

## Self-Controlled Leadership

### 1 Samuel 26:5-12

By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-19-2012

## Introduction

The confederate soldier, John Mosby, was once asked who was the best northern commander that the south ever faced. And without any hesitation he said,

McClellan, by all odds.

That was a total surprise, because McClellan had been mocked throughout his command as being indecisive, cowardly, ignorant, lacking action – some of the very points we are going to be looking at today. One time Abraham Lincoln wrote to McClellan and said, “If you don't want to use the army, I should like to borrow it for a while. Respectfully, A. Lincoln.” And that's the perspective of most of the histories that I have read. But more than one scholar has said that McClellan actually exercised brilliant self-control. I'm not enough of a civil war history buff to know. So you won't get any argument from me afterwards if you disagree. I'm just reporting the debate. Anyway, Mosby said,

McClellan, by all odds. I think he is the only man on the Federal side who could have organized the army as it was. Grant had, of course, more successes in the field in the latter part of the war, but Grant only came in to reap the benefits of McClellan's previous efforts... if Grant had commanded during the first years of the war, we would have gained our independence. Grant's policy of attacking would have been a blessing to us, for we lost more by inaction than we would have lost in battle. After the first Manassas the army took a sort of 'dry rot', and we lost more men by camp diseases than we would have by fighting.

It's a fascinating (if somewhat controversial) perspective, and whatever you think of McClellan, I'm using this perspective to start my sermon because there *are* many times when God's call to self-control within the family, church, or society, is often misinterpreted by others as a character defect. Let me repeat that: God's call to self-control within the family, church, or society, is often misinterpreted by others as a character defect. I believe that Abishai thought David had a character defect. One recent writer said of Mosby's analysis:

In my opinion, Mosby's analysis - and we should take him at his word, being the well-placed and highly successful Confederate soldier he was - is spot on.

McClellan's actions were comparable to the strategy employed by Fabius in the Hannibalic Wars.

Fabius knew Hannibal's armies couldn't sustain a war in Italy indefinitely. In contrast to the impulsive Varro, Fabius preferred to avoid pitched battle and instead force Hannibal to attack fortified positions, where his natural genius at battle would be at least partially mitigated. When Fabius was deposed from command of the Roman consular armies, it was transferred to the aforementioned Varro, who sought a general engagement immediately. The result was the disaster at Cannae, which has since become a byword for total annihilation on the field. At the end of the grueling 17 year war, Fabius was vindicated by his countrymen who recognized his caution had spared the Republic.

... Looking at the war from this angle, it is hard not to feel some sympathy for McClellan. He was constantly opposed by his so-called friends in the Lincoln Administration and was routinely fed faulty intelligence by Lincoln's own Pinkerton men. Still, he managed to evade and confound Lee's designs at almost every turn, and if he had not been withdrawn from the Peninsula in 1862, might very well have ended the war then and there. There are those who maintain that McClellan's so-called caution was simply a way to conceal his own cowardice, but McClellan's considerable bravery in the West at the beginning of the war and his actions at Contreras and Churubusco in the Mexican-American War easily refute this charge. Indeed, McClellan's caution, if anything, seems to me an act of great self-control when all around him were urging an ill-advised advance.

We are going to be looking at the subject of self-control in leadership. And David showed a high degree of self-control when he refused for a second time to kill Saul. There is evidence that Abishai was really ticked off at David, and we will look at that in verses 11-12. Abishai felt that he could have ended this conflict right then and there. As far as Abishai was concerned, this would have saved enormous numbers of lives. But he wasn't seeing the big picture. And many modern scholars don't understand David's refusal because they don't understand Biblical civics. So it is my contention that David had the self-control to make the right decision despite the opposition. And that is why I have picked this passage to emphasize the issue of self-control.

## **I. Don't confuse self-control with ignorance. David's leadership exercised due diligence (v. 4). But his knowledge required self-control (see 2 Pet. 1:5-6).**

McClellan's caution is often attributed to Pinkerton's men giving wrong intelligence and way over-inflating the size of the southern armies. In the Hannibal wars, Fabius' caution was also attributed to ignorance. But with David, this was certainly not the case. Verse 4 shows that he got good intelligence. **"David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come."** But what does he do with that knowledge? Some people would have run. For some people, the intelligence would have led to panic

rather than to good decision making. Knowledge by itself does not make you a good leader. Knowledge unhinged from self-control can lead to fear, or to arrogance, or to shame, to avoidance, to throwing up your hands and giving up. Knowledge simply shines the light on whatever good or bad characteristics you already have. If you are indecisive, it doesn't matter how much extra knowledge you get, you will still be indecisive. If you are fearful, it doesn't matter how much extra knowledge you get, you are still going to be fearful.

In fact, I want you to turn with me to 2 Peter 1 so that you can see the logical interrelationships of knowledge and the other graces. Verse 1 says,

**Simon Peter, a bondservant and apostle of Jesus Christ, to those who have obtained like precious faith with us by the righteousness of our God and Savior Jesus Christ:**

Our Christian life begins by God giving us faith as a gift and making us secure in the righteousness of Christ. And that faith becomes a hand that receives more and more from the throne of Jesus. Let's read verses 5-8:

**2Peter 1:5 But also for this very reason, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue, to virtue knowledge,**

**2Peter 1:6 to knowledge self-control, to self-control perseverance, to perseverance godliness,**

**2Peter 1:7 to godliness brotherly kindness, and to brotherly kindness love.**

**2Peter 1:8 For if these things are yours and abound, *you will be neither barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ.***

I won't take much time to explain these verses, but there is a logical order to them. And any time you fail in your Christian walk, it is because one of these links in the chain is missing. The whole chain falls apart and lets you down if any one link is missing. God gives faith. That's the first link. And by faith we receive each of the other graces.

Peter says that we must add virtue to faith because virtue is a predisposition to obey God before we know what God will demand. It's essential that we have virtue before we have knowledge, or we will constantly be disobeying the things that we learn. We will become hardened. Abishai had the knowledge from God's word that without authorization from a civil magistrate he was not allowed to kill Saul. He had that information all the way back in chapter 24, but he did not have the predisposition to obey that knowledge. It seemed crazy to him. And these verses explain why that set Abishai up for failure. By faith we ask God daily – "Give me virtue; give me the predisposition to obey your will, and *then*

give me the knowledge of that will. I don't want the knowledge without the virtue. Otherwise I may disobey it."

So the order is faith, then virtue, then knowledge, then self-control. The reason self-control is absolutely critical is that the more we learn, the more challenges to our faith and virtue we will have, and it will take real self-control to live consistently with that knowledge. So self-control is added to knowledge, and perseverance is added to self-control. As we persevere, godliness begins to characterize every part of our lives. And if we have this genuine godliness that comes through the valley of self-control and painful perseverance we will have more sympathy for others who are also struggling with the same issues and it will give us brotherly kindness. We won't be Pharisees who judge each other. We will be pilgrims who pull each other out of the mud puddles, and walk arm in arm, and encourage each other. And when you go through that order, the love you have will be a full-orbed love that is able to love even your enemies. It will not be counterfeit. And so this is an absolutely essential order, and every link is important if we are to prosper, be fruitful, and abound.

Back to 1 Samuel 26. If David had been ignorant of the fact that he was in danger people might have admired his courage sticking around. They might have assumed that doing the right thing was an exercise in self-control. But in reality it could have simply been ignorance of the stakes. "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." But David's self-control shines precisely because he had self-control in the face of this knowledge.

## **II. Don't confuse self-control with lack of initiative. David showed leadership, not simply reaction (v. 5).**

Point II says, "Don't confuse self-control with lack of initiative." There is evidence that Abishai, Joab, and Asahel (the three sons of Zeruiah) often thought that David lacked enough initiative. Abishai certainly felt so in verses 8 and following. They were always ready to whack off heads. Sometimes that was good; sometimes not. But there is a big difference between acting on impulse and taking well-thought-out initiative. Verses 5 and following show that David *was* a man of initiative. It's not like he was passive.

**So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him.**

It took self-control to come to the camp of Saul rather than fleeing from it. And he went there to evaluate whether God might open up any divine opportunities. And self-control enabled him to take initiative rather than simply responding.

Here is an interesting little statistic that can help you to distinguish between initiative and its counterfeits. Alan Lang, in his “Substance Abuse and Habitual Behavior” report to the National Academy of Science gave nine characteristics that are true of almost all drug abusers, and interestingly at least six of those nine can be confused with initiative. Let me just list the first three:<sup>1</sup>

Impulsive behavior. Sometimes the impulsive behavior can turn out well, sometimes not. Abishai’s reaction was impulsive, and it ignored the teaching that David had given in chapter 24. Abishai’s impulsive decision failed to consider the long-term ramifications of revolutionary behavior. I mean, think of it - once you open the door to revolution in a country you set a precedent, and there is a never-ending series of revolutions. Just look wherever revolutions have happened in South America, Africa, and Asia and you will see that they are never ending. When you look in 1 and 2 Kings you can see that once the first revolutionary act happened in the Northern Kingdom of Israel, it kept getting perpetuated. Anyway, David was setting a Biblical precedent for what could and could not happen with tyranny, and it took great self-control to do so. In contrast, Abishai’s impulsivity took the easy way out rather than considering the best alternatives. Leadership must not be impulsive. Yes, it must sometimes make quick decisions, but those decisions need to be made in light of worldview, outcome, alternatives. And the more of those things you can quickly process, the better you can make good leadership decisions. And by the way, this is one of the reasons why I always encourage you to keep reading. It expands your capacity to make quick decisions that are reasonable.

The second characteristic of drug abusers that Alan Lang listed was difficulty in delaying gratification. They satisfy what they perceive they need right now. Well, that can be confused for leadership initiative as well. If you don’t understand Biblical law, Abishai’s decision makes perfect sense. But it was immediate gratification that ignored the Biblical law he had been instructed in back in chapter 24. Doing things the Biblical way required

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<sup>1</sup> The full list is Impulsive behavior, Difficulty in delaying gratification, Sensation seeking, Antisocial personality, Nonconformist values, Sense of alienation, Deviant behavior, Heightened feelings of stress, Little regard for goals generally valued by society.

deferred gratification – big time! It would have been so much easier for David to kill Saul when he had the opportunity. Jonathan would have invited him to be king, and a whole lot of lives could have been saved. Pragmatism would have said, “Do it Abishai’s way.” That’s the leadership of the world. But David realized that following God’s law sometimes means deferring the gratification of your desires and goals.

The third characteristic of drug abusers is sensation seeking. And the sensation seekers Joab, Abishai, and Asahel caused David a great deal of trouble in 2 Samuel – almost as much trouble as drug abusers cause their families. These guys were heroes in many ways, but they were too driven by that. And right now we won’t take the time to look at any examples of sensation seeking in 2 Samuel.

But in contrast, it was self-control that enabled David to avoid those counterfeits of initiative. So even though the outline is a little bit odd, I hope you see that I am doing two things at once: I am listing some leadership characteristics that we need to put on, and I am trying to convince you that self-control is critical to them all. This sermon is an apologetic for self-control.

### **III. Don’t confuse self-control with cowardice. David was as bold as anyone (v. 6).**

Point III – “Don’t confuse self-control with cowardice.” That was what McClellan was accused of. That’s what Fabius was accused of. And if people didn’t know David better, his failure to fight Saul may have been confused with cowardice. But we saw earlier in the book that David *was indeed* willing to fight Saul under two circumstances and two circumstances only – if he himself was a civil magistrate with executive power or if he was serving a civil magistrate. During those two times in his life he was willing to fight Saul. Otherwise it was outside of his jurisdiction. But those two occasions show that David’s refusal to kill Saul had nothing to do with cowardice. It’s obvious in verse 6 that David was as bold as anyone. Look at his boldness:

**Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruiah, brother of Joab, saying, “Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?” And Abishai said, “I will go down with you.”**

One thing that Joab, Abishai, and Asahel had in spades was courage or boldness. That was definitely not a defect. But unlike David, that boldness was not wedded with self-control, and it got all three in trouble.

When I was in ninth grade there was a kid in our school who didn't fear anything. But he constantly did stupid things to prove that he wasn't a coward. He took everybody's dares. You didn't even need to double dare him. He was sort of like these little lap dogs that have courage in spades and will take on a big dog that could eat them. But boldness without intelligent self-control is stupidity. Just like the expression I quoted earlier - "Fools rush in where angels fear to tread." But, if you can wed Abishai's courage together with the wisdom and self-control of David, you would have a winning combination.

#### **IV. Don't confuse self-control with lack of faith. David was always looking for God's opportunities (v. 7)**

Point IV says, "Don't confuse self-control with lack of faith." Maybe another way of saying this is that (unlike presumption) true faith requires self-control. Verse 7 says,

**So David and Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner and the people lay all around him.**

David is looking to see if God might open an opportunity for him to avert confrontation. Abishai was looking for something different. David was looking for the way of escape that he may be able to bear it (1 Corinthians 10:13). And he was confident that God would provide something. This sound sleep appeared to be God providentially providing that something. But the point is that David was approaching the situation with faith that God could avert a confrontation. Abishai was only evaluating the things that he could see. He was living by sight and not always by faith.

And I think Abraham is another excellent example of this tendency to vacillate. His self-controlled faith that God would provide him a son through Sarah seemed irrational. When year after year brought no son, Sarah suggested that they help God out by raising a son through Hagar. That uncoupling of self-control from faith resulted in presumption, a very clever counterfeit of faith.

And Abraham was not the only one who had to exercise self-control in order to live by faith. Most of the examples of faith given in Hebrews 11 would have required self-control. Noah's faith required one hundred and twenty years of self-controlled believing. And I'm sure he had plenty of neighbors mocking him for building that ark. "Where's the rain, Noah?" Abraham would have had to control his fears when he left his home without knowing where he was going. And Hebrews goes on to describe the sacrifice

of Isaac by Abraham. Exercising that faith would have taken great self-control. In fact, Hebrews indicates that Abraham was convinced that God would have to raise Isaac from the dead if God made him follow through. Moses gave up Pharaoh's riches. Rahab's family stayed in the house during the battle against Jericho. Gideon controlled his fears by faith as he went into battle with only 300 men. And Hebrews 11 gives other examples. Without the bookends of knowledge and self-control faith can easily morph into presumption.

**V. Don't confuse self-control with lack of opportunity. David had the perfect opportunity to end Saul but instead chose to take the more difficult path (v. 8).**

Point V says, "Don't confuse self-control with lack of opportunity. David had the perfect opportunity to end Saul, but instead chose to take the more difficult path." Verse 8 says,

**Then Abishai said to David, "God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not *have to strike* him a second time!"**

David refused to let Abishai finish the job, not because he lacked opportunity. He could have gotten away with it. In fact, he wouldn't have even had to have taken the blame. With Abishai killing Saul, there was plausible deniability. David refused to take Abishai's action, not because of inability or lack of opportunity, but simply because it was not Biblical.

And brothers and sisters, *this* is what makes his self-control all the more remarkable. Think about it this way. There is nothing heroic about self-control when there are no cookies or brownies or other tempting snacks in front of you. In fact, it is not self-control at all. It's lack of opportunity. People who avoid drunkenness using the Alcoholics Anonymous approach don't have self-control. They have lack of opportunity. There is nothing heroic about standing by your post in the army when the enemy is not attacking. Self-control really shines when the opportunity to compromise is present and you refuse to take it. It was *David* who had the self-control.

**VI. Don't confuse self-control with indecision or paralysis. David's leadership decisively took an unpopular stand (v. 9).**

Point VI – "Don't confuse self-control with indecision or paralysis. David's leadership decisively took an unpopular stand." Verse 9:



**But David said to Abishai, “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’S anointed, and be guiltless?”**

Of course, he said it in a whisper, probably with some hand motions mixed in. David was quite decisive and was willing to make an executive decision that would make Abishai upset. So his failure to kill was not because he was paralyzed into inaction. Quite the opposite. He took an action. It just wasn’t the action that Abishai wanted. It’s not an issue of indecision, but of making the right decision.

I think of the scene in the movie *Braveheart* when William Wallace is telling the soldiers who have those long spears, “Hold. Hold. Hold.” And you can tell by the facial expressions of some of the soldiers that it seems like insanity to be holding. But it took incredible self-control for William Wallace to wait till the last second to say, “Now!” And David’s making Abishai wait for God’s providence seemed like insanity to Abishai – but it was actually self-control.

And again, it is incredibly hard to have David’s balance. We need God’s grace to have his balance. You must be decisive if you are going to be a leader, and your decisiveness might mean that you are making unpopular stands that will get you into trouble. But with the God-given grace of self-control you can make those tough decisions in the family (when your family perhaps doesn’t like them), in your business, in the church, and in society. How many times have people lost money because of indecision as the stock market has been falling? But if you have a stop-loss plan in place (like, “I will sell my stocks the moment they lose 25% of their value), all it takes is self-control to implement it. David already knew his stop-loss plan. And he did it. He did it even when it was uncomfortable. So even though people could have accused him of indecision, he made the best decision because he had learned the grace of self-control. Are you getting the impression that self-control is pretty important?

## **VII. Don’t confuse self-control with inflexibility. David was able to see alternatives that others could not (v. 10f).**

Point VII balances this point. Point VII says, “Don’t confuse self-control with inflexibility.” Some people are just conservative in nature and don’t like making decisions. That’s not self-control. David was able to see alternatives that others could not. Verse 10:

**David said furthermore, “As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish.**

There was no question in his mind that Saul deserved to die. But since it was not his jurisdiction to kill him, David was able to leave things in God's hands. And the very fact that David quickly thinks of three lawful ways in which God could take care of Saul shows that he was already thinking outside the box. Abishai can only think in either/or. Either we kill him right now while we have the chance or we are hosed. But David knows that with God you are never in a box where you have to sin.

So we should not confuse stubborn inflexibility with godly self-control. Inflexibility is simply fear of change. That's not godly. David did not have an inflexible personality. He simply was not willing to compromise Scripture. And there is a difference. That's principled living, not inflexibility.

### **VIII. Don't confuse self-control with lack of commitment.**

**David was as opposed to Saul's tyranny as anyone, but resistance had to be God's way in God's time and within God's jurisdiction (vv. 9-11a).**

Point VIII says, "Don't confuse self-control with lack of commitment. David was as opposed to Saul's tyranny as anyone, but resistance had to be God's way, in God's time, and within God's jurisdiction. Let's start reading at verse 9:

**1Samuel 26:9** But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD'S anointed, and be guiltless?"

**1Samuel 26:10** David said furthermore, "As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish.

**1Samuel 26:11** The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD'S anointed.

The Reformed doctrine of resistance to tyranny has always rejected armed resistance to tyranny unless a civil magistrate has called us to war and unless all seven principles of just war theory are in place. In fact, since discussions have come up on which American wars have been just, let me read you the seven principles of just war, and I think you will be able to tell pretty quickly that America has lacked self-control. Sure we have been committed to fighting against certain forms of tyranny, and we've got pretty good armies, and they've got great discipline, but we have lacked self-control in which wars we have decided to commit to. I'm not against the soldiers. Like many soldiers, I just don't think the decision makers are always acting wisely. Here are the seven principles (and keep in mind that

there is more than a fifteen hundred year history of this Christian just war theory – this is not just out of the blue). The first principle is...

- A just war can only be waged as a last resort. All non-violent options must be exhausted before the use of force can be justified.

Could there be legitimate debate on whether this principle was in place here in chapter 26? I think so. Abishai did have some justification for saying that they had tried everything short of war to defend themselves, and it hadn't worked. But David wasn't quite so sure. He wanted to try two more things. He tries one in this chapter and another one in the next chapter. The second principle that needs to be in place before a war is a just war is this:

- A war is just only if it is waged by a legitimate authority. Even just causes cannot be served by actions taken by individuals or groups who do not constitute an authority sanctioned by whatever the society and outsiders to the society deem legitimate.

I think this was the main reason that David exercised self-control and said "No." He didn't have the jurisdiction to fight Saul yet. Most revolutions in South America, Asia, and Africa completely violate this principle. The third principle is:

- A just war can only be fought to redress a wrong suffered. For example, self-defense against an armed attack is always considered to be a just cause (although the justice of the cause is not sufficient--see point #4). Further, a just war can only be fought with 'right' intentions': the only permissible objective of a just war is to redress the injury.

I think everybody would agree that this principle for just war was definitely in place for David. But they all need to be in place. So on to the fourth principle:

- A war can only be just if it is fought with a reasonable chance of success. Deaths and injury incurred in a hopeless cause are not morally justifiable.

And of course this comes from Christ's discussion of war in Luke 14. Could David have won with his 600 men against Saul's 3000 crack troops? Possibly. And doing as Abishai suggested (if it was legitimate) would have helped. Assassination during war is not necessarily wrong. So I am willing

to grant Abishai this point. There could have been a reasonable chance of success. The fifth principle is:

- The ultimate goal of a just war is to re-establish peace. More specifically, the peace established after the war must be preferable to the peace that would have prevailed if the war had not been fought.

Would a more conservative Davidic government that was started unconstitutionally be better than Saul's unconstitutional government? That's debatable. From a pragmatic perspective, yes. But from principle? I don't think so. You see, once a government justifies *anything* that is unconstitutional there is no rational basis for saying that it can't become as bad as Saul's. So Abishai would have broken this principle. Sixth principle:

- The violence used in the war must be proportional to the injury suffered. States are prohibited from using force not necessary to attain the limited objective of addressing the injury suffered.

I think most would agree that Abishai's suggestion was proportional. So it passes this test. Seventh principle:

- The weapons used in war must discriminate between combatants and non-combatants. Civilians are never permissible targets of war, and every effort must be taken to avoid killing civilians. The deaths of civilians are justified only if they are unavoidable victims of a deliberate attack on a military target.

Abishai passes that test with flying colors. In fact, Abishai is more self-controlled than America has been in many of its past wars. But if you criticize our engagements in Iraq, Iran, Somalia, Bosnia, and other countries, you are often attacked as lacking commitment to America's security. Just as Abishai got mad at David, I have had friends get mad at me for calling on America to stop its unconstitutional, imperialistic wars. It's not fun to be accused of lack of patriotism or lack of commitment. In fact, it takes self-control for a politician to do the right thing today just as it took self-control for David to do the right thing back then. You are going to be misunderstood.

I think the debate between Ron Paul and all of the other Republican candidates is very similar to the debate between David and Abishai. Both David and Abishai were good men. Both valued liberty. But they were both

as committed to the constitution. Just because we *can* do it does not mean that we *should* do it. Just because drones can kill people in another countries without Congressional declaration of war does not mean that we should do so. And actually, Abishai violated fewer of the just war principles than America does. But that's going down a rabbit trail. It does actually relate to this text, but I want to move on to point IX.

### **IX. Don't confuse self-control with failure to act. David was willing to act even when followers refused to (vv. 11b-12a)**

Let's start reading in the middle of verse 11, and I want to demonstrate why some scholars think that Abishai was really ticked off with David. David suggested that if Abishai wants to take some action, that he can take two articles that belong to Saul. In fact, he commanded Abishai to do so. He says,

**1Samuel 26:11 ... But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that *are* by his head, and let us go."**

**1Samuel 26:12 So David took the spear and the jug of water *by* Saul's head, and they got away;**

Apparently Abishai is so upset that he doesn't even follow David's orders here. Perhaps he thought this was a petty thing to do if David is not going to take the necessary action of killing the enemy. So *David* had to pick up the spear and the water jug himself. Abishai apparently refused to do so.

This illustrates both that David was willing to act, and that he was willing to act contrary to the desires of the key men around him. He had the self-control to do the right thing even when it meant he would come under criticism. He had the self-control to do the right thing even if it meant that his close friends and associates would be angry with him.

But of course, that is what leadership is about. It is recognizing what needs to be done before others recognize it, and it is willingness to act when others can't or won't, and it is willingness to make the tough decisions that need to be made even in the face of stiff criticism. That's why leadership in one sense is not that fun. Do you have the self-control to do what God wants you to do even when everyone wants you to do something different? If so, you've got one of the components of godly leadership. And if not, start praying through the chain of sanctification in 2 Peter chapter 1.

**X. Don't confuse self-control with self-sufficiency. David was simply seizing a divine providence (v. 12b).**

Finally, point X says, "Don't confuse self-control with self-sufficiency. David was simply seizing a divine providence." Verse 12 goes on to say,

**and no man saw or knew *it* or awoke. For they *were* all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them.**

It would have been presumptuous for David to walk into the camp if guards had been awake. It would have been presumptuous for him to call out to Saul if he had not gone a great distance away and climbed to a point where he could be heard but could not be captured. So David is not trusting in himself when he enters that camp. He was taking advantage of God's divine providence. And God's divine providence works everything together for good to those who love Him. I have seen many divine interventions on my behalf that were just as remarkable, as far as I am concerned. But that doesn't make me trust myself. It makes me trust God all the more. Self-sufficiency is a counterfeit of self-control. Self-control is part of the fruit of the Spirit. It's a gift of God and requires God's grace.

**Conclusion – "A true leader is committed to the cause, and does not become the cause."**

So let me end with a quote: James Hewett said, "A true leader is committed to the cause, and does not become the cause."<sup>2</sup> And I think that is the golden thread that runs all through these points. For Abishai, David was the cause and the hope and the answer for getting rid of tyranny. But as we will see in the book of 2 Samuel, you cannot put your trust in even a David. You cannot put your trust in a Ron Paul, a Newt Gingrich, a Barack Obama, or anyone else.

What was David's cause? David's cause was seeing God exalted in every area of life including politics. And anything that came in the way of *God* being exalted was cast aside. Sure tyranny might be ended if he killed Saul, but God would not be exalted if this involved disobeying God, so he cast that suggestion aside. At this point David did not see himself as the supreme cause. He did not see ending tyranny as the supreme cause. He did not see ending socialism as the supreme cause. All of his self-control was exercised in the promotion of God and God's Word. Now, was he willing to work with the Tea Party of his day, even though they had a lesser passion –

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<sup>2</sup> James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1988), p. 311.

the passion of ending tyranny? Of course. He worked side by side with others who were not quite so consistent as he was. But God was his cause. And that's why Abigail's rebuke to him was so powerful in the previous chapter. It hit him like a lightning bolt that as a result of Nabal's insults he had subtly transferred his cause from God to himself. And he repented.

And I would urge you to repent if you have anything but the cause of God in your heart. Your self-controlled search for *knowledge* must be in the cause of seeing God exalted (point I). It's not knowledge for sake of knowledge. Your self-controlled *initiative* should be aimed at promoting the crown rights of king Jesus in your life and the life of your family, church, business, and culture (point II). Your *boldness* should be driven by an eternal perspective, not simply in maintaining your own personal rights. As you by faith seize opportunities, as you take unpopular stands, as you think outside the box, make sure that you do it for King Jesus (points IV through VII). Be absolutely committed to following the Bible, the whole Bible, and nothing but the Bible (point VIII). And as you take action in our culture wars, make sure that you do it with a trust in God's ways and God's providence.

To repeat the quote by James Hewett, "A true leader is committed to the cause, and does not become the cause."<sup>3</sup> May each of us be true leaders who are committed to the upward calling that God has given us in Christ Jesus. And may we exercise the grace of self-control when anything draws us from that. Amen.

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<sup>3</sup> James S. Hewett, *Illustrations Unlimited* (Wheaton: Tyndale House, 1988), p. 311.

## Youth Notes

Draw a picture of the sermon

Word checklist:

- ☐ self-control
- ☐ leadership
- ☐ knowledge
- ☐ virtue
- ☐ perseverance
- ☐ initiative
- ☐ impulsive
- ☐ danger
- ☐ deferred gratification
- ☐ sensation
- ☐ boldness
- ☐ faith
- ☐ opportunity
- ☐ indecision
- ☐ unpopular
- ☐ inflexibility
- ☐ war
- ☐ commitment
- ☐ pragmatism
- ☐ defense
- ☐ self-sufficiency
- ☐ success
- ☐ proportional
- ☐ inaction

Things I need to do:

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The answers to the following wordsearch puzzle can be found to the right





## Self-Controlled Leadership

### 1 Samuel 26:5-12

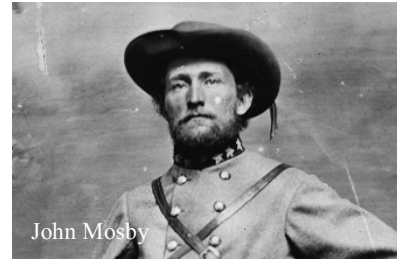
By Phillip G. Kayser at DCC on 2-19-2012



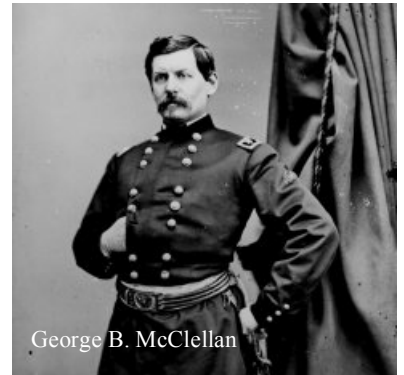
#### Introduction

- I. Don't confuse self-control with ignorance. David's leadership exercised due diligence (v. 4). But his knowledge required self-control (see 2 Pet. 1:5-6).
- II. Don't confuse self-control with lack of initiative. David showed leadership, not simply reaction (v. 5).
- III. Don't confuse self-control with cowardice. David was as bold as anyone (v. 6).
- IV. Don't confuse self-control with lack of faith. David was always looking for God's opportunities (v. 7)
- V. Don't confuse self-control with lack of opportunity. David had the perfect opportunity to end Saul but instead chose to take the more difficult path (v. 8).
- VI. Don't confuse self-control with indecision or paralysis. David's leadership decisively took an unpopular stand (v. 9).
- VII. Don't confuse self-control with inflexibility. David was able to see alternatives that others could not (v. 10f).
- VIII. Don't confuse self-control with lack of commitment. David was as opposed to Saul's tyranny as anyone, but resistance had to be God's way in God's time and within God's jurisdiction (vv. 9-11a).  
[On a separate piece of paper, write out the seven principles of just war theory.]
- IX. Don't confuse self-control with failure to act. David was willing to act even when followers refused to (vv. 11b-12a)
- X. Don't confuse self-control with self-sufficiency. David was simply seizing a divine providence (v. 12b).

Conclusion – "A true leader is committed to the cause, and does not become the cause."



John Mosby



George B. McClellan

