

The Tyranny of Gravel

I Kings 2:1-9; I Chronicles 28-29

Introduction

A staff associate, who is involved in the Covey Leadership Center, attended a time management seminar. The speaker gave an illustration that I recently read and shared with the men at our church men's retreat. I thought of that illustration as I studied the final speech of King David to his son Solomon, and decided to attempt the demonstration. I have changed the demonstration slightly, after practicing it in my garage, as it takes too much time to do otherwise.

In order to do this demonstration, I have a plastic jar and a pile of rocks. Some of the rocks are large and some are small gravel. These rocks, by the way, are from my own back yard. In fact, I think they grow in my back yard. You are welcome to come and take some home and start your own collection!

Do you think that I can put all of the large rocks into this jar? Yes, I got them all in!

Now, is the jar full? No! Although there is no more room for large rocks, there is room for gravel.

I will pour in the gravel.

Now is the jar full? No!

I can still pour water into the jar.

NOW is the jar is full? **YES!**

What is the point of this illustration as it relates to managing your time, and as it relates to all of the events relating to your own busy schedule?

When I first read this illustration, my answer to that question was the same as that of nearly everyone else. We ventured, "The big rocks represent the important essentials in your life, and, if you work hard

enough, you can squeeze a lot of the non-essential activities in around them."

Let me tell you the real lesson, however. If I were to take the water and gravel and pour them into the jar first, I would not have room for the large rocks. That leaves the question, "Which major things in my life am I leaving out?"

So, the lesson is:

Make sure you put in the big rocks first!

Let me repeat that, "Make sure you put in the big rocks first!"

What I want to do today, is take you to I Kings, chapter 2, and to I Chronicles, chapters 28 and 29, and show David's passionate challenge to his young son. It is a challenge that, in effect, would put the big rocks, the main things, the important relationships into his son's life first.

You may have heard the phrase, "tyranny of the urgent". Today, I am changing that phrase to something that I hope you will never forget; to something that I hope God will bring back to your mind over and over again, as you ponder the path of your feet. I will change it to, "tyranny of the gravel".

The word for "tyranny" comes directly from the Greek language. It is the word, "tyrannos," which means, "master, ruler". When the context is developed, it means, "a hard, unfair taskmaster".

The truth is, most Christians are mastered and their calendars are subjugated, not by the essential; that is, by the large rocks, but by non-essential; that is, by the gravel. When you do not have time for the essentials because of the optional activities, then, at that moment, that gravel has become a tyrant; it has

become your master. So, it is time to take a hard look at our schedules to distinguish between the gravel and the rocks!

Three Important “Rocks” In Life

In I Kings, chapter 2, and I Chronicles, chapter 28, all of the important rocks are not mentioned, but we will take time to address three of them. Then, at the end of our discussion, we will take a personal test that, I believe, will further apply this discussion and present a challenge to our own personal lives.

Rock #1 – A close relationship with God

1. Rock number one is a close relationship with God.

Look at I Kings, chapter 2, verses 1 and 2.

As David’s time to die drew near, he charged Solomon his son, saying, “I am going the way of all the earth. Be strong, therefore, and show yourself a man.”

By the way, these are the same words spoken by Moses to Joshua just before Moses died! And they are the same words spoken by Joshua to the Israelites just before he died!

Turn over to I Chronicles, chapter 28, and look at verse 9.

As for you my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole heart and a willing mind, for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts.

Now, as I thought of David’s words to his son, and where David’s life intersected Solomon’s, there are two areas that would have defined, in Solomon’s mind, what his father was trying to say. As a young thirteen-year-old, Solomon had watched his father’s life during the past six or seven years. He would have understood David’s urgent command to know God and serve Him to mean at least two things.

Two things that knowing God and serving Him involves

Let me give two things that knowing God and serving Him involves.

Submission in spite of God’s refusals

- The first is submission in spite of God’s refusals.

Look at verse 2 of I Chronicles, chapter 28, and listen to the words of David.

Then King David rose to his feet and said, “Listen to me, my brethren and my people; I had intended to build a permanent home for the ark of the covenant of the Lord and for the footstool of our God.”

Did you catch those poignant words,
. . . *I had intended to build . . .*

We previously studied, at length, this passionate desire of David’s to build a house for the glory of God’s presence; to build a permanent temple that would replace the movable tabernacle or tent. It was a pure, wonderful dream. After fifteen years of fighting other nations, the nation of Israel experienced peace and David went to Nathan with his plan. Nathan, the prophet of God, said, “Yes!”

God, however, came to Nathan in the night and said, “Go back to David with My answer. It isn’t, ‘Yes,’ it’s ‘No.’”

If you will look at verse 3 of chapter 28, we are finally told why.

But God said to me, “You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.”

If I had been David, this is when I would have “lost it”. The battles that David had fought were the will of God. David was a man of war because he had the courage and faith to trust and obey God and drive the enemies of God from the land. Every time David swung his sword, God received the glory.

Now, however, God said, “Because you swung the sword, you can’t build your lifelong dream.”

What would David do? Here was a life ambition rejected. In the secret place of David’s heart, he was not really a soldier, he was a builder. When he lay in bed at night, he was not dreaming of battle plans, he was drawing up building plans. But God had refused; God had said, “No.”

The mark of your character, my friend, will be revealed in how you handle what God does not do for you more than in what God does do for you. Has God said, “No,” to one of your dreams? Perhaps He has rejected your dream of a great accomplishment, a certain career, a ministry, or a relationship. If so,

relinquish it; let it go. Instead, like David, focus on what the Lord *will* do in your life.

One author wrote, “Rather than pining away the last few years of his life with an ache for that unfulfilled desire, David focuses on what the Lord will allow him to do.”

Gratitude in light of God’s allowances

- That leads to the second of what knowing God and serving Him involves. There is submission in spite of God’s refusals and, secondly, gratitude in light of God’s allowances.

Look at verse 3 of chapter 28 again.

But God said to me, “You shall not build a house for My name because you are a man of war and have shed blood.”

Now continue and look at verse 4. Notice the first word, which is character revealing.

Yet, the Lord, the God of Israel, chose me from all the house of my father to be king over Israel forever. For He has chosen Judah to be a leader; and in the house of Judah, my father’s house, and among the sons of my father He took pleasure in me to make me king over all Israel.

Isn’t that great?! That is knowing God, and saying, “He did not do this, but He did do that. He did not allow that, but He did allow this.”

So, get it right, rock number one is a close personal relationship with God!

Rock #2 – A clear accountability to God’s Word

2. Rock number two is a clear accountability to God’s Word.

Go back to I Kings, chapter 2, and look at verse 3.

Keep the charge of the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, to keep His statutes, His commandments, His ordinances, and His testimonies, according to what is written in the Law of Moses, that you may succeed in all that you do and wherever you turn

David knew the depths of moral and spiritual failure; he knew the consequences of an unaccountable life. He was guilty of murder and adultery and he would receive the penalty of the consequences for

those things until the day he died. He knew the only guideline that would ever steer his son through the maze of temptation was the written Word. It is as if he said, “Son, study the Word and know the precepts, the insights, the commands, the ordinances, and the testimonies. This Book is a rock, so put it in first!”

Now, ironically, something is spoken of, during his conversation with Solomon, that reveals David’s failure, to a degree, in this matter. Look at verses 5 and 6 of chapter 2.

Now you also know what Joab the son of Zeruiah did to me, what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner the son of Ner, and to Amasa the son of Jether, whom he killed; he also shed the blood of war in peace. And he put the blood of war on his belt about his waist, and on his sandals on his feet. So act according to your wisdom, and do not let his gray hair go down to Sheol in peace.

Skip to verses 8 and 9.

Behold, there is with you Shimei the son of Gera the Benjamite, of Bahurim; now it was he who cursed me with a violent curse on the day I went to Mahanaim. But when he came down to me at the Jordan, I swore to him by the Lord, saying, “I will not put you to death with the sword.” Now therefore, do not let him go unpunished, for you are a wise man; and you will know what you ought to do to him, and you will bring his gray hair down to Sheol with blood.

Now, at first, I was convinced that David was acting something like a Mafia “Godfather”, telling his successor who was on the royal “hit list”; who to “knock off”. The more I studied and researched, however, it became clear that one of the consequences related to David’s disobedience to the Law was unfinished business. There was unfinished business regarding Joab and Shimei that David had failed to carry out.

Dr. Howard Vos writes insightfully,

Was this just a piece of oriental cruelty, as the critics often claim? Not necessarily. Both Joab and Shimei had committed acts worthy of the death penalty. Modern Americans need to remember that ancient Semitic government prescribed the death

penalty for many crimes that would not warrant the same treatment today.

Dr. Simon DeVries adds,

Joab had brought blood upon the house of David, and Solomon's fulfillment of David's command will be to punish Joab for his bloodthirstiness, but most importantly, the house of David needed to be purged of blood-guilt so that it might reign in peace.

The point is, David should have dealt with these men, but he could not. Why? If you study the story of these two men, you will recognize that these men sinned against the Lord at the same time David was sinning, or reaping the consequences of his own sins, against the Lord.

With Shimei, the problem was David's grief over his son Absalom's coup attempt. David had failed Absalom, and the Lord, as a father. He was in the process of fleeing when Shimei came out and publicly cursed David. Ultimately, Shimei cursed God, who had anointed David as King.

With Joab, David should have dealt with him years before this conversation with Solomon. Joab was guilty of murdering two innocent commanders who just happened to be in his career path. Why did David not act with righteous judgment? Because earlier, David had used Joab to make sure that Bathsheba's young husband, Uriah, was killed in battle. David needed to cover up his adultery with Bathsheba, who was pregnant with his child. So, he sent a message to Joab, by the very hand of Uriah, that said, in effect, "Joab, I've got this little problem. See to it that Uriah never comes home from battle alive."

Frankly, Joab and Shimei were skeletons in David's closet of past sin! They haunted him until the day he died.

I want to address something that does not get a lot of "prime time" coverage. It is a tragic thought, but one that happens every day. It is the sins of a father or grandfather; the sins of a preacher, politician, or executive that have to be dealt with later by the living family members. In other words, the skeletons in a man's closet that come out only after the man has died. Then, the stunned sons and daughters have to pick up the pieces.

I happen to be a father, but I am also a son. One of the best gifts my father continues to give me is his clean name. Those of you who have the same gift

understand. I run into those who say, "I know your father, he's a godly man," or, as one man who was traveling through town some time ago told me, "I remember your father when he was in college, he was such a student of the Word."

Some time ago, I was about to speak to the student body at Liberty University. I was going to walk out to a makeshift stage, located on the center court of their athletic center, and preach to approximately five thousand students. I was in a room near the stage, sitting with the campus pastor, when the door opened and the president of the university walked in. He gave me a big handshake and thanked me for coming. Then, he told me to tell my father, "Hello," and shared, briefly, how much he appreciated my father's godly walk. I can tell you that speaking to five thousand students was not nearly as significant or meaningful to me as that man's commendation of my father.

I want that for my children, don't you? You can have it, but it means living a life of accountability to the Word. *This has to be a BIG ROCK!* Your relationship to the Word, among other things, means keeping short accounts on sin.

Those of you who do not have a heritage like that have every reason to start that process now. Just remember, as Proverbs, chapter 22, verse 1, tells us,

A good name is to be more desired than . . . silver and gold.

A few years ago, in a town where I used to live, a well-respected, wealthy businessman tragically died. He had served as the leading trustee in the church I had attended; he had been instrumental in the development of a Christian college and seminary, and he had seemed, outwardly, so dedicated to God. He and his wife had driven down their driveway to the street, which had a guardrail on the opposite side that overlooked a steep mountain cliff. Then, for some unknown reason, the accelerator jammed. The car raced through the guardrail and crashed into the cliff below, killing them both. It was a tragic loss to their family, as well as to many people, and left many places to fill in the ministries that they had been involved in.

In the days ahead, to the amazement of all who heard the story, when the man's will was being probated, a young lady in her mid-twenties mysteriously appeared. She claimed to be his daughter, and the result of an immoral relationship that he had carried on years earlier. She was able to

prove it, along with the fact that she had been receiving payments from him to keep her existence a secret.

Clean out the skeletons. Do not leave moral or unethical garbage behind for your kids to discover; toxic waste that will deeply hurt them.

Did you know Solomon's name means "peace"? In fact, the Hebrew word "Shalom" and "Solomon" come from the same root. Yet, the reign of Solomon begins with bloodshed and intrigue that will rock the Israelite world. Solomon's first acts were ridding the kingdom of compromise that David, his father, had allowed.

Make sure you put this rock, to live a life of accountability to the Word, in first!

Rock #3 – A committed involvement with God's work

3. Rock number three is a committed involvement with God's work.

For all of David's failures and sins, he was referred to as, "a man after God's own heart". This name was not because he was perfect, but because ultimately, God was his priority.

By the time of David's death, his worship choruses were being sung throughout the nation. His acts of faith and courage had become legendary. His expansion of the kingdom and solidification of Israel's worship system were heroic achievements.

Two ways in which David communicated a heart committed to God to Solomon

Now, in this final scene, in this last recorded conversation with his son, David's heart for God is revealed all over again. Let me give you two ways in which it is revealed.

David communicated a sense of destiny to his son

- First, David communicated a sense of destiny to his son.

Look again at I Chronicles, chapter 28. You can almost see and hear David saying, "Solomon, come here. Pull up a chair close to me, and listen."

Begin at verse 9.

As for you, my son Solomon, know the God of your father, and serve Him with a whole

heart and a willing mind; for the Lord searches all hearts, and understands every intent of the thoughts. If you seek Him, He will let you find Him; but if you forsake Him, He will reject you forever.

Now notice verse 10.

Consider now, for the Lord has chosen you to build a house for the sanctuary; be courageous and act.

Imagine, for a moment, that you only had one more conversation with your child. Would you say, "Now listen son or sweetheart, make sure you get a good education and then, a good paying job that you enjoy, settle down and marry a nice Christian, mind your manners, and brush your teeth."?

How temporary! While all of those little lessons are necessary, and it is a good idea to brush your teeth and study in school, they all miss the purpose statement of life.

I saw a cartoon of a person who was jogging up a sweat. The caption had the man saying, "I'm doing whatever I can to prolong my life, hoping that someday I'll figure out what it's for."

That is a classic!

How many parents are preparing their children, and are also living, with the idea that God has something special for their lives? How many are teaching, as well as realizing, that God has chosen them to know Him and to serve Him in whatever arena He places them? How many are saying, and showing by their example, to, "Follow after God; get to know God; serve God in His church."? That is passing to your son or daughter, grandson or granddaughter, or your close friends as well, a rock-like principle around which all the other gravel can settle.

I like the way David, in verse 10b, adds the words,

. . . be courageous and act.

In contemporary English, we would say, "Don't just talk the talk, walk the walk."

David communicated a passionate desire for God's glory to his son

- There is a second way that David revealed his heart for God to Solomon. David communicated a passionate desire for God's glory.

Look at verses 11 and 12a of I Chronicles, chapter 28.

Then David gave to his son Solomon the plan of the porch of the temple, its buildings, its storehouses, its upper rooms, its inner rooms, and the room for the mercy seat; and the plan of all that he had in mind, for the courts of the house of the Lord . . .

Can you see David and Solomon with these blueprints rolled out before them on a table, with David showing Solomon every detail? David might say, “Solomon, God’s house has been my passion; establishing His glory through this house has been my dream. I’ve worked out every detail!”

The amazing thing, ladies and gentlemen, is that David was so excited about something he would never see. It did not matter, God would see it!

I have read that the Statue of Liberty towers one hundred fifty one feet into the air. The project took years to complete. The sculptor, who finished the work, was a Frenchman named Bartholdi. Once, Oscar Hammerstein saw a picture of the Statue of Liberty that had been taken from a helicopter. It showed the top of the lady’s head. He wrote of how amazed he was at the detail in the lady’s hair. That is amazing when you consider that Bartholdi never lived to see the invention of the airplane or the helicopter. In other words, he would have been fairly confident that no one would ever see the top of the lady’s hair. Yet, with as much detail as he sculptured her face and gown, he sculptured the lines and contours of the hair on the top of her head.

If you have a passion for God’s glory, it does not matter whether anyone will ever see your work, it will be done right. Having a passion for the work of God and the glory of God means performing the tedious with as much intensity as the exciting!

You might say, “I cannot live like that in my own strength!”

You are right. Notice verse 20 of chapter 28.

Then David said to his son Solomon, “Be strong and courageous, and act; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the Lord God, my God, is with you. He will not fail you nor forsake you until all the work of the service of the house of the Lord is finished.”

Make sure you put in the big rocks first:

- a firm conviction to know Him,

- a close accountability to His Word, and
- a commitment to serve Him and bring Him glory with all that you are.

These are the rocks around which the gravel of life should settle!

Application – A Personal Test

Now, as an application of our discussion today, let us take a personal test. Below is a list of activities. Beside each entry, write a “G” or an “R” to designate whether they are life’s little extras; that is, gravel, or life’s main essentials; that is, rock.

Remember that “gravel” does not necessarily mean sinful, but it is non-essential. The point is that gravel becomes a tyrant when we allow it to come first or when we so fill our lives with these activities that there is no room for the rocks.

A Personal Test

Personal test activities:

- studying the Word
- playing Saturday golf/tennis
- prayer
- spending time with your children
- watching television
- weekly group Bible study
- talking on the telephone
- going to the movies
- memorizing scripture
- contributing financial resources to God’s work
- climbing the career ladder
- following the stock market
- spending time with your spouse
- planning family outings/events
- getting a graduate degree
- playing on a softball team
- attending your child’s ballgames/events
- going to church
- attending the symphony/theater
- family vacations
- working out

- doing your job well
- planting a garden/working in the yard
- writing to loved ones
- family devotions
- dating
- serving in some capacity at church

At the end of every week, do we look back over our shoulder and wonder, “Why can’t I find the time to study the Word? Why can’t I find the time to get involved in a ministry to others? Why can’t I remember the last time my kids and I played games together or my wife and I had some time for just the two of us?”

I will tell you why. The reason is that our lives can be ruled by gravel. Ladies and gentlemen, if you are coming to the end of your days and weeks with the same frustration, then, ultimately, you will come to the end of your life and your epitaph could read, “I never had time for the important things”.

In closing, let us look at David’s last words. Last words are incredibly revealing!

Some of the most tragic last words came from Philip III, King of France, who said, “What an account I shall have to give to God! How I should like to have lived differently than I have lived.”

David’s last words are recorded in I Chronicles, chapter 29, verses 10 through 13.

So David blessed the Lord in the sight of all the assembly; and David said, “Blessed are

You, O Lord God of Israel our father, forever and ever. Yours, O Lord, is the greatness and the power and the glory and the victory and the majesty, indeed everything that is in the heavens and the earth; Yours is the dominion, O Lord, and You exalt Yourself as head over all. Both riches and honor come from You, and You rule over all, and in Your hand is power and might; and it lies in Your hand to make great and to strengthen everyone. Now therefore, our God, we thank You, and praise Your glorious name.

Wow!

Now look at verse 28.

Then he died in a ripe old age, full of days, riches and honor; and his son Solomon reigned in his place.

There is a New Testament postscript to David’s life; his epitaph. Look at Acts, chapter 13, verse 36.

For David, after he had served the purpose of God in his own generation, fell asleep, and was laid among his fathers

The only way you and I can hope to have that said of us, that we did more than create computer programs, sell insurance, raise kids, build buildings, but that we, “served the purpose of God in [our] own generation,” is to make certain, by God’s grace, that we put the big rocks in first!

This manuscript is from a sermon preached on 5/28/1995 by Stephen Davey.

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