

A Statesman's Insights for Becoming a Statesman

In the history of imperfect humans as leaders, one stands out: King David of ancient Israel, who governed for 40 years. Our Creator described him:

I have found David My servant; I have anointed him I will also make him ... greatest of the kings of the earth (Psalm 89:20, 27).

I have found David ..., a man loyal to Me, who will carry out all My will. (Acts 13:22).

[King] David reigned ..., administering justice and righteousness for all his people (2 Samuel 8:15; 1 Chronicles 18:14).

During his 40 years of attempting to govern as our Creator's instrument, often stumbling due to his human weakness, he visualized what the ideal ruler would be like, based upon what he had learned, at the same time integrating this with his understanding of what Jesus' coming reign would look like. We learn about this composite picture through his aspirations for his son Solomon who would follow him on the throne. This is expressed in Psalm 72 as a prayer for Solomon. Truly, this represents the understanding on the part of one Statesman of what another Statesman would look like. Let us explore some of these insights from this passage. He begins:

God, give Your justice to the king and Your righteousness to the king's son. (Psalm 72:1).

King David is expressing the need for righteousness and justice, presumably with justice flowing from righteous behavior as foundational to being a good leader – a Statesman. And the righteousness that must serve as the basis is not merely human righteousness, but the righteousness of God provided by His cleansing, through Jesus. Then, based upon that righteousness, we must strive for justice by our actions.

King David reflects on what the resulting society will look like:

May the righteous flourish in his days and prosperity abound ... (Psalm 72:7).

King David is here arguing that the Statesman would, through his policies and actions, cause the honorable people – the pure-hearted – to thrive, not merely the corrupt and the powerful, as too often seems to be the case. And that prosperity would abound as a result of the good-hearted members of society thriving.

As a further result, King David proceeds:

Let all kings bow down to him (Psalm 72:11).

Seemingly, this respect for the Statesman would come from other national leaders out of respect for his achievements in serving his people. Again, I believe King David is visualizing Solomon's reign against an understanding of Jesus' coming reign and praying that Solomon will reign as Jesus will, based on his own partial understanding of Jesus' coming reign.

King David then illuminates what he believes will be some of the motivations for the Statesman:

For he will rescue the poor who cry out and the afflicted who have no helper (Psalm 72:12).

The heart attitude includes rescuing the poor and the afflicted. What will rescuing the poor look like? We can expect this to go far beyond welfare programs that might create a dependence upon government and may in turn help the leader remain in office. Seemingly, with the help of God's wisdom, it will entail policies that will truly set the poor and entrapped free.

King David continues, giving us further insight:

He will have pity on the poor and helpless and save the lives of the poor (Psalm 72:13).

"Pity on the poor" connotes deep, heartfelt compassion that will drive the Statesman to act to "save the lives of the poor", indicating taking strong action on their behalf. King David goes deeper:

He will redeem them from oppression and violence, for their lives are precious in his sight (Psalm 72:14).

Redeem, as used here, means "To deliver, to purchase, or to ransom, such as to free a person from bondage by payment." Applying this to those entrapped in oppression and violence, the implication here is that the poor do not simply suffer from poverty but that they are further taken advantage of by the more powerful due to their helplessness. Hence, this statement also implies actively removing the threat of violence against them, as they may be unable to do this for themselves.

Caring for the lives of the poor and oppressed is not to be viewed as a hinderance to achieving one's grand dreams for the development of the nation. Rather, the lives of the poor and the powerless are to be viewed as just as valuable to the nation as those of the rich and powerful. In fact, they are also to be recognized as created in the image of God, with the amazing potential this offers, and need to be set free to achieve all this entails. They need to live with hope and dream of achieving this. The clear implication here is that those once considered weak and a drain can be expected to become a strong asset to the nation. Hence the motivation for these efforts:

For their lives are precious in his sight (Psalm 72:14).

From King David's point of view, this is the heart attitude that drives the Statesman – viewing the lives of those served as precious and valuable.

All this leads to an often overlooked component in the effectiveness of the Statesman:

May prayer be offered for him [the leader, the Statesman] continually, and may he be blessed all day long. (Psalm 72:15).

This reflects the partnership between the people governed and the leader – the governed continually appealing to our Creator to give guidance, wisdom, and favor to the good leader as he must act in the face of challenges beyond his ability in service to the people.

This leads to the accomplishment envisioned by King David, expressed:

May there be plenty of grain in the land... May people flourish in the cities like the grass of the field (Psalm 72:16).

The result of this kind of leadership is expected to be associated with prosperity and abundance – literally, the people flourishing.

And the consequences for this leader:

May his name endure forever; as long as the sun shines, may his fame increase (Psalm 72:17).

May he be remembered as a great and honorable leader, literally, a Statesman. King David had laid out how he understood his son Solomon could be remembered as a Statesman.

Of further significance:

May all nations be blessed by him and call him blessed (Psalm 72:17).

His good governance can be expected to contribute to well-being not only in the leader's own nation, but in nations throughout the world. The actions of the true Statesman can be expected to ultimately contribute to the betterment of all humanity, as we see resulting from more recent Statesmen: William Wilberforce, Abraham Lincoln, George C. Marshall, Nelson Mandela.

To summarize, King David, one of the great Statesmen of all time, based upon what our Creator had taught him about governing from his own successes and failures, and his limited knowledge of what Jesus' future reign would be like, shared these perspectives on what a Statesman would do in heart and action.

APPLICATION FOR THE STATESMAN

1. Can I truly see myself as God's instrument in the lives of those for whom I am responsible, as King David clearly understood we must be?
2. In my desire to be the kind of leader King David described, what would God have me to do?
3. For example, when I embrace the heart attitude toward the poor and disadvantaged that King David advocated – "they are precious in his sight" – what steps must I take?