

Building a Strong Heart 1 Samuel 16:7

Good morning! We're in the last part of our series we're calling "Built to Stand". In this series, we said that to be able to withstand the pressures in life, we need to build a strong spirit, a strong body, and a strong mind. Today, we're going to look at one more aspect of our selves that lies at the very heart of our beings, no pun intended, because in today's message I'm going to talk about "Building a Strong Heart".

Now, the heart I'm talking about here is not the physical heart. I'm talking about a heart which we normally say it's here but it's not really here. We can't really locate it, but this part of our body is what we point to in order to represent it like when we sing the national anthem, we put our hands on our chest like this or when a guy says "I love you" to a woman he would even put both hands on his chest. So, this heart is said to be the seat of our intellect, our emotions, our desires, and it is that which drives the will of man towards action.

Now, the physical heart is an organ that pumps blood. And you really need a strong physical heart to keep on living and be of used to God. I talked about that in the second part of the series. I said that if you want to be useful to God, you need to take care of your body.

Today, I'd like to continue the thought of being useful to God by taking care of our spiritual heart. It is necessary because we live in a world where our faith is constantly being attacked by godless people. We live in a time where our Christian values are being assaulted by the liberal philosophies of this world.

We know that throughout history, from Bible times till now, there were people who stood for the truth and who followed God wholeheartedly. But there is one person who the Bible says is a man after God's own heart.

I'm talking about David, the shepherd boy who became king. Why is he a man after God's own heart? The answer is in Acts 13:22 where it says, "After removing Saul, he made David their king. God testified concerning him: 'I have found David son of Jesse, a man after my own heart; he will do everything I want him to do.'" David did whatever God wanted him to do. An obvious question is, how could God still call David a man after his own heart when David committed such terrible sins, including adultery and murder? Well, you see, we learn much of David's character in the book of Psalms as he opened up his life for all to examine. David's life was a portrait of success and failure, and the biblical record highlights the fact that David was far from perfect. But what made David a cut above the rest was that his heart was pointed toward God. He had a deep desire to follow God's will and do "everything" God wanted him to do.

Now, let me give you a background of the text we're considering today. God commands Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of Jesse's sons as future king of Israel without revealing to Samuel who that someone is. Upon arrival in Bethlehem, Samuel sees Eliab, the eldest, who is tall and muscular, and says to himself, "Surely the Lord's anointed stands here before the Lord." (1 Samuel 16:6) He is wrong, however, because he receives a rebuke from God. God says to him, and this is our text for today, "Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things man looks at. Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart." (1 Samuel 16:7)

The error of Samuel is also the error of many of us. We judge people by their looks or by their achievements or by their abilities. And we have bought in to the world's lie that a person's worth is determined by all these. We, Filipinos, are guilty of this. We think that being beautiful is having a well-chiseled nose. That's why we're ashamed of our noses. One guy wrote a song that goes, "Tayo'y mga Pinoy, tayo'y hindi Kano. Hwag kang mahihiya kung ang ilong mo ay pango."

In English, that's roughly translated as, "We are Filipinos, we're not Americans. Don't be ashamed if your nose is flat as a pancake." But you know what, the Shah of Iran, before he was overthrown in the late 70's, said in an interview that he admired the Filipino nose. In fact, when he was still alive, he wanted to have a plastic surgery just to have a nose like ours. His was really long and pointy. Ours is short and flat. Imagine that. So, be proud of your nose.

Anyway, going back to our nose, I mean our verse, as the verse pointedly indicates, God looks at the condition of our hearts not at how we look on the outside. The problem with many people is that they try to build their physical bodies without concern for building their inner qualities.

So, God tells Samuel to choose Jesse's youngest son David, a shepherd boy, as Israel's future king. David was only about sixteen or eighteen when this took place. The Bible says that he has a fine appearance and handsome features but certainly he was not as big and strong as his brother Eliab or King Saul. Besides, he was an unlikely candidate for kingship because he tended flock not people and he was not even experienced in war.

Nevertheless, God looked deep inside of him and saw a heart that was totally devoted to Him, a heart that was willing and ready to do God's bidding. David was, therefore, the only logical choice as king.

This morning, I'd like to share with you five qualities of David that endeared him to God. When you have these qualities, your heart will be as strong as David's and you can be used by God. So, **to build a strong heart, first I must be**

1. H-umble

David, even as a young man, was filled with humility. He was content with what God had given him. He knew what his limitations were. His only desire was to please God in what he was doing.

Because God's will for him as a youth was to be a shepherd, he never aspired to be someone other than that even after his anointing as the future king. David did not change his attitude toward his brothers and other people. This promotion did not go to his head.

For example, one day when Goliath was challenging the Israelites to fight him, David asked the Israelite soldiers about Goliath. Eliab his brother overheard him. Eliab said angrily "Why have you come down here? And with whom did you leave those few sheep in the desert. I know how conceited you are and how wicked your heart is; you came down only to watch the battle." (1 Samuel 17:28) Some sharp words from his brother, right? Probably, he was still envious of David because he was bypassed by Samuel.

What did David say? What did he do? Another person would have been greatly offended by those words and might reply in kind. Yet, David meekly replied. "Now what have I done? Can't I even speak?" (1 Samuel 17:29) Then, he turned away to avoid further trouble.

The Lord Jesus placed great importance on humility. In Matthew 18:4 He says, "Therefore, whoever humbles himself like this child is the greatest in the kingdom of heaven."

You see, a child longs to just please his father and cast himself upon him. A child can play with other children, whether rich or poor, without regard to the color of the skin of the other children. We should be like little children in our attitudes and disposition. We cannot claim to be Christ's disciples unless we reflect child-like qualities. Being humble, therefore, means to put others before us. The Bible says "Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit, but in humility consider others better than yourselves." (Phil. 2:30)

A Christian minister once said: "I was never of any use until I found out that God did not intend me to be a great man."

To build a strong heart, I must be humble, and I must be...

II. Eager

David was always eager to do what God wanted him to do. He was eager to listen to Him. He never questioned God or doubted the wisdom of God's directions to him. This is the reason why he was successful in his war campaigns. Before he would go to war, he would first go to God and asked whether he should fight and how he should fight.

For example, this is what we read in 1 Samuel 23:1-4, "When David was told, 'Look, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are looting the threshing floors,' he inquired of the Lord, saying, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?' The Lord answered him, 'Go, attack the Philistines and save Keilah.' But David's men said to him. 'Here in Judah we are afraid. How much more, then, if we go to Keilah against the Philistine forces!' Once again David inquired of the Lord, and the Lord answered him. 'Go down to Keilah, for I am giving the Philistines into your hand.'"

We notice in these verses that David did not make any move until he knew exactly what the Lord wanted. By doing so, he was assured of victory and he avoided getting into trouble. The secret of his success, in other words, was an eager ear. And whatever he heard from God, he immediately put into practice.

There was this editor of a small weekly newspaper in a town in the West. One day, he was having a hard time filling his columns. So, he had his compositor set up the Ten Commandments, and ran them without making any editorial comment. Three days later after the paper was published, he received a letter saying, "Please cancel my subscription. You're getting too personal."

Sometimes, we are like that person. We like to hear only what tickles our ears. If it is something not palatable to us, we cringe in dismay and disobey. We're eager...not to hear what God says but to do things our own way.

And more often than not, we end up in disaster. God is looking for people who will listen to him with all their hearts and ears and eagerly obey Him.

Throughout church history, God used mightily individuals who listened to his voice. God used Paul the apostle to spread his word to the Gentiles when he listened to God's voice in the Road to Damascus. God used Martin Luther to launch the Great Reformation when he listened to what God said in his word that "the just shall live by faith." And in our own time God used Billy Graham to evangelize the world since the time he heard the still, small voice of God in an evangelistic rally in 1939 telling him to place his trust in Christ alone. I know some question his practice and even theology in his later years, but the fact remains he had been an effective witness for Jesus for many decades and many Christian ministries had been born because of his ministry. In the very last message he preached at the age of 95, five years before he died, which was broadcast around the world, he clearly preached salvation by the grace of God through faith in Christ alone.

To build a strong heart I must also be

III. A-vailable

David was always available for God's work. Whenever he saw something that needs to be done for God's glory he made himself available. It didn't matter whether the task at hand was big and formidable. It didn't matter whether he had the necessary tools to do the job or had the skill to do it. What mattered was that God's will was being carried out. He knew that God can use him despite himself as long as he was available.

When the Philistine giant Goliath challenged the Israelites, David put his life on the line by volunteering to face him. King Saul was hesitant at first to let David fight Goliath because he saw that he was only a boy. But David replied that he was doing it in the name of God.

He said, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." (1 Samuel 17:37) And the Bible tells us that he slew the giant with only a sling and a stone.

There was a pastor who reached the age of retirement. He still wanted to serve but he was asked to step down to give way to a younger pastor. Many months passed and the retired pastor was still restless because he felt that his service in the pulpit hasn't really stopped. What he did was he applied for pastorship in one church after another. However, no one took him in. One day, he accepted an invitation to speak in a Christian conference in India. After the conference, a church in India became interested in him and asked him to become their pastor which he gladly accepted.

This old, retired pastor, who many thought in his own country was no longer capable, was so powerfully used by God in that part of the world that he became instrumental in that church's dynamic growth and the establishment of other churches. Since his retirement until the day he died, he served the Lord for another twenty years.

In this room, many of us are far from retirement, some have retired, and some are retiring soon. When the day comes for us to retire, however, will we still be available for the Lord like the pastor in the story? Or are we going to be swayed with the world's opinion that we are no longer useful and capable because we have reached a certain age?

I'm afraid that even right now some of us may be considered retired already. Because we do not make ourselves available to the Lord. Perhaps, God has long been tugging at your heart to lead a Bible study or to become more involved in a church ministry, or to study full-time, or to become a missionary to someplace and yet you have been buying time because you feel inadequate or incapable.

In Isaiah 6:8 we read that Isaiah heard the voice of the Lord saying, "Whom shall I send? And who will go for us?" And what was Isaiah's answer? "Here am I. Send me." I hope we give the Lord a similar answer when he calls and not "There he is. Send him."

We come to the fourth quality. I must be

IV. R-epentant

At the height of David's career as a king, he committed two very serious sinful acts. First, he slept with another man's wife and second, he murdered the woman's husband. For quite some time, David was able to cover up his sins. But not from God, of course. God, through the prophet Nathan, rebuked David sternly. Immediately, David was stabbed in the heart and exclaimed, "I have sinned against the Lord" (2 Samuel 12: 13). Later on, David wrote a psalm to express his deep sorrow over his shameful deeds.

I believe that when David unquestioningly accepted God's rebuke and immediately asked for forgiveness, he put himself in a more favorable light before God. You see, God is a very understanding God. He knows that we are made of clay and we easily crumble. But when that happens he promised, nevertheless, that "he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9). It is when we stubbornly cling to our sins and do not acknowledge them even when God has consistently pointed them to us that we get into trouble. This is what happened to King Saul.

In chapter 15 of 1 Samuel, we read that God commanded Saul to attack the Amalekites and destroy them completely, not leaving anyone alive, including animals. Saul attacked and killed the Amalekites except for Agag their king and the best of their sheep and cattle. This greatly displeased the Lord and he sent Samuel to rebuke him. What was Saul's reaction? In verse 20, this is what he said, "But I did obey the Lord."

Then, he rationalized that they spared the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to God. Samuel however, pointed out that to obey is better than sacrifice. And Saul replied, "I have sinned." Against whom? Saul believed that it was only against Samuel for he asked forgiveness from Samuel, not from God. Because of Saul's unrepentant heart the Lord rejected him as king of Israel and verse 25 says that "the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel."

Let us remember these words of the Lord in Isaiah 66:2, "This is the one I esteem: he who is humble and contrite in spirit, and trembles at my word."

Finally, to build a strong heart, I must be...

V. T-hankful

David's entire life can be described as a life of praise and thanksgiving to God. Why?

Because he wrote psalms that praise and thank God at almost every occasion in his life and the life of Israel. When the Lord delivered him from the hand of all his enemies and from the hand of Saul, David composed a long psalm which is now Psalm 18 wherein toward the end after giving praises to God he says,

"Therefore I will give thanks to you among the nations, Lord; I will sing praises about your name." (Psalm 18:49 CSB) On another occasion, when the Ark of the Covenant was returned to Israel after being in the enemy's hands for a long time, David composed another long psalm in which at the very start he gave thanks to God: "Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name; proclaim his deeds among the peoples." (1 Chron. 16:8 CSB) Toward the end of this psalm, he declares again, "Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his faithful love endures forever." (1 Chron. 16:34 CSB).

What is most revealing about David's attitude is that in the midst of his pain and suffering he can still give praise and thanksgiving to God.

We find that in some of the psalms he wrote, he starts by pouring out his heart to God and then finishes with a word of praise or thanks to God.

For instance, in Psalm 7:1 he begins by saying, "Lord my God, I take refuge in you; save and deliver me from all who pursue me" and ends with these words, "I will give thanks to the Lord because of his righteousness; I will sing the praises of the name of the Lord Most High." (Psalm 7:17)

When I was still serving in my former church, a member died of cancer at the age of 27 leaving behind a husband and a three-year-old son. Months before she died, she wrote an article which was published in our church newsletter. Her article was based on Max Lucado's "On the Anvil" and an excerpt from her article goes like this:

"This (book) has encouraged me so much on what is going on in my life right now. It has reminded me to hold on to God. And to hope that there is something great He has in store for me. It has reminded me that God is in control. Indeed, my life is in His hand. As what David in Psalm 23:4 said, 'Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me.'

"I praise God for visiting me. He thinks I'm still worth reshaping."
Here was a woman going through intense pain and suffering and yet could still praise God. I wonder how many of us would also be able to utter words of praises to God when put in the same situation?

David was used by God in a powerful way because he had a heart that was right. Yes, David was a sinner like you and me, a far from perfect mortal person yet the condition of his heart is what separates him from most of us. To summarize, David's heart can be described as being humble, eager, available, repentant, and thankful.

The Lord Jesus expects nothing less of you, too. He wants you to come to him and follow him with humility and eagerness. He wants you to be available for him, to repent of your sins and be thankful for what he has done for you. He wants to use you. Jesus is looking for disciples who are willing to give their hearts to him.

If you don't know Jesus as your personal Lord and Savior, you can also come to him this morning. You see, God loves you so much that he came down in the person of Jesus to die for you. He died on the cross between two thieves. He was counted as a criminal although he committed no sin. He died for your sake. He died for the forgiveness of your sin. His blood was shed so that your sins can be forgiven. The Bible says, "God demonstrates his own love for us in this: While we were still sinners, Christ died for us." (Romans 5:8)

The thing is, death did not hold him forever because on the third day he rose from the dead. He was victorious over sin and death. He is now in heaven waiting for you. If you want to be with Jesus when you die, receive him in your heart as your personal Lord and Savior. Acknowledge that you can't save yourself, your good works cannot save, and no one else can save you except Jesus.

The Bible says, "To all who received him, to those who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God" (John 1:12).

My friend, if you want to have a new heart, a heart that pleases God, accept Jesus in your heart. Then, this is what God will do for you as he did to the wayward Israelites a long time ago, "I will give them an undivided heart and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh." (Ezekiel 11:19)

So, would you give your heart to Jesus this morning?

