

# *A Spiritual Spring for the Week*

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Sermon Text: 1 Kings 2:13-25  
Sermon Title: "Out of Control, But Going the Right Way"

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External locus of control. It is a fancy way of saying that sometimes things happen to us beyond our control. We get caught up in some event or situation that we cannot escape. We have to deal with it, even though it isn't our fault. Rarely are we happy when things happen to us beyond our control. Most of the time we complain, saying that we don't know why we have to put up with this. What did we do to deserve this? But we must go through it, and hopefully with flying colors.

The story we read today has something to do with external locus of control. Solomon is the son of David: we all know him. He is the newly-anointed king of Israel and Judah after King David passes away. Bathsheba is the mother of Solomon, the queen mother we would say if we lived in England. She is still a part of the royal family, but because her husband, David, is dead, she gets to keep the title of queen in name only. Solomon is the true ruler.

Adonijah is a name we might not know so well. He

is the older brother to Solomon. He is not the son of Bathsheba, so this means Solomon and he are half-brothers. By right of birth, Adonijah should be the newly-anointed king of Israel and Judah. He has a legitimate beef with what happened to him. He even says to Bathsheba that the people “set their expectations on him” to be their next king.<sup>1</sup> He is the heir apparent – he should be the one sitting on the throne. But he is passed by. Solomon is anointed instead of him.

Adonijah has to consider this situation. He has to think about what has happened to him, and he has to plan the next steps he could take to make his life better or just comfortable.

We have been at these crossroads before. There are moments in our lives, when we had to choose between Path Number 1 and Path Number 2. Both paths looked smooth enough to go across, and we could have chosen any one of them, but we could only choose one. We could not go back and rewrite history. We could not undo what was done to us. We had to move forward. We had to choose. We prayed to God that we chose the right path.

I was an associate pastor in Ohio for 3 years and 3

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<sup>1</sup> 1 Kings 2:15.

months. I hoped to be the associate for 5 years or more, but plans changed. Tamara and I were newly-married. We had bought a home and were looking forward to being in it for a good-many years. The senior pastor of the church found another position when I had been in the church for just over one year. The interim pastor came and, unbeknownst to me, it was his job to get rid of me. I didn't find out until later that he would go to churches with associate pastors, who were still lingering on, and would get rid of them so the church could start with a whole new pastoral staff. This interim pastor never told these associates that he was going to get rid of them. He just did. So he met with the Personnel Committee of the church. They talked about the shortfall they were experiencing in the budget, and the deficit amount just happened to be the same amount as my salary. The interim pastor convinced them that getting rid of me would solve their budgetary issues, and they agreed. It was the end of November, and I was calling in to meet with the Personnel Committee, which I rarely did. After we opened with prayer, the interim pastor looked across the table and said to me that everybody in the room wanted me to leave. I was shocked. It was like a tidal wave knocking me over and driving me into the coarse sand underneath. They would give me until February

to find another church, which was unrealistic. The average time it takes a Presbyterian pastor to find a church is 18 months. Besides, Christmas was coming, and no church looking for a pastor would hold interviews until late January. And, my wife was pregnant with our first child, and so I had to look feverishly for another job and learn to be a new dad all at once.

My family and I were at a huge crossroad. Things were moving fast. We could not go back and rewrite history. We had to move forward, but how? I had two options, the first being to make a big stink about what was happening. I could have fought tooth-and-nail against the Interim and the Personnel Committee. I could have told the Session to pay me a year's worth in salary as severance, or I would sue them. They had no real grievances against me, so my termination was unfounded. A jury of my peers might have loved to hear about that.

Or, I could select Option 2, which was to "accept my fate." I chose not to fight, because the uproar would have damaged the church. It was bad enough that the Session knew, but I did not want my situation to distract the overall ministry of the church. I had to speak with the Committee on Ministry of the Presbytery to negotiate my departure. I received

counsel and support from my wife's father, who is a Presbyterian pastor, and other pastors whom I knew. The Personnel committee gave me until July to find another position. 9 months was still not long enough, but I worked hard. I prayed hard. I asked God to present a church to me, and quickly. God answered prayers. By April a church came my way. In May I accepted the position to a church in Pennsylvania, and left the church in Ohio in June.

When we are in the thick of it, we want justice. When we know that we did not cause a certain thing to happen, and yet we have to put up with it, we want to find a quick fix. We want to be vindicated, and move on with our lives. And if somebody is causing us great pain by putting us through a situation, we want that person to pay. We might want that person or those people to suffer as we did.

In 1 Kings 2, Adonijah is treated unfairly. He should be the king by most accounts. His right was taken from him, and now he has to play second-fiddle to his younger brother Solomon. And now Adonijah has a choice. He could accept what God has given him. He can accept that he may never be the king, and that God truly wants Solomon to be the king for the sake of God's people. His half-brother Solomon

could give him a nifty title of honor, and lands, and money. If this was the Middle Ages, Solomon could grant Adonijah a castle or two, and the right to rule over a certain area of land as a lord to the king. All in all, Adonijah could live a comfortable life with what he already has, and what Solomon might give him. That is choice Number 1.

Choice Number 2, well, we read about it in 1 Kings 2. Adonijah quite innocently speaks with the queen mother, innocently requests one of Solomon's concubines as his wife. "If you could please," Adonijah says, "talk to Solomon. Tell him to give me Abishag as a wife." Such a small request, right, since we read in 1 Kings 11 that Solomon has 700 princesses and 300 concubines as wives. He wouldn't miss one concubine, right? He could easily replace Abishag, if he wanted.

However, what we don't understand is that the taking of just one concubine from the king's court is interpreted as claiming the throne for oneself. Adonijah is claiming the throne by wanting a piece of Solomon's property. If Adonijah just wants a small piece of Solomon's belongings, what is to hold him back from going after all of Solomon's belongings? And to go even further, this Abishag is the same person who cared for King David in his declining

years. She is the nurse who cared for David up to his death, and so it is possibly that David claimed Abishag as his concubine, and even as his property. That property, that Abishag, was given to Solomon as a gift from his father, the king. Adonijah wants to steal that gift, and thus could claim that David gave Abishag to him as a sign that David wanted him as king, not Solomon.

Adonijah knows exactly what he is doing, when he “innocently” makes a request before the queen mother. He chooses option Number 2, and goes after his brother quietly, so later he might go after him loudly. At the end of the story, we discover that Adonijah pays with his life.

We have been caught in these situations, when it was not our fault. Something unfair has happened to us, and now we have to suffer through it. However, we are not completely out of control. We do have choices in front of us. We can take steps that are constructive and not destructive.

The first thing we need to do is to think about ourselves. Self-preservation is the word. It's like having the air masks drop from the ceiling in an airplane: we have to put the mask over our faces first before helping anyone else.

Self-preservation in this case (when something unfair happens to us) does not mean fight and argue and try to win. In self-preservation, what we do is to pray. Sadly that might be a last thing we do, because we are too shocked and angry by what is happening to us. Our emotions are raw – our minds are running a mile a second. We are at wit's end, and we do not know what to do next. However, we have to pray. Prayer is the only lifeline we have in the middle of disturbing situations that will preserve us: our dignity, our compassion, our faith.

We pray for God to calm us down. That might take some time, and we may have to pray for calm throughout the entire unpleasant situation. But we need clarity of mind. We need our emotions to settle down. We need to pray for God to cool our jets, to take our stress down several notches. Again, we may need to pray this every single day. We pray and pray and pray for calm.

We also pray for any anger in us to go away. We don't want our anger to subside – it needs to be eliminated. Anger wants to relive how the situation began in the first place, and then we get stuck in the rut of “Why me? Why me?” Anger will cause us to make rash decisions. It wants to hurt the other person or people. It wants to argue and fight, adding



fuel to the fire, without calmly finding the way through. We need to pray that we don't give in to our anger – that it is eliminate totally – or it will consume us. Nothing will be solved.

We then have to think of the preservation of others. How are those around us affected by events that have taken place? Our spouses, our children, our friends, our church family, our coworkers. They could easily be drawn into the situation, whether it is their problem or not, and the ways we act might create undue stress and pain in their lives. Any decision we make will affect them, and we want to make sure the people we know and love are affected in positive ways. In my case, going after the Personnel Committee and the interim pastor might have satisfied some frustration within me, but that decision would have affected my wife negatively. The stress was already affecting the pregnancy, so I didn't have to add to it. It would have affected the whole church, people I cared about, and turn the entire congregation upside-down. It was enough that the Session was involved, and rightful so, but that was all. Nobody else needed to get caught in the vortex.

We pray that nobody becomes collateral damage by what is happening. We do not want our anger to

scorch everyone around us. We don't want to fight and argue, so that the strong relationships we have with others will break apart. We might be victims by what is happening, but not everybody else has to become victims, too.

In our prayers, we ask God to show us how each decision we make will affect the people around us, and we take steps not to harm them. We take steps to keep them out of the loop if necessary, especially if they do not need to be in the loop. We pray for the preservation of others, seeking God's ways to keep their love and integrity and faith in tact.

And, let us not forget, that even when something unfair happens to us, God is still at work. When the external locus of control occurs, when something happens out there that brings us stress and pain, we may feel we are out of control, but God is not. God still has a plan even amid the pain. He will make his plan come to maturity.

In my case, I realized I had to go, because God was opening doors for my departure. It was not within my timing to leave that church, and it was not the way I wanted to leave. But God had a larger plan, and it involved my wife and new son to go to PA and do some good ministry there. The time had come for that

church in Ohio to carry on with ministry without me. Almost a year ago, I visited that church with my family. We ran into the pastor serving there, whom I knew 15 plus years ago.<sup>2</sup> He showed us around the church, and talked about how the great ministry they are carrying out. My heart was gladdened by his news. That church in Ohio is going stronger, and I am going stronger in ministry. It is all water under the bridge.

God had a plan for the kingdoms of Israel and Judah. When King David died, it was God's plan to move Solomon to the throne. Adonijah might have been first in line, but he was not God's choice. God thought of the good of his people, and he wanted the right king to rule over them. Adonijah was being manipulated by advisers to get him to be king, so those advisers might become the power behind the throne. None of what they wanted to do would have had God's people in mind or God's best interests in mind. Solomon sought the wisdom of God, and he was the right choice.

Ultimately, we are God's people. We are God's servants. In the middle of the thickest problems, we still must act as God's people. We cannot play the victim in a problem, to the point that we bask in the

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<sup>2</sup> We even follow each other on Facebook.

light of everybody's sympathy. We cannot go on the attack in the name of getting even. We pray for guidance. We pray for God to take care of us, to take care of the people around us, and to take care of the situation.

Eventually all will pass, if we are prayerful servants of God. A year from now things will be different. Our faith will be stronger. Our love more open. We will be able to face anything, for God will see us through.