a different example that's down in 2 Samuel 23, which is kind of giving us a summary of the mighty men of David. What I think is interesting about this is: you can sometimes understand a man by the kind of people who he attracts and who want to be with him

and who want to fight alongside of him. I heard a lot about this in the late presidential campaign of “guilt by association” (which is, I suppose, a bad thing) but all my lifetime I have heard that a man is known by the company he keeps. And his company does say something for him. In 2 Samuel 23, verse 14:

2 Samuel 23

AKJV

¹⁴ And David was then in an hold, and the garrison of the Philistines was then in Bethlehem.

David was out here on a stronghold, on the side of a hill; they could see Bethlehem from where they were. And you know how it is around the campfire. David, one night, said, “Oh, man! I wish somebody would give me a drink of water from that well of Bethlehem by the gate. Oh, I’d love to have that sweet water. I’d like to have it, and when we get that we’ve got the city.” Well, remember that this is campfire conversation—nothing but that—but three of what are called his “mighty men”... (This is sort of like brigade commanders, I would think, to us. They are fighting man. They are leaders. They’re the kind of guys that men will follow almost anywhere.) These guys looked at each other, they walked out of the camp, they went down and:

2 Samuel 23

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] broke through the host of the Philistines, and drew water out of the well of Bethlehem, that was by the gate, and took it, and brought it to David: [...]

These are men with the bark on, folks. And they cared enough for David to go get that water for him. David wouldn’t drink it, of course, he:

2 Samuel 23

AKJV

¹⁶ [...] poured it out to the LORD.

¹⁷ And he said, Be it far from me, O LORD, that I should do this: is not this the blood of the men that went in jeopardy of their lives? therefore he would not drink it. [...]

These are the kinds of things that these men did. David cared *deeply* about his men. In simple terms, he *loved* them—and his name was “loving”. When we put this all together, we have an incomplete list of the characteristics of leadership we can learn from David. It may be incomplete but, boy, we have a lot.

A leader is *single-minded*. He isn’t sitting around waffling. He doesn’t try to analyze things to death. He focuses on his task. He is single-minded. He has a purpose and he pursues it.

He is *audacious*. He is courageous with action—actively courageous.

He is a man of *faith*—a man who trusts God, knows that God is there, and knows (whether win, lose, or draw) that he’s doing it for God.

A leader is *realistic*. He’s not some ideal, pie-in-the-sky guy that tells what a wonderful world we can make out of this thing someday. He knows his limitations. He knows what can be done. He knows what *cannot* be done. You know, that’s something that I often think of in politicians who stand up making promises, and they don’t bother to remind us that they *can’t do it without Congress*. They’re not realistic.

A leader is *prepared*. He takes five stones, not just one. He goes into battle, prepared to win, having done his work. We have been *so blessed*, frankly, with military leaders in this country who are man who

understand these things.

Leaders are *authoritative*—that is, they go into battle with *full authority* and knowing that, whatever the task is, they have the authority of the American people behind them. And to whatever extent we undermine that, we do it at our peril.

A leader *assumes victory*.

A leader acts *decisively and quickly*. He doesn't waste time. He does it now.

He comes to *fight*, not to talk. And he knows when it is *time to kill*.

A leader *manages his behavior*, his conduct. He doesn't take advantage of the people who are under him. (Be careful about that.)

A leader values *wisdom*.

A leader is a *fighter*. A leader is a killer *if he has to be*.

And perhaps more important than any of this, a leader is a *loving* man who cares *deeply* about the people he's been chosen to lead.

You know, after all, David was a man after God's own heart, and the things we read about here are also the characteristics of *our* leader—Jesus Christ—and his father. Think about that.

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