

From Warrior to Lamp

2 Samuel 21:15-17

Dedicated to Peter and Annemarie Nunn, David and Grace Taylor, Ian and Margaret Mears, Doug and Maurita Hayhoe and the many other lamps around you.

From early days, David was a strong, dynamic and fearless fighter. As a young man, while looking after his father's sheep, he killed a lion and a bear. Soon after, he faced and destroyed Goliath the Philistine "because he has defied the armies of the living God" (1 Sam. 17:37). Years later, once again "war broke out, and David went out and fought the Philistines. He struck them with such force that they fled before him" (1 Sam. 19:8). As a king, David's courage and victories over the enemies of Israel became legendary.

A time to transition

But one day, things changed: "David went down with his men to fight against the Philistines, and he became exhausted" (v.15). He narrowly escaped death only because Abishai came to his rescue. David was growing old. He was losing his physical strength and stamina. He felt it. His friends knew it. His foes could see it. When our heart still burns with passion, it can be difficult to acknowledge our own physical reality. David's men, his friends, encircled him and "swore to him, saying, 'Never again will you go out with us to battle, so that the lamp of Israel will not be extinguished'" (v.17). How would you, as king, have reacted? This was not a suggestion to take a sabbatical. It was a request to stop being a warrior, to "never again" join them in battle.

Dangers in transitions

Some, like Winston Churchill and more recently Robert Mugabe in Zimbabwe, resist handing over responsibilities to the next generation. What we do, our ministry, our talents, our 'successes' can easily become our identity. It is much better to prepare others, and then hand over gracefully. There are others who step aside and become negative and critical of how the battle is being fought. They can become cynical, even bitter. Please don't let that happen to you. But neither look down on yourself because you have grown older and in some ways weaker. Through the years you have walked with God, you have accumulated riches that only time can give. Please don't just retire, stop, and disconnect.

Don't meekly disappear. You still have a significant and valuable contribution to make, no longer as a busy *warrior* (doing) but as a *lamp* (being).

The lamp of Israel

David returned to Jerusalem. He hung up his sword and took up his harp. In these latter years in David's life he grew more alive towards God. He discovered that God dwells "amid the praises of Israel" (Ps. 22:3). He wrote new music and Psalms. He remained interested in the present and in the future. He prepared for the building of the temple, he purchased land, drew plans, equipped personnel and trained musicians. He discovered that it was possible to "bear fruit in old age" (Ps. 92:14). But perhaps a different kind of fruit! Few Christians today celebrate David's many victories in battle. But we all find comfort and inspiration in David's Psalms.

We need lamps today

How are the elderly viewed? They can be marginalized, ignored and dehumanized. Among those growing older you will find those who have experienced loss, deep pain, debilitating sickness, who have wrestled with doubt, cynicism, temptation, betrayal and discouragement ... and yet still believe, still love, still want to grow, still hope and still worship God. Seek out those old lamps that still shine. Those who inwardly are "being renewed day by day" (2 Cor. 4:16). Seek ways to capture the insights and resources of age for the benefit of Christ's body. "Consider the outcome of their way of life and imitate their faith" (Heb. 13:7).

How do the elderly view themselves? There is nothing virtuous about being old in itself. It happens automatically. Don't use your 'age card' to force or gain advantage. Instead, choose to be a *lamp*. Every Christian community needs good lamps. Be there! Give your moral support to those who are learning, struggling and fighting. Smile your approval. When you meet those who are open, calmly share some of your wisdom, spiritual insights and stories of life and faith. Be a mentor. Let your light shine and your warmth glow. Don't stop. Don't disconnect. Don't simply retire to a life of self-absorption. Choose to transition from *warrior* to *lamp*, and choose to do so graciously.

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