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VOL. XXIX
NO. 34
August 24, 2014

Tower of Strength

**“The name of the Lord is a strong tower
The righteous runs into it and is safe.”**

—Proverbs 18:10

When Shimei Shows Up

King David had hit rock bottom. When David sinned with Bathsheba, God decreed that shameful consequences would come upon him, including a man from his own household who would rise up and usurp his throne and take his wives (2 Sam. 12:11).

Though God forgave the iniquity of his sin, the consequences still came. Within a few years, David’s son Absalom had seized power, ravished David’s wives publicly, and forced David to flee Jerusalem for his life (2 Sam. 15:13–14, 16:22).

In 2 Samuel 16, while David and his men hoofed it down the road out of town, toward the empty wilderness,

There came out from there a man of the family of the house of Saul whose name was Shimei, the son of Gera; he came out cursing continually as he came. He threw stones at David and at all the servants of King David; and all the people and all the mighty men were at his right hand and at his left. Thus Shimei said when he cursed, “Get out, get out, you man of bloodshed, and worthless fellow! The Lord has returned upon you all the bloodshed of the

house of Saul, in whose place you have reigned; and the Lord has given the kingdom into the hand of your son Absalom. And behold, you are taken in your own evil, for you are a man of bloodshed” (16:5–8).

Shimei was doing little more than kick David when he was down. Shimei had lost prestige and wealth due to the transfer of the throne, and now saw an opportunity to hurl insults at David.

One of David’s men offered to deal harshly with Shimei:

Abishai, the son of Zeruiah, said to the king, “Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over now and cut off his head” (16:9).

Indeed, David had executed men for lesser crimes. He was probably tempted to do the same to silence Shimei’s rantings.

But David, a man after God’s own heart, did not retaliate. David knew that his flight from Jerusalem was punishment for his own crimes, and he avoided making it worse by lashing out in anger. David said,

“What have I to do with you, O sons of Zeruiah? If he curses, and if the Lord has told him, ‘Curse David,’ then who shall say, ‘Why have you done so?’ ”

Then David said to Abishai and to all his servants, “Behold, my son who came out from me seeks my life; how much more now this Benjamite? Let him alone, and let him curse, for the Lord has told him. Perhaps the Lord will look on my affliction and return good to me instead of his cursing this day.”

So David and his men went on the way; and Shimei went along on the hillside parallel with him, and as he went he cursed and cast stones and threw dust at him (16:10–13).

What self-control! David, like Jesus, “while being reviled did not revile in return; while suffering He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Pet. 2:23). David looked for God’s will in the situation.

Don't Close Your Ears to a Shimei

I don't know about you, but when someone (a brother, an elder, my spouse, a friend) pulls me aside to issue correction or challenge my behavior, the first impulse that arises in my chest is to justify myself, to make myself look better, to defend myself against the accusations, or even to go on the offensive and lash out at the other person.

King David did none of those things. He did not reflexively strike back and silence this loudmouth, even though he was being publicly humiliated. David considered the possibility that these brash statements were exactly what he needed to hear! Although no one likes to endure a Shimei, David humbled himself and listened, for he realized that God Himself may have sent Shimei to correct him.

God help me to never respond rashly in anger, to never close my ears. I must appreciate the possibility that I am wrong, and that God is using a man I do not like, with whom I often do not agree, to whom I have little desire to pay attention, and whose approach I do not appreciate, to rebuke my sins and get me back on the right course. We all need to have David's spirit in this situation. Our first impulse is to cut that man's head off! But David is right. What if God is speaking through him (Prov. 15:31–32)?

Deal Kindly with a Shimei

Those who endeavor to lead the church must be ready to suffer the blows of a Shimei. No matter where one goes or what one does in the church, whether one's good intentions succeed or fail, men like Shimei will snipe from the roadside bleachers, hurling abuses and kicking dirt. "The Lord's bond-servant must not be quarrelsome, but be kind to all, able to teach, patient when wronged, with gentleness correcting those who are in opposition..." (2 Tim. 2:24–25).

Much of the time, the grumblings of these Shimeis are stupid, petty, shallow, and deserve to be ignored. Every active worker for the Lord will expose his contributions to the unkind review of peers. He must therefore be choosy and confident. He must learn to accept the good criticism. And when the advice is nothing more than mean-spirited

yapping, he must shrug it off without irritation and without holding a grudge. He must develop thick skin and broad shoulders. "A man's discretion makes him slow to anger, and it is his glory to overlook a transgression" (Prov. 19:11). God's man, when slandered, absorbs the blow, turns the other cheek, and seeks to reconcile (1 Cor. 4:13).

Not many months passed before Absalom was slain while stuck in an oak tree, and the people turned back to David for leadership. Vindicated, but sad, David began moving his household back to the capital of Jerusalem. And there stood Shimei, waiting to speak to the king in the very same place where he had insulted him:

Shimei the son of Gera fell down before the king as he was about to cross the Jordan. So he said to the king, "Let not my lord consider me guilty, nor remember what your servant did wrong on the day when my lord the king came out from Jerusalem, so that the king would take it to heart. For your servant knows that I have sinned" (19:18–20).

Oh, how the tables were turned! Abishai once again offered to kill Shimei (19:21–23). But David, not too proud to be mindful of his own failures, forgave him and spared him. Shimei outlived David, though he remained under house arrest (1 Kings 2:8–9, 36–46).

Don't Copy Shimei (Except for His Courage)

On close review, Shimei's words were not helpful. David certainly deserved rebuke, but Shimei offered little advice, only scorn. If you are going to correct your brother, use your words to build up rather than tear down (2 Cor. 13:10). Don't be hot-headed Shimei. Neither be the pugnacious Abishai, eager to return fire. Instead, display the yielding, patient spirit of David, and you will invite the pleasure of God, and maybe even win over the spirit of your brother. —*John Guzzetta*

Quote of the Week:

"People will judge you by your actions, not your intentions. You may have a heart of gold, but so does a hard-boiled egg." —*author unknown*