



Vicissitudes and vice in the world of work:

what is a Christian's calling in the workplace?

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Les Vicissitudes

Jean Dubuffet, Tate Gallery

<https://www.tate.org.uk/art/artworks/dubuffet-vicissitudes-t03679>

- This picture in the Tate gallery was made by glueing together paintings that had accumulated on the floor of the studio. Chance arrangements evoking different places, events and scenes are a reminder of the ups and downs of our lives. In retrospect, these can be assembled into something that has more coherence than we had imagined.
- God is constantly at work providentially to knit together the apparent vicissitudes of life into something that matures us into a man or woman in the image of God.

Your life

- If you could summarise even the last decade or two of your life in images, logos or phrases, what would it look like?
- Mine would look something like the following.

The life of David, shepherd boy - to King of Israel

- One of the most vivid biographies in all literature.
- Read 1Sam 15 - 2Sam; preferably in one or two sittings.
- Note the glorious successes and unvarnished failures recorded in unsparing detail.

Introduction

Common challenges at work

Lessons from the life of King David

- 1. Preparing to serve***
- 2. Serving God, not pleasing people**
- 3. Maturing in service**

Introduction

Common challenges at work

1. Preparing to serve

- a) Success
- b) Adversity
- c) Waiting

1. Preparing

a) Coping with success

- **Privilege:** David anointed publicly before his brothers
- **Early plumb job:** Master of King's Music
- **Media profile:** Triumph over Goliath
- **'Sleb':** Prince Jonathan. Army. Women: all adored him.
- Pride in your achievements; or humility in serving others?

1. Preparing

b) Coping with adversity

- Spears and assassins incited by jealous King Saul
- Fickle friends: threatened at Nob, Gath, Mizpah
- Particularly vicious ingratitude at Keilah, 1Sam 23
- Discipline not joyous but grievous, Heb 12:11
- Do not be surprised at fiery ordeals that come on you to test you, as if something strange 1Pet 4:12
- *When sorrows come, they come not single spies, but in battalions*, Claudius in Shakespeare's Hamlet

b) Coping with adversity: the example of Job

- **Economic:** oxen, donkeys, camels stolen
- **Environmental:** fire/mighty wind struck his house
- **Social:** 10 children destroyed by building collapse
- **Personal:** health breakdown, boils, halitosis
- **Spiritual:** Satan, *Everything he has is in your power*

His power is made perfect in weakness, 2Cor 12:19

1. Preparing

c) Coping with waiting

- David resisted two opportunities to kill King Saul
 - * Saul relieving his bowels in a cave, 1Sam 24
 - * Saul asleep in the camp at Hakilah, 1Sam 26
- Rather than assassinating the Lord's anointed king, David preferred exile for 16m in Philistine, 1Sam 27

Introduction

Common challenges at work

1. Preparing to serve

2. Serving God, not pleasing people

a) Acknowledging God's sovereignty

b) Honouring God's Word

c) Reflecting God's character

3. Maturing in service

2. Serving

a) Acknowledging

God's sovereignty

David honoured Saul's

- **Memory:** executed Saul's 'killer'
- **Body:** praised those who buried him, 7-day fast
- **CinC:** attended assassinated Gen Abner's funeral
- **Son:** executed King Ishbosheth's murderers
- **Grandson:** lame Mephibosheth: fulfilled vow

a) Acknowledging God's sovereignty

Even when God refused him the honour of building the Temple because of his bloody track record, David's response was:

*'Who am I, Sovereign LORD..?
Lord Almighty.. You have revealed,
I will build a house for **you**'.
Sovereign Lord: you are God!'*

2. Serving

b) Honouring God's Word

- Followed God's military strategies, 2Sam 5:19
- Brought the Ark to the centre of national life
- *'David enquired of the Lord'* x9
- Psalms - for every occasion

2. Serving

b) *Dishonouring God's Word*

- Brought back the Ark '*celebrating with all their might*', 2Sam 6
- Uzzah killed for his presumptuous disregard of all the requirements surrounding respect for the Ark of Covenant:
 - * The people were to seek him according to **his rules**, 1Chr 15
 - * They must **not touch** holy objects, Num 4:15,20
 - * Holy things must be carried on **shoulders**, not couriered by cattle, Num 7:9
 - * Transport must be by **rings and inserted poles** to prevent instability, Ex 25:14
 - * **Kohathites** alone were permitted to carry the Ark, Num 4:15

Today? The best lack all conviction?

- Disrespect of God's Word to conform it to our culture
- Gospel of The Beatles vs God's Gospel
- Grace is extended through the Cross to those who stand condemned already. But we prefer darkness despite God's revealed anger and the judgement of hell for intransigent rebellion, Jn 3: 1-21

Honouring God's Word

- Jesus defined himself as a teacher:
 - * You call me *Teacher* - rightly, for that is what I am, Jn 13:13
- We are to teach, preach and capture every thought to obey Christ, 2Cor 10:5
 - * Preach the Word in season and out, 2Tim 4:2
 - * Paul preached for hours: even when Eutychus died, Ac 20:9!

2. Serving

c) Reflecting **God's** character

- *David reigned doing what was just and right for all his people, 2Sam 8:15.*
- Even when his responsibility as Chief Justice required deeply unpleasant sanctions for Saul's attempted genocide of the Gibeonites, 2Sam 21.
 - ✦ Only when 7 sons of Saul were executed as demanded by Gibeon to avenge Saul's slaughter was David able to avert a fourth year of devastating famine for his people.

Moralistic therapeutic deism: young peoples' attitudes to faith

- **Moralistic (Me)**

- ☑ Kind, good, nice, fair, inclusive, non-judgemental
- ⊗ Law, obey, punish, suffering, sin, repent, holy, true

- **Therapeutic (You)**

- ☑ Happy, fulfilled, special, self-esteem, optimistic
- ⊗ Discipline, conviction, suffer, tithe, fear God, serve

- **Deism (He)**

- ☑ Creator, provider, problem solver, forgiver
- ⊗ Lord of history, just, severe, Judge of all, Holy x3

Our attitude to Christmas?

Joy to the world, good luck to all

- * Zechariah struck dumb
- * King Herod's vicious rule
- * Mary single, pregnant teen
- * 'Wise' migrants in police state
- * Slaughter of innocents U-2
- * Asylum flight to Egypt

Introduction

Common challenges at work

1. Preparing to serve
2. Serving God, not pleasing people
3. *Maturing in service*
 - a) Controlling personal passion
 - b) Managing family responsibilities
 - c) Pursuing the public interest

3. Maturing

a) Controlling passion

David's sex tangles

- *Took* Michal, Saul's daughter, for politics
- *Took* Abigail, Nabal's wife just after his death
- *Took* Ahinoam, Saul's wife
- *Took* Bathsheba, wife of one of his closest friends, Uriah: murdered Uriah
- Took 4 additional wives = 8 + 10 concubines

3. Maturing

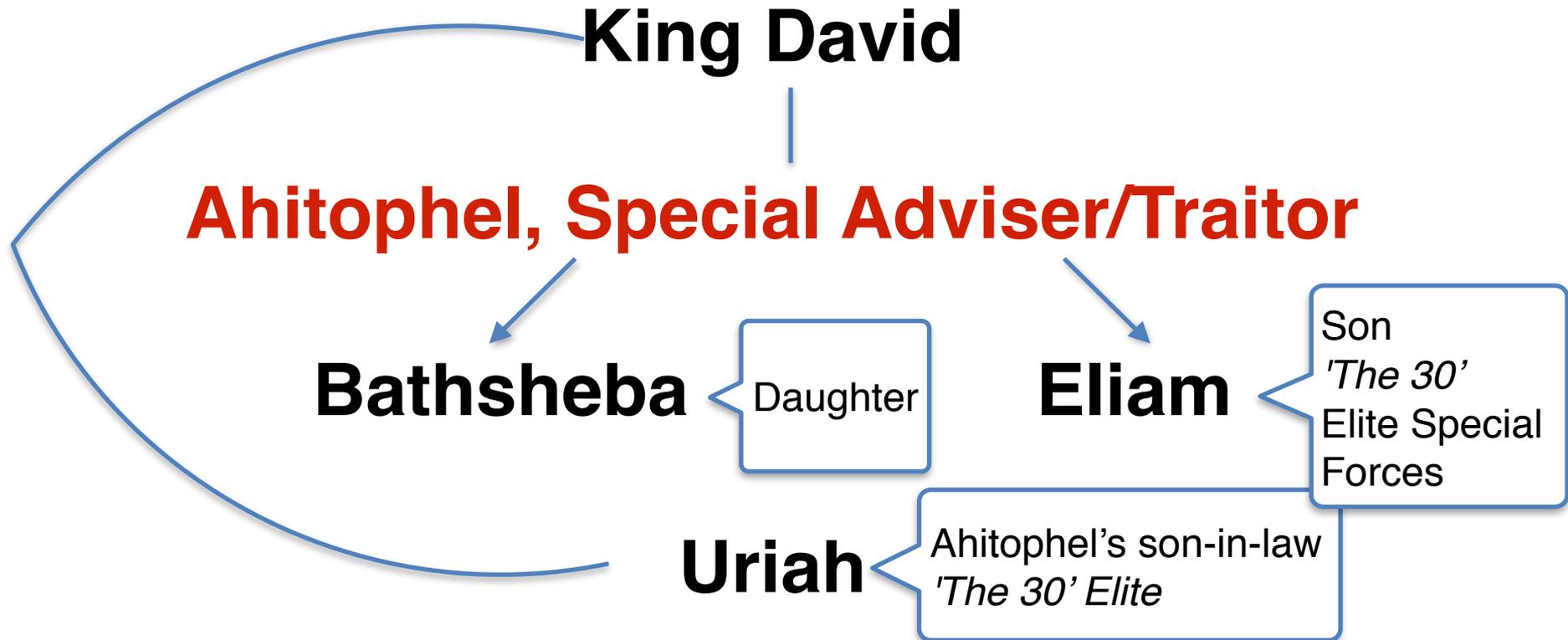
a) Controlling passion: relationship havoc

Fire that consumes to destruction

- Wife, Bathsheba's baby by David dies
- Son, Amnon rapes half-sister Tamar
- Son, Absalom murders brother Amnon
- Absalom takes David's concubines
- Absalom killed by David's CinC
- Son, Solomon kills brother Adonijah

3. Maturing

a) Controlling passion: unintended consequences



3. Maturing

b) Managing family

- Great King but indulgent parent: he failed to discipline his children. Death bed summary: *David never rebuked Adonijah by asking “Why do you behave as you do?”*, 1Ki 1:6
- Sons in murder, rape, 3 died violently
- Was David compromised in public office by guilt and fear of hypocrisy over his private conduct? Implications today?

3. Maturing

c) Pursuing the *public* interest

David pursued grim justice on his deathbed, 1Ki 2

- Gen Joab murdered Gen Abner/Gen Amasa
 - * *Bring Joab's grey head down*
- *Shimei cursed and pelted David fleeing Absalom*
 - * *Bring Shimei's grey head down to the grave in blood*

Dont tell the wicked they are innocent: people will curse you, nations will hate you. Things go well you can punish the wicked,
Prov 24:24

- How much easier it is to support right than to confront wrong.

3. Maturing

c) Pursuing the *political* interest?

Calamitous census

- 3 yrs famine? 3m fleeing? 3 days plague?
- David, 'Let us fall into the hands of the Lord, 2Sam 24/1Chron 21
- The Lord sent plague: 70,000 died.

3. Maturing

c) The *public* interest: amazing grace

We are not told why God imposed such severe judgement over the census: nationalistic pride? Reliance on military might rather than on the living God?

Yet through the Prophet Gad, the Lord expressed grace. David is told to build an altar on Araunah's threshing floor to halt the plague. He was Jebusite/Canaanite; yet this site became the site of the Jerusalem Temple - the centre of generations of worship by which all the families of the earth shall be blessed, 2Sam 24.

Conclusion

Preparing to serve

- Success, adversity, waiting

Serving God, not pleasing people

- Acknowledging God's sovereignty
- Honouring God's Word
- Reflecting God's character

Maturing in character

- Controlling personal passion
- Managing family responsibilities
- Pursuing the public interest

Conclusion

*Whatever you do,
work at it wholeheartedly
as working for the Lord, not for people,
since you know
you will receive an inheritance
from the Lord as a reward.
It is the Lord Christ you are serving.*