

1 Samuel Devotionals 2

1 Samuel DEVOTIONALS

Today in the Word Moody Bible Institute

1 Samuel 1

1 Samuel 1:1-20

I was pouring out my soul to the Lord... out of my great anguish and grief. - 1 Samuel 1:15-16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Art and Mindy Paveleski wanted a baby. But they'd married later in life, and two years after their marriage Mindy was still not pregnant. They visited a doctor, who put Mindy on a fertility drug, but to no avail. So they visited another doctor, who told them that for the price of a new car they could slightly increase their chances for a pregnancy.

Art and Mindy decided not to pursue that option, instead trusting God for divine intervention if He wanted them to have a baby. They continued praying, along with many of their friends, taking their heart's desire to the Lord. Two months later, they discovered Mindy was pregnant!

Ryan Edward Paveleski was born on June 25, 1996 a normal, healthy, active baby, an answer to prayer! In today's reading, Hannah takes her prayer for a baby to the Lord, and her prayer is also granted with the birth of Samuel.

This month we will study the life of Samuel, who is regarded as a transitional figure in the history of Israel. He acted as the last of the judges, anointed the first two kings, and also functioned as a prophet.

But before he began to function in any of these roles, Samuel was first a prayer in his mother's heart. Although Hannah had her husband's love, she had no children a source of pain to her personally. And since her barrenness was a serious strike against her in that culture, Peninnah used it as an emotional weapon against her (v. 6).

During one of their annual trips to the tabernacle, Hannah offered a prayer and a vow to the Lord. If He would give her a son, she would dedicate him to God for his entire life (v. 11). This was not a 'bargain' with God, but a sign of the depth of her desire and commitment.

Because Hannah was praying so intensely, Eli, the priest in charge, thought she was drunk. God, on the other hand, saw her heart and answered her prayer. She bore a son, whom she named 'Samuel,' meaning 'heard of God' (v. 20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In today's Scripture reading, Hannah takes the deepest, most painful problem in her life to the Lord. She doesn't try to pretend that 'everything is all right,' but submits her wants to the sovereignty of God (vv. 10-11). She does right to take her pain to God His love and power are her only hope.

What about you? Do you dare to take that issue to God, the issue that causes such grief, such hurt, the one you've hidden away? Do you have the faith to trust Him with that, too?

If you need some help doing this in your prayer time, consider using one of the psalms that honestly expresses negative emotions (e.g., Psalm 13).

1 Samuel 1:1-28

I will fulfill my vows to the LORD in the presence of all his people. - Psalm 116:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Many years ago, a young mother was making her way on foot across the hills of South Wales, carrying her infant son. A blinding

blizzard overtook the pair, and the mother never reached her destination. Searchers found her lifeless body, with the baby snuggled beneath her, warm and alive. She had wrapped her outer clothing and scarf around the boy and then covered him with her own body. That baby grew up to be David Lloyd George, British Prime Minister and one of England's greatest statesmen. No little doubt that Hannah would gladly have made the ultimate sacrifice for her baby if God had required it. We could fill a library with the volumes that have been written about the impact of this faithful mother and it would not be an overstatement. This godly woman wanted a child so much that her anguished prayer at the tabernacle in Shiloh drew the attention of the priest Eli (vv. 12-14). conceive. But she stands out in our survey of people who made a difference because she made an extraordinary vow to the Lord and kept it. Hannah's faithfulness was key to the way God used her son, Samuel, to touch the nation Israel. Her vow was sincere. She promised God that if He would give her a son, she would give him back all the days of his life (v. 11). Samuel was still a toddler when his mother brought him to Eli at Shiloh, the worship center in those days. t let God answer to her prayer give her amnesia concerning her vow. If we were not careful, we can make promises to God in times of need that we forget about later. Humanly speaking, it could not have been easy for Hannah to leave Samuel at the tabernacle at such a tender age. But she had made a vow. was a way of life for her and her husband, Elkanah, Hannah felt at home in the tabernacle pouring out her heart to God (vv. 3-7). And God heard her cry. Have you ever made a vow to God? It can be a great moment of commitment, as it was for Hannah. because God has a blessing for you in it. Heres a vow you may want to make to the Lord today: to be consistent this month, even this year, in your appointment with Him in daily prayer and Bible study.

1 Samuel 1:20 2 Timothy 1:3-7

Hannah... named him Samuel, saying, "Because I asked the Lord for him." - 1 Samuel 1:20

TODAY IN THE WORD

Evangelist Billy Sunday told of a minister who was calling on his people. He came to one home and asked the girl who answered the door if he might talk to her mother. "No," she replied, "mother prays from nine to ten." The minister waited for forty minutes; and when the mother came out, her face was so radiant that he understood why her oldest daughter was a missionary and her two sons were in the ministry. Billy Sunday added, "All hell cannot tear a boy or a girl away from a praying mother."

1 Samuel 1:21-28

I prayed for this child, and the Lord has granted me what I asked of him. - 1 Samuel 1:27

TODAY IN THE WORD

God had promised Abraham that he would be the 'father of many nations' but late in life he and Sarah had no children. Now she was past the age of childbearing. How could God's promise be fulfilled?

One day three strangers visited their tent. One of them was the Lord Himself, who made Abraham an extraordinary promise: 'I will surely return to you about this time next year, and Sarah your wife will have a son' (Gen. 18:10). When she heard this, Sarah, who was eavesdropping, laughed to herself and thought, 'After I am worn out and my master is old, will I now have this pleasure?' (v. 12).

The Lord spoke truly, of course, and just as He had said, Sarah gave birth to Isaac. She rejoiced: 'God has brought me laughter, and everyone who hears about this will laugh with me' (21:6).

Like Sarah, Hannah experienced the joy of seeing God accomplish the 'impossible' and discovered that nothing is too hard for the Lord (Gen. 18:14). Hannah's name means 'grace' or 'favor,' which God surely showed her in granting her a son.

Then came the time for Hannah to keep her vow. After Samuel was weaned probably at about age three she took him to Shiloh, along with a special offering to show her gratitude to God. Just as she had promised, her son would serve the Lord in the tabernacle, the spiritual center of Israel at that time.

Given Israel's spiritual state then something we'll learn more about tomorrow Eli may have been surprised that Hannah kept her vow. After all, she could have made excuses the boy was too young or Israel's spiritual life was too corrupt. But she understood the serious nature of a vow and faithfully kept her promise to the Lord.

Though surely Hannah and Samuel experience the normal emotions of a mother and child being separated, the mood here is not one of despair or sorrow, but rather of celebration and thankfulness. God changed grief into joy!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Hannah's dedication of her son Samuel to the Lord is a beautiful picture of what we as Christian parents can do today.

Have you dedicated your child or children to the Lord? At many churches, this simple ceremony involves standing before your

congregation and committing to be godly parents a public promise to trust God with all your parenting challenges and with your child's future. Often the church body responds with a similar pledge to be a loving, supporting community. If you haven't done this, why not talk to your pastor soon?

What is the spiritual significance of a baby dedication in your church? Discuss this issue with your pastor or an elder.

1 Samuel 2

1 Samuel 2:2 Luke 1:39-55

There is no one holy like the Lord; there is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. - 1 Samuel 2:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Uffizi Gallery in Florence, Italy, contains some of the world's most famous art pieces, including works by Leonardo da Vinci and Sandro Botticelli. Perhaps less well-known is a remarkable piece by Mariotto Albertinelli entitled "Visitation," dated 1503. In elegant simplicity, the artist depicts Elizabeth, heavy with child, tenderly greeting Mary. Elizabeth's robes are painted in warm, golden tones, and Mary's robes are regal blue and crimson. As the two women greet each other, you can almost hear their amazement and reverence for their miraculous pregnancies. The painting invites the viewer to join in this hushed worship.

1 Samuel 2:1-11

There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God. - 1 Samuel 2:2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Throughout history, men and women of faith have been characterized by their willingness to give anything they had back to God.

Abraham was willing to sacrifice his own son, trusting God to fulfill His promise of a mighty nation of Abraham's descendants.

Moses' parents hid him in a basket in the Nile River, trusting God to protect him from Pharaoh's wrath against the Hebrews.

And D. L. Moody, the founder of the Moody Bible Institute, gave up an enormously successful career in sales to dedicate his life to full-time ministry in evangelism.

Each of these people acknowledged that all of creation belongs to God, and each time God rewarded their sacrifice with greater blessings.

With the same faith in God's sovereignty, Hannah gave her only son, for whom she had prayed years in advance. And she praised the Lord for His loving answer to her anguished prayer, commemorating Samuel's dedication at the tabernacle, and telling a God-glorifying story of spiritual victory.

Who is God? He is the deliverer, the holy one, the Rock, the just judge, and the one who changes people's intentions and their lives (vv. 1-6, 9-10). He is sovereign and omnipotent, as well as compassionate and loving (vv. 7-10).

That Hannah can rejoice even as she must say farewell to her son proves her godly priorities. Loving and trusting God comes ahead even of loving her dear son a lesson Abraham had also been taught earlier in the Old Testament (Gen. 22:1-19).

Hannah finds delight in God's power and rulership over all creation. This means that in the long run, righteousness is protected and evil is punished (1 Sam. 2:9). True strength is God's alone (v. 10)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Hannah celebrated Samuel the answer to her special prayer with the joyful psalm of praise found in today's reading. What a creative, heartfelt way to thank the Lord!

Why not find a creative way to thank God for a recent answer to prayer in your life? Several ideas might include: (1) Like Hannah, write a psalm. Focus less on the specifics of your prayer, and more on God's attributes as shown through His answer. (2) Draw a 'before and after' picture to show the difference the answered prayer has made in your life. (3) Or follow through on another creative idea of your own!

1 Samuel 2:7 1 Timothy 6:17-19; Ephesians 4:28

The Lord sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts. - 1 Samuel 2:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

A store in an affluent beach community in Florida recently offered its upscale customers a new kind of gift wrapping paper: uncut sheets of \$2 bills. The sheets contain thirty-two bills each, and are big enough to wrap a gift about the size of a shirt box. The cost for this gift wrap greenery is \$110 per sheet. Stories such as this may give a newscaster an offbeat way to end a broadcast, but the mindset that's behind this kind of excess isn't a laughing matter. It flies in the face of the attitude God's Word commands us to take toward our financial resources. Here's one problem with using our money and other possessions for silly excess. It helps breed--or maybe just reveals--an attitude of arrogant self-sufficiency that God rejects. The Word forbids this attitude, in fact (v. 17).

Another problem with letting our attitudes get out of hand is that we are tempted to replace trust in God with trust in our bank accounts. That's bad for two reasons. First, it's idolatry to put anything in God's place. Second, placing our trust in material wealth is like trying to grab a fistful of sand. In a great understatement, Paul says wealth is ""very uncertain.""

But the Bible doesn't just give us the negative side. The cure for greed and misplaced trust in money is ""to do good, to be rich in good deeds, and to be generous and willing to share"" (v. 18).

By doing these acts of Christian mercy and service, Paul says we will ""lay up treasure for [our]selves"" (v. 19). He could have said ""treasure in heaven,"" because the apostle's instruction here echoes the teaching of Jesus in Matthew 6:19-21 (see the June 19 study).

Paul's reference to the ""coming age"" is another example of how often the Bible ties our attitude toward money to the kingdom of God and eternity. Financial counselors often advise their clients to invest for the ""long haul."" Paul would certainly agree with that! You can't take a longer view than to use your resources to store up for yourself eternal wealth.

There's another benefit for the God-honoring use of our money. Good stewardship helps us take hold of real life. That is, managing our assets with God's kingdom in mind helps us enjoy now the eternal life God has given us (v. 19).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

A generous, sharing spirit is a good antidote against developing a bad case of greed--the ""gimmies.""

All of us need to learn how to give, children included. This summer is a good time to help the child in your life put together some baskets or bags of personal items and/or food to take to the local homeless shelter, crisis pregnancy center, or other ministry to hurting people. You might also suggest the project to your Sunday school class or Bible study group.

1 Samuel 2:11-18; 3:1-11

Speak, for your servant is listening. - 1 Samuel 3:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

When the reformer John Calvin first arrived in Geneva, he found a city in moral, political, and spiritual chaos. Violence and vice were common, and Christianity was only accepted as long as it did not make any real demands on the people. Calvin found this state of affairs intolerable and went to work to improve it. One historian says that Calvin preaching and public influence helped turn one of Europe's most licentious cities into the cradle of Protestantism. His life was a ringing testimony to what one person can do. So was the life of Samuel, the boy who grew up in the Lord's house. prayer. He was set apart for God's service as a very small child. Having a mother like Hannah gave Samuel a great spiritual start in life. And it soon became obvious that he too was a person who had a great heart for the Lord. lay on his bed one night. The story has a charming, innocent feel to it as it is told in most children's Bible story books, and it is a wonderful story. storybook kind. This lad was living in the midst of scandalous corruption in God's house, as today's reading makes clear. Later we learn that they were committing immorality (2:22) and that Eli made only a halfhearted attempt to discipline them (v. 23). In fact, verse 25 makes the startling declaration that God had pronounced these young men worthy of death! in today's verse, set the stage for Samuel's distinguished life of service as Israel's last prophet. His faithfulness saw Israel through a spiritually desperate period in its history. Samuel's response to the Lord is a great prayer for any believer of any age to offer. Listen, Lord, for your servant is speaking, while the attitude of Samuel says, Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. Of course, we are right to make our needs and requests known to the Lord. But we also need to nurture the heart attitude of a listener, for 's Spirit will not try to shout the world to get our attention. Are you ready to listen today?

1 Samuel 2:11-36

I will raise up for myself a faithful priest, who will do according to what is in my heart and mind. - 1 Samuel 2:35

TODAY IN THE WORD

Late one evening, two fishermen were caught in a sudden storm on the sea. Unable to row to shore, the men endured a wet, fearful night of stinging rain and swelling waves. After the storm had passed, but still uncertain of their fate, they found comfort in glimpses of a lighthouse beacon in the distant horizon. Darkness was all about them, but hints of hope remained.

Today's passage is much like this ocean scene: darkness and dreadful judgment pervade the story, but glimpses of hope relentlessly break through. The opening verses record the disturbing truth about the spiritual leadership in Israel. Although the Law guaranteed sacrificial meat portions for all priests (see Lev. 7:28-36), Eli's sons greedily and irreverently took more. Furthermore, they engaged in sexual immorality with the sanctuary women. Finally, although Eli knew of his sons' sinful behavior, he failed to discipline them beyond a verbal slap on the wrist. In short, the spiritual leadership in Israel was a sinful mess.

Unlike Eli, God's response was decisive and severe: although He had blessed Eli's line with the honor of the priesthood, their sin would now bring generational punishment. Eli's line would be removed from honor and placed in utter disdain (vv. 27-36). These were hard words, both for Eli and his family, but also for the entire nation of Israel—their divinely appointed spiritual leadership had just come under severe judgment.

Yet in this dark and dreadful moment, there are glimpses of hope. It is easy to overlook, but Scripture is careful to repeat that behind all this wickedness and sin there is one—Samuel—who is quietly and faithfully serving the Lord (vv. 11, 18-21, 26). And then there is that more ultimate promise that God will “raise up for myself a faithful priest who will do according to what is in my heart and mind” (v. 35), reminding us that even in the dark moments of our lives, we still have Christ, our “faithful high priest” who makes “atonement for the sins of the people” (Heb. 2:17).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

There are two equally inappropriate responses to the sin we see in ourselves and in our spiritual leaders. One is, like Eli, to turn a blind eye to it. The other is to fall into despair, believing that even God cannot rescue us from such a desperate situation. Today's passage turns us from both paths and offers a third option: confess and rebuke sin, and also trust in God's redemption. Spend time today confessing your sins and also praying for God's care over the leaders in your own church.

1 Samuel 2:12-26

The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men. - 1 Samuel 2:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the hardest times in parenthood comes while the child is 'sleeping like a baby.' In other words, the baby's crying in the middle of the night.

Many times, parents can't resist running in to hold the baby or to calm the child with a bottle of milk. As this trend continues over the years, those parents soon learn that they have not taught the child discipline. The ability to say 'no' to a child can frame an entire lifetime of behavior.

Catering to a child's every whim can teach children to have a very selfish attitude. Without a loving firmness toward children, parents meet the child's strongest desires, but ignore their child's best interests.

Parents who love their children must discipline them (Proverbs 13:24; 19:18). Lenience in the guise of kindness only spoils children. Perhaps that's where Eli failed as a father to his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas. They were wicked priests, who bullied the worshippers and dared to put themselves ahead of God in the offering sequence (1 Sam. 2:17). Eli was aware not only of these sins, but also of his sons' sexual immorality (they were probably imitating neighboring pagan practices).

The contrast with Samuel could not be more obvious. His mother's faithfulness was rewarded God blessed her with five more children. Samuel's own growth in the Lord (v. 26; cf. Prov. 3:1-4) was explicitly echoed later in the Bible, in reference to our Lord Jesus Christ (Lk. 2:52)!

That verse in Luke 2 isn't the only parallel. As with Jesus, Samuel's birth was a miracle of God. And like Jesus' mother (Lk. 1:46-55), Samuel's mother responded with words of praise. Most importantly, the child Samuel was learning to walk in righteousness and to follow the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As you know, this month's study focuses on the life of Samuel and the early history of Israel under the kings. As we study, we'll discover how crucial the righteousness of individual leaders is to the fate of the nation.

On this Independence Day in the United States, it seems especially appropriate to pray for our nation's leaders (1 Tim. 2:1-2). Pray

that integrity will be a high priority in their lives. Pray that those who do not know God will be brought to an understanding of who He is. Pray that Christians in politics will have special wisdom for how to lead godly lives in this difficult arena.

Remember that the Lord is sovereign in the area of politics (Prov. 21:1), just as He is in all other areas of life.

1 Samuel 2:12-36

He who obeys instructions guards his life, but he who is contemptuous of his ways will die. - Proverbs 19:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 2002, George W. Bush initiated the President's Corporate Fraud Task Force to investigate and prosecute white-collar crimes like money laundering, accounting fraud, and insider trading. In the first five years of its existence, the task force secured the convictions of 214 CEOs and presidents, 53 CFOs, 23 corporate counsels or attorneys, and 129 vice presidents—over 1,200 of the most powerful people in America have been imprisoned as criminals.

What causes a leader to become corrupt? One factor is contempt for his or her position of authority. When that leader is representative of God, the punishment is far worse than prison. Hophni and Phinehas treated the sacred sacrifices like their own personal barbecue. They completely ignored the Levitical guidelines for the portions of meat reserved for the priests (Lev. 7:34) and the restrictions against eating fat or blood (Lev. 3:16-17). They desecrated their roles as priests with their immorality (v. 22). Eli correctly accused them of sinning against God, and there would be no one to intercede for them (v. 25). How could anyone associated with a divinely appointed office stoop to such lows? They weren't acquainted with God in the least (v. 12).

Eli's sons thought only of themselves. We'll focus on Eli's passive approach to their wickedness later in the month, but the sons should have known better without being told. Their actions showed no respect for the sacrifices of the people or the God to whom they were sacrificing. They effectively put themselves in the place of God as the object of worship.

The judgment was appropriately harsh for Eli and his family. The Lord pronounced a shift away from the ancestral line of Levi, a transfer from the arrangement that began at the beginning of Israel's existence as a nation but in keeping with the warnings issued at the time (Num. 18:1). The Levites were responsible for sins against the priesthood, so the entire tribe suffered the consequences of Eli's sons' evil ways.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Peter calls believers members of a holy priesthood (1 Peter 2:5), so the question naturally arises: are we as believers ever guilty of showing contempt for our privileged position? It's a question of selfishness or selflessness. When our Christianity becomes more of a status symbol than a standard of service, we begin using our priesthood for our own benefit. The only true fix for this problem, though, isn't to increase service; it's to humbly draw closer to God.

1 Samuel 2:30 Ezra 7:11-28

Those who honor me I will honor. - 1 Samuel 2:30

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to a recent newspaper story, some local governments of the United States have come up with a variation on the idea of prepaid expenses. The new initiative includes prepaid traffic tickets, which means putting money on deposit with the local authorities so that if you are stopped for speeding, your ticket has already been paid. Some people, bothered by the idea, see it as giving drivers permission to speed. Those who object to the concept of prepaid speeding tickets have a point. Human nature is such that it's hard to be good and it's easy to abuse a privilege when the bill has already been paid. All of the expenses for Ezra's trip back to Jerusalem, and his ongoing needs in Israel (and then some), were "prepaid" by the generosity of the Persian king Artaxerxes. Ezra carried with him a sizable wealth that had been entrusted to his care, and he didn't abuse this privilege.

1 Samuel 3

1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a

The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. - 1 Samuel 3:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the field of combat, any soldier knows the importance of a properly working communication system. With it, soldiers receive the necessary instructions for deployment and military strategy. A malfunctioning radio can create hesitation, delay, and potential

danger. Being able to receive the commanding officer's words of instruction could mean the difference between life and death.

The same is true for God's people receiving God's word. Israel's preceding history demonstrates this truth. The book of Judges describes the repeated sinfulness of the people, declaring that "everyone did as he saw fit" (17:6; 21:25). Following the period of the judges, 1 Samuel 2 highlights the corruption of the spiritual leadership as well. Our text today indicates the reason: "In those days the word of the Lord was rare" (3:1). When the gift of God's word is absent, the people suffer; where God's word comes forth, there is blessing. Amos 8:11 declares that the greatest famine any people face is "a famine of hearing the words of the Lord" (8:11).

Fortunately, God does not leave His people to such famines. Note two things that we learn about God and His word from today's passage. First, God is patient and persistent in bringing His word to His people. He must call Samuel four separate times before He gets the proper response (3:2-10). Second, although God's word is necessary for spiritual health and renewal, sometimes it is a difficult word about sin and disobedience (3:11-18). The true gospel of Christ is not just a message of love and forgiveness, but first a message about our own sin. We must learn to receive all of God's word.

Through Samuel, God patiently delivered His difficult but saving word to His people. What began with the rarity of God's word now ends with a new era where a faithful God brings forth His word "to all Israel" (4:1). And that word continues even today. Where in the past God spoke through prophets like Samuel, today "He has spoken to us by his Son" (Heb. 1:2). Are we prepared to listen?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Even today in a church-filled, Bible-filled nation, the word of God can be a rarity, not just when the word fails to be preached, but also when we refuse to listen. The psalmist warns: "Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts" (95:7-8). Have your ears perhaps become deaf to God's word through resistance or neglect? Make today the day you renew your attention to God's word, asking Him to open your ears to what He might be saying to you this month.

1 Samuel 3:1-21

The Lord disciplines those he loves, as a father the son he delights in. - Proverbs 3:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Criminal negligence is an act of omission in which a person fails to foresee the consequences of a situation and then fails to take reasonable action to prevent harm from taking place. An individual convicted of negligence is considered dangerous to society because he or she doesn't have the sense to protect others from avoidable suffering or loss.

In God's judgment, Eli was found guilty of negligence as a priest and as a father. As we studied earlier in the month from 1 Samuel 2, Eli's sons committed multiple despicable sins against God. They abused their office as priests and showed contempt for the Lord and those who worshiped Him. If we removed his sons from the equation, Eli would appear to have been a humble man of God with a heart for serving Him. But taking the full picture into account, Eli was a failure. A parent can't be held accountable for all the sins of their children, but Eli let their sin go completely unchecked, even allowing them to keep their positions of service.

One item in question is just how much Eli knew about his sons' behavior. Chapter 2 indicates that Eli was very old when he finally learned of everything they had done (2:22), but today's reading implies he had knowledge of their sin (v. 13). It's likely that he knew they were sinning but turned a blind eye to the full extent of their misdeeds. Then, when rumors of all they had done finally reached his ears, it was much too late to do anything about it.

Eli's sin is another instance of a failure to embrace the truth. But unlike jealousy (which leads to wrath against another person) and pride (which results in self-service and self-promotion), Eli's sin brought about no action at all. The judgment against his family effectively ended his service for the Lord, and pointed to the beginning of a new priestly ministry through Samuel. Eli's reaction of resignation is sad, for it reaffirms that Eli had a good heart—he just lacked a backbone.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Do you have the courage to stand up to sin when the offending party is someone you love? Don't wait for things to work out on their own. Sin doesn't dissipate; it festers and grows. Address your friend or loved one before the sin takes hold even deeper. But before you do, ask God to show you where you are guilty, and be sensitive toward anything you may have done to contribute negatively to the situation. If you're seeking growth and change, humility is vital.

1 Samuel 3:1-21

Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening. - 1 Samuel 3:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 386 A.D., Augustine had reached a crisis in his spiritual search. He had tried various beliefs and philosophies and was unsatisfied. He'd rejected Christianity, but then found that his arguments and objections had all been stripped away.

One day, Augustine heard a child's voice saying, 'Take up and read; take up and read.' Receiving this as God's direction, he picked up a Bible and flipped it open to Romans 13:13-14: 'Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in orgies and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and jealousy. Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.'

'As I came to the end of the sentence,' he wrote later, 'it was as though the light of faith flooded into my heart and all the darkness of doubt was dispelled.' Augustine answered God's call he would later become an important leader and theologian in church history!

Similarly, Samuel responded obediently to God's call in today's reading, and took his first step down the road to changing history. Though it took Eli several tries to realize that God was speaking, he gave his protégé the right advice. Samuel's attitude was willing and obedient: Here I am (v. 10). This was his first personal encounter with God, the first time the word of the Lord was revealed to him (v. 7).

Samuel's call also defined the judgment on Eli's family. God's message to Samuel was not the first such judgment (see 2:27-36), nor was Eli surprised, knowing his sons' sin against God's holiness. He seemed resigned, recognizing the justice in the judgment and his own failings as a parent (3:13).

Today's narrative defines the end of Samuel's childhood and the beginning of his early ministry. The reading closes with another summary of his growth and development. God was with him, and everyone could see it (vv. 19-21)!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God had to call Samuel three times in today's reading before he gave the answer God was looking for. Sadly, hearing God's voice was a rare experience in those days (v. 1).

But how different are we today? Sometimes we do all the talking, pouring out many words before the Lord without staying to hear His response. If God wants to speak to you today, will He find you listening?

This week, purposefully include a period of listening in your prayer times. Simply tell God that your ears and heart are open to whatever He wants to say to you, then wait in expectation. Clear your mind of distracting thoughts and sit at His feet, enjoying His presence.

1 Samuel 3:1-21

The boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with men. - 1 Samuel 2:26

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jason McElwain had been on the bench for every high school varsity basketball game, but he had never suited up—he was the team manager, and he was autistic. But on Senior Night, the coach added him to the roster and gave him a uniform, promising that if the team had a big enough lead, he would put Jason in the game. With three minutes to go, he called Jason off the bench. The boy who had never been in a game before proceeded to score 20 points in three minutes, and he was carried off the court in jubilation by his teammates.

In our reading today we see the story of Samuel, another young man who received a call and was willing to respond to the dramatic message from God.

The specific context was that Samuel's mother, Hannah, had prayed that God would give her a son, and when He answered that prayer she dedicated Samuel to the Lord's service (see 1 Sam. 1:11). The cultural context was the time of the judges, when the people did evil and sinned against the Lord (see Judg. 21:25). In fact, Scripture says, "In those days the word of the Lord was rare; there were not many visions" (v. 1).

When Samuel first heard God calling him, he thought it was the priest Eli, and he responded. Eli realized that the Lord was calling Samuel and instructed Samuel what to say. Samuel obeyed exactly what Eli said; when the Lord called again, he was willing to hear (vv. 9-10).

The word that Samuel received from God wasn't cheery. Understandably, Samuel was reluctant to repeat the message to Eli, but he honestly recounted the word of the Lord though it contained the prophecy of the destruction of Eli's family as judgment for their sin. Eli's sons had been blatantly wicked before God and Eli had not restrained them, but now Samuel was obedient and responsive to God's call. At last the word of the Lord again came to the people through Samuel (v. 21).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Samuel was willing to hear and speak the word of God, even though the Lord gave him a painful truth to proclaim. It's easy to proclaim news that people want to hear or information that makes people feel good. Are we as willing to be obedient when we have to share the truth that people don't want to hear? If you struggle with this, ask God to give you the courage to speak the truth even in difficult circumstances. Remember, we seek His approval, not the applause of others.

1 Samuel 3:10 1 Kings 19:1-18; Psalm 46

Then Samuel said [to the Lord], "Speak, for your servant is listening." - 1 Samuel 3:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Lord, I know not what I ought to ask of thee ... I simply present myself before thee, I open my heart to thee... I am silent; I offer myself in sacrifice; I yield myself to thee; I would have no other desire than to accomplish thy Will. Teach me to pray. Pray thyself in me. Amen.—François Fénelon

Ole Hallesby shares a significant incident in his book, *Prayer*. Although his young son knew that he was not supposed to disturb his father during work hours, the boy nevertheless came into his father's office one day and said, "Papa, dear, I will sit still all the time if you will only let me be here with you!"

For many of us, however, simply wanting to "sit still" with the Lord may not be our daily experience. We are more comfortable doing things for God and speaking to Him than simply listening to Him.

Sometimes we aren't even sure how to listen to God. The Lord spoke to Elijah in "a gentle whisper" (v. 12), but we may prefer a great shout! Our culture suggests that "louder is better" and more important.

1 Samuel 4

1 Samuel 4:1b-22

If my people ... seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven. - 2 Chronicles 7:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Trends in religion may reflect the rise of popular self-help "spirituality." One self-proclaimed neo-pagan writer, for example, suggests that charms, amulets, and talismans can help you "gain more self-assurance, power, and control over every aspect of your life." Most Christians know to avoid such practices, but other ways to replace God with a subtle version of lucky charms may appear. In some instances, as in today's reading, a good luck charm can even appear under the guise of fervent piety.

Israel had just suffered defeat at the hands of the Philistines and now wondered why. Rather than turn to God in prayer, repentance, and covenant renewal (cf. Deut. 29:25), Israel chose another course: bring out the ark of the covenant "so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies" (v. 3). True, the ark was the sign of God's presence and victory over enemies (Ex. 25:10-22; Num. 10:35). And true, the ark had gone before Israel when they entered the Promised Land, crossing the Jordan (see Joshua 3-4). From one perspective, this looks like a faithful recovery of the centrality of God in Israel.

Yet, underlying their actions, Israel was operating on the false assumption that they could force God's hand. Surely God would save them rather than suffer defeat and the shaming of His name! The ark had become a pious version of a superstitious lucky charm, what one scholar calls a "rabbit-foot theology."

Observe the consequences of Israel's poor theology: another terrible defeat and the death of 30,000 soldiers, Eli's sons, Eli himself, and Eli's daughter-in-law. But at center stage is the ark's capture, mentioned seven different times in just eleven verses (vv. 11-22). The greatest tragedy of this brief episode was not military defeat, but the departure of God Himself from Israel. The lesson is an important one: our holy and powerful God is not some useful amulet for our well-being, but a Lord who calls us to blessing through repentance and humble obedience.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Through today's reading you may have realized ways, even seemingly pious ways, in which you have been trying to force God's hand. Perhaps you have been using certain prayer "techniques," church attendance, or even service projects as a means of bartering with God or forcing Him to act for your benefit. Make a list of such misguided attitudes or practices in your life and seek God's forgiveness. Then ask God to show you ways to love and worship Him without trying to manipulate Him for your own personal gain.

1 Samuel 5

1 Samuel 5:1-12

You shall have no other gods before me. - Exodus 20:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

The ark of the covenant was the most sacred part of Israel's identity. It had been crafted according to the precise instructions given by God (see Ex. 25:1-22; 37:1-9), and the glory of God's presence rested above the atonement cover (see Lev. 16:2; Num. 7:89). Through His presence over the ark, God led His people; it represented His power, protection, guidance, and holiness. Most importantly, it embodied Israel's relationship to God, their identity as His people.

But by the time of our passage, the Israelites had come to view the ark as little more than a lucky charm, a totem they could trot on to the battlefield whenever they wanted success (1 Sam. 4:1-11). God's power and presence can never be treated like a rabbit's foot. The Israelites were routed in battle, and the Philistines captured the ark.

This hardly seems like the setup for a funny story! But in the middle of these dark days for Israel, God had a joke to play on the false gods of the Philistines and a lesson to teach about divine power. Pleased with their victory, the Philistines installed the ark of God in the temple of their god, Dagon. Capturing an enemy's god was considered proof that the god of the victorious nation was superior.

But the next morning, Dagon—supposedly triumphant on the battlefield—was found lying facedown before the ark! Scripture makes sure we don't miss the humorous fact that Dagon couldn't even pick himself back up—his priests had to stand him in his place. The next day things got worse for Dagon. The idol was found facedown before the ark, with his head and hands broken off.

The Lord wasn't done making his point about the powerlessness of idols. The Philistines became afflicted with tumors, sometimes translated as tumors in the groin. The location is significant—Dagon was a Baal or fertility god. These tumors were a further demonstration of Dagon's complete failure as a god. The Philistines now couldn't wait to send the ark of the Lord back to Israel.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The Israelites believed that God was powerful but thought they could manipulate that power in whatever way they chose. The Philistines believed God was powerless and thought they could make Him subservient to their own idolatrous agenda. Ultimately, both thought they could dictate terms to God. We who have access to the throne of grace must never presume to manipulate or minimize God. He is our loving Father and also the Holy Judge, the almighty Creator, and the Alpha and Omega.

1 Samuel 7

1 Samuel 7:3

Commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only. - 1 Samuel 7:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

In one of his most well-known books, famed psychologist Dr. Robert J. Stenberg took a unique approach to the study of the human intellect. The subjects that he and his colleagues studied were among the smartest people throughout modern history. But the focus of their study was not the mental composition that gave these great minds their genius—instead, they explored their most foolish mistakes. The book is aptly titled, *Why Smart People Can Be So Stupid*.

1 Samuel 8:1-18

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. - Psalm 66:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Have you ever thought about what would cause God to turn a deaf ear to a person's prayers?

The Bible doesn't say much about prayers that God turns His ears away from or that He doesn't answer. But when we are talking about God's Word, the volume of the information isn't important. Even if the Bible speaks on a subject in only a few places, each of those references carries the full authority of God.

Our study on the power of prayer would not be balanced if we did not take time to consider what could lead to powerless prayers.

Today we will consider several of the conditions under which the Scripture says God refuses to hear prayer.

The verse for today gives us one condition--cherishing known sin, refusing to let it go. Trying to pray for other things in this situation is like a disobedient child asking for an allowance while his or her father is trying to correct the disobedience. Once God puts His finger on a sin, the discussion goes no further until the sin is removed.

The story in 1 Samuel 8 reveals another condition of unanswered prayer--flying directly in the face of God's revealed will and His clear warnings.

The nation of Israel already had a King, the King of kings. But the people looked at the kings of the nations around them and told Samuel, ""We want one of those."" The craving for a human king became such a national obsession that the people refused God's warnings about the hardships a king would impose on them.

Samuel was faithful in relaying the message, but it fell on deaf ears. So God turned the tables, telling Israel through Samuel that He would turn a deaf ear to their prayers when they cried out to Him in complaint at a later date.

In Job 35:12-13 we find a third sure-fire way to make sure that prayers do not get beyond the ceiling. Job's friend Elihu said God would not respond to the prayer of an arrogant, prideful person. Elihu did not mince words. ""God does not listen... the Almighty pays no attention."" Nothing sets a person in opposition to God faster than pride.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

These are definitely a collection of problems to be avoided. On the encouraging side, consider the resources God has given us to deal with each of these conditions that lead to powerless prayer: 1. The remedy of confession and cleansing for sin (1 John 1:9, see the May 12 study); 2. His revealed will and clear warnings in Scripture; and 3. The cure for pride by humbling ourselves before God (James 4:7-10). As we draw on these resources, there is no reason that our prayers have to hit the ceiling and bounce back.

1 Samuel 7:2-6

Commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only. - 1 Samuel 7:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Nineteenth-century evangelist Charles G. Finney lists seven signs of the need for a revival: (1) When there is a lack of brotherly love and faith among Christians; (2) When there is dissension and jealousy among Christians; (3) When there is a worldly spirit in the church; (4) When Christians are regularly falling into gross sins; (5) When there is a spirit of controversy in the church or nation; (6) When the wicked seem to be winning the day; and (7) When sinners are heedless of the consequences of their actions.

'When such things are taking place,' says Finney, 'then it is time to awake and cry to God for a revival of religion... It is time to ask of God, 'What will become of your great Name?''

Finney speaks of the church, but his points apply as well to the nation of Israel in today's reading. They were characterized by worldliness, selfishness, and a 'spirit of controversy.' Israel badly needed the repentance urged on them by Samuel.

We have left behind Samuel's childhood and now begin to examine the early period of his adult ministry. Twenty years have passed. Samuel has grown to manhood a prophet and a judge. The judgment on Eli's family has come to pass. Shiloh has been destroyed (cf. Jer. 7:12). Nationally, there is spiritual uncertainty where is God? What do we do with the ark of the covenant?

Into this void stepped Samuel. He urged Israel to put away their idols (cf. Ex. 20:3-4), to repent and return to the Lord. Then God would save them, as He had promised. In a national gathering at Mizpah, Samuel led the way and interceded for his people (cf. Ex. 32:7-14; Jer. 15:1).

The sincerity of their confession was shown through their actions. They left their idols. They fasted. They poured out water before the Lord. Although there is no other Old Testament reference to such a ceremony, it probably indicates humility or openness of heart (cf. Lam. 2:19).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Confession of sin is a spiritual discipline which should be practiced regularly by every child of God.

Is confession a key part of your spiritual life? Today, do a 'heart check' before the Lord (Ps. 139:23-24). Ask Him to convict you of any unconfessed sin. Then don't hesitate confess, repent, and be cleansed, for the Lord has promised to forgive us (1 John 1:9)!

If too much time has passed since you last did this, consider imitating the actions of the Israelites in today's reading. That is, you might fast to show the sincerity of your repentance. Or you might ask a leader in your church to pray with you, interceding on your

behalf.

1 Samuel 7:7-11

He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed. - 1 Samuel 2:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1288 A.D., Vietnamese general Tran Hung Dao won a stunning victory against an overwhelming Mongolian invasion force. Four hundred ships and 40 enemy soldiers were massed off the coast, and the situation looked desperate for the Vietnamese.

After gaining valuable terrain and tide information from a local tea vendor, Tran Hung Dao planted huge, iron-tipped wooden stakes into a nearby riverbed. At flood tide, he lured in the Mongolian invasion fleet; at ebb tide, the Vietnamese forces made a furious counterattack. Hurrying to withdraw, the Mongolians found their ships stuck on the deadly spikes. The invaders were defeated.

We find another impressive military victory in today's Scripture reading. Just as Samuel brought spiritual rescue to the nation (yesterday's devotional), he also brought military rescue exactly as godly leaders and judges before him had done. National security and national righteousness are closely linked throughout the Old Testament.

The Philistines chose to attack at that time because they were afraid that the Israelites' courage was growing. They wanted to keep strong the atmosphere of fear and domination that they had enjoyed for many years. And since the Israelites were all gathered together at Mizpah like sitting ducks the time seemed ripe.

The people were afraid, but they knew where to turn for help to Samuel, God's spokesman. Again, Samuel prayed for them and offered a burnt offering for sin. Instead of frantically trying to give orders and make military preparations, he chose spiritual preparation, even as the Philistines drew dangerously near. Why? Because he believed that God would be faithful to His covenant relationship (v. 3) and that He would rescue His people.

And He did! God's thunder routed the enemy and the Israelites won the victory (v. 10). Against human expectations, the Israelites stopped being 'easy targets' and soundly defeated the Philistines. Who receives the credit? God alone!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's power is an exciting truth for all believers! We should have several verses on that topic always ready to use whenever we feel weak or discouraged.

Today, why not memorize one or two of these verses? You might write them on index cards, then tuck them inside your Bible or tape them to your bathroom mirror.

Our recommendation is Job 42:2, 'I know that you can do all things; no plan of yours can be thwarted.' And Proverbs 2:7-8 proclaims, 'He holds victory in store for the upright, He is a shield to those whose walk is blameless, for He guards the course of the just and protects the way of His faithful ones.'

1 Samuel 7:12-17

Help us, O God our Savior, for the glory of your name; deliver us and forgive our sins for your name's sake. - Psalm 79:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Thinking of God's faithfulness through history, the great hymnwriter Isaac Watts penned these famous lines:

O God, our help in ages past,

Our Hope for years to come,

Our Shelter from the stormy blast,

And our eternal Home.

Under the shadow of Thy throne

Still may we dwell secure;

Sufficient is Thine arm alone,

And our defense is sure.

Before the hills in order stood,
Or earth received her frame,
From everlasting Thou art God,
To endless years the same.

Remembering God's faithfulness can encourage His people to keep trusting Him with future problems. That's the principle Samuel has in mind in today's story.

To commemorate the victory over the Philistines (yesterday's devotional), Samuel erected a stone and called it 'Ebenezer,' or 'stone of help.' Much more than a simple war memorial, 'Ebenezer's' purpose is to remind Israel that God won the victory, not them. The stone reminds them to follow and trust God in the future also, rather than backsliding to idolatry and disobedience.

Setting up a 'stone of remembrance' may be seen in other Old Testament accounts as well. For instance, when Israel crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land, they set up stones to mark the event (Joshua 4:8-9). Or in a more personal example, Jacob, after having his famous dream of angels and a stairway to heaven, set up a stone at Bethel to acknowledge his encounter with God (Gen. 28:18-19).

We can say that Samuel's leadership at this point was a smashing success. The Philistines were subdued. Israelite territory was secure. There was peace with another enemy, the Amorites. Justice reigned in the land, thanks to Samuel's 'circuit riding' judging. Most importantly, the spiritual life of the nation had a center Ramah, Samuel's original home (see 1 Sam. 1:1) and a focus the altar of the Lord.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

When Samuel set up a stone and named it 'Ebenezer,' he intended that the Israelites remember the victory God had given them that day. This 'stone of remembrance' was a spiritual milestone in the history of the nation.

In your personal history, there have doubtless been similar spiritual milestones, 'stones of remembrance' on your road with the Lord. What are they? If you've never done so before, map out a spiritual timeline of your life, noting major turning points and seeing the 'big picture' of what God has been doing in your life. You might do this during family devotions, putting together a timeline of God's work in your family.

Praise the Lord for His faithfulness to you!

1 Samuel 8

1 Samuel 8:1-22

You are slaves to the one whom you obey—whether you are slaves to sin, which leads to death, or to obedience, which leads to righteousness. - Romans 6:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

When Adam and Eve disobeyed God's command in Genesis 3, the root of their sin was idolatry. Eve was led to believe that God's terms of leadership were unfair, that perhaps God did not have her best interest in mind, or even that God is a liar. The serpent promised godlike wisdom—if she would only cast off God's rule and choose her own destiny. Adam and Eve's fateful choice in the garden led only to shame, banishment, and a life of struggle and toil.

Some things never change. Most sin finds its root in idolatry, and idolatry always promises much but ends in enslavement. This is God's message to Israel and to us today. First Samuel 8 opens with a shocking problem: although Samuel was a good judge (7:15-16), his sons were not (vv. 1-3). The elders of Israel came to Samuel with a petition: they want a king. What seems like an innocuous request, upon closer examination, is fraught with the age-old problem of idolatry.

We learn this in two ways. First, God Himself declares: "they have rejected me as their king" (v. 7). How so? Kingship per se was not a wrong idea (cf. Deut. 17:14-20), but look at the reason for Israel's request: "We want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles" (vv. 19-20). Despite God's victory over the Philistines in chapter 7, Israel wanted to replace God with something that seemed grander, more powerful, perhaps even more popular. Would we rather be "normal" in the world's eyes than faithful to God's ways?

Second, we see the true results of their idolatrous desire. Samuel's speech repeatedly stresses that a king will not liberate and

empower them; it will only enslave them. A king will take their sons, daughters, money, servants, cattle, and land (vv. 10-18). This is the way of idolatry. We must serve something, either God or our own idols.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As a folk musician sang in 1979, no matter who you are “you're gonna have to serve somebody.” Whom do you serve with your time and resources? Ask God to show you any idols in your own life and to renew in you a life of love and service to God. Think of ways you can demonstrate your service to Him—such as cheerfully serving your family at home or giving your neighbor a helping hand or listening ear—and put that service into action today.

1 Samuel 8:1-18

If I had cherished sin in my heart, the Lord would not have listened. - Psalm 66:18

TODAY IN THE WORD

Have you ever thought about what would cause God to turn a deaf ear to a person's prayers?

The Bible doesn't say much about prayers that God turns His ears away from or that He doesn't answer. But when we are talking about God's Word, the volume of the information isn't important. Even if the Bible speaks on a subject in only a few places, each of those references carries the full authority of God.

Our study on the power of prayer would not be balanced if we did not take time to consider what could lead to powerless prayers. Today we will consider several of the conditions under which the Scripture says God refuses to hear prayer.

The verse for today gives us one condition--cherishing known sin, refusing to let it go. Trying to pray for other things in this situation is like a disobedient child asking for an allowance while his or her father is trying to correct the disobedience. Once God puts His finger on a sin, the discussion goes no further until the sin is removed.

The story in 1 Samuel 8 reveals another condition of unanswered prayer--flying directly in the face of God's revealed will and His clear warnings.

The nation of Israel already had a King, the King of kings. But the people looked at the kings of the nations around them and told Samuel, ""We want one of those."" The craving for a human king became such a national obsession that the people refused God's warnings about the hardships a king would impose on them.

Samuel was faithful in relaying the message, but it fell on deaf ears. So God turned the tables, telling Israel through Samuel that He would turn a deaf ear to their prayers when they cried out to Him in complaint at a later date.

In Job 35:12-13 we find a third sure-fire way to make sure that prayers do not get beyond the ceiling. Job's friend Elihu said God would not respond to the prayer of an arrogant, prideful person. Elihu did not mince words. ""God does not listen... the Almighty pays no attention."" Nothing sets a person in opposition to God faster than pride.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

These are definitely a collection of problems to be avoided. On the encouraging side, consider the resources God has given us to deal with each of these conditions that lead to powerless prayer: 1. The remedy of confession and cleansing for sin (1 John 1:9, see the May 12 study); 2. His revealed will and clear warnings in Scripture; and 3. The cure for pride by humbling ourselves before God (James 4:7-10). As we draw on these resources, there is no reason that our prayers have to hit the ceiling and bounce back.

1 Samuel 8:1-22

You are my King and my God, who decrees victories for Jacob. - Psalm 44:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

An old folktale recounts how a man decided to steal grain from his neighbors' fields. 'Just a little from each one,' he thought. 'No one will notice.'

So one dark night, the man took his youngest daughter and went out. He told her to warn him if anyone was coming, then crept off and began filling his sack with stolen wheat. 'Father, someone sees you!' cried the daughter.

He looked, but saw no one. Soon his daughter called again, 'Father, someone sees you!' Again he saw no one. She did this several times finally he asked her, 'Why do you keep saying that? There's no one here.'

'Father,' she replied, 'Someone sees you from above.' That little girl knew what her father did not know dishonesty can never be hidden from God. If only Samuel's sons had learned that lesson!

Twenty more years have passed, time enough for the Israelites to forget God's power and faithfulness. Samuel, perhaps age 65 now, had appointed his two sons as leaders after him. But they stole from God and from the people by using their positions of responsibility for personal gain (v. 3). Tired of this dishonesty and corruption, the Israelites approached Samuel with a solution they wanted a king.

Samuel knew the bad character of his sons, just as Eli had known the sins of his sons. But he was not pleased with the request for a king, because he saw a deeper, sinful motivation. Why did the Israelites ask for a king? To be like the other nations (v. 5). So their request was actually a rejection of God's kingship.

Long before, Moses had anticipated this situation and warned against trusting only in a human deliverer (see Deut. 17:14-20). Samuel reminded them of these words, of the disadvantages of a king, and of their distinct character as God's people, but they stubbornly insisted that a king was what they wanted. God said He would grant their request, but that all the warnings will come true. In other words, 'You'll get what you want, but you'll be sorry!

1 Samuel 9

1 Samuel 9:1-24

Many who are first will be last, and the last first. - Mark 10:31

TODAY IN THE WORD

Who could have guessed it? Born a slave during the dark days of the Civil War, George grew up during the difficult period of Reconstruction. Education for a young black man was very hard to come by in those days overt racism and discrimination blocked him at every turn.

Despite these barriers, George Washington Carver received a Master's degree in botany, joined the faculty of the Tuskegee Institute, and eventually became a world-famous scientist. He is best-known for his research into peanuts and sweet potatoes. In his laboratory, Carver discovered more than 100 marketable products made of sweet potatoes, and 300 made of peanuts!

Even more importantly, Carver saw science through the eyes of faith. He said of his students: 'I want them to find Jesus... How long for each one to walk and talk with the Great Creator through the things He has created.'

God chose an ex-slave to rejuvenate Southern agriculture. And He chose a donkey-herder to be the first king of Israel!

We first meet Saul as he's doing a bothersome chore chasing after some lost livestock. Not meeting with much success, he took his servant's advice and decided to stop in at Ramah to ask the seer (or prophet) for help. In this way, the future king's path first crossed that of Samuel.

This wasn't by chance. And Samuel was not surprised. God had told him the previous day what would be happening and who would be arriving. Far from retiring quietly, Samuel was to anoint and guide the first king of Israel.

No doubt Saul was puzzled. Though he didn't know the man of God, Saul was seated at the head of the worship banquet. He was also honored with a special portion of food. Saul may have thought it was a case of mistaken identity. But little did he know what God had in store for him!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Saul both met and contradicted the Israelites' expectations of what a king should be. On the one hand, he was tall and strong. On the other hand, his clan was the least in the smallest tribe of Israel.

With that in mind, here's an open-ended question for you to think about today: What do you expect from your leaders and why? What do you think makes a good leader? What talents or abilities are required? You might make a list of the qualities you think are necessary.

Then look again. How many characteristics on your list are the reflection of a merely human point of view? What qualities would be on God's list? After considering this issue, are there any adjustments you need to make in your thoughts, words, or actions?

1 Samuel 9:25-10:8

God changed Saul's heart. - 1 Samuel 10:9

TODAY IN THE WORD

Mary Slessor was a pioneer missionary and explorer in West Africa in the late nineteenth century.

Born into a poor working-class family, Mary was interested in foreign missions from childhood. She decided to go when her brother John died; their mother had hoped John would go overseas. In 1876 Mary arrived in present-day Nigeria.

Unlike many missionaries of the day, Mary lived as one of the natives, eating their food and living in their houses. She evangelized, supervised schools, dispensed medicine, and took care of orphans. She fought the custom of killing twins at birth and earned a respect rare for a woman in those days. She took the gospel to unreached tribes in the interior for more than a quarter century!

To be called and to be anointed are much the same in both cases, people are set apart for a special purpose. Mary Slessor was called as a missionary to Africa; Saul was anointed as the first king of Israel. In both cases, God chose and equipped them for specific purposes.

After the feast, Samuel talked privately with Saul (9:25) perhaps he was getting to know Saul. One wonders what Samuel must have thought of such unpromising material. It's encouraging to see that God Himself later changed Saul's heart (10:9).

With the authority given him by God, Samuel anointed Saul as the first king of Israel. To prove the truth of this action, and perhaps to reassure Saul, Samuel foretold several specific signs. Saul's mind must have been whirling, since he didn't tell anyone about his anointing even after the signs came to pass (v. 16).

The 'prophets' Saul joins (vv. 5, 10) were probably a small community of godly men, exuberantly praising and worshipping the Lord (cf. Ps. 149:1-3).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In the Old Testament, to anoint a king or priest was an act signifying consecration. These days, we don't normally anoint people in that way, but consecration to God's ways and purposes remains a spiritual necessity for believers.

Today, as a personal act of consecration, memorize one or both of these New Testament verses on this topic. Romans 12:1-2 exhorts, 'Therefore, I urge you, brothers, in view of God's mercy, to offer your bodies as living sacrifices, holy and pleasing to God this is your spiritual act of worship. Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is His good, pleasing and perfect will.' And 1 Corinthians 6:19-20 admonishes, 'Do you not know that your body is a temple of the Holy Spirit, who is in you, whom you have received from God? You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore honor God with your body.'

1 Samuel 10

1 Samuel 9:1-10:16

Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good; his love endures forever. Let the redeemed of the Lord say this. - Psalm 107:1-2

TODAY IN THE WORD

Jackson Pollock, an American painter in the early twentieth century, believed the world is chaos. Dripping paint on a canvas by swinging a can from the ceiling, he attempted to demonstrate that even art is chance. The problem, as apologist Francis Schaeffer observed, is that because the universe has an inherent structure, the seemingly random paintings actually contained very ordered lines, circles, and parabolas. Even in the chaos there was order.

Saul learned a similar lesson in his encounter with Samuel. Our text begins with seemingly random events: losing donkeys, arriving in Zuph, a servant's off-hand suggestion to seek out a man of God, and the "coincidence" that Samuel just happened to be in town. We soon discover that what seems random had actually been planned by God all along. This "chance" meeting was arranged by God in order to anoint Saul as Israel's first king.

In case this was not enough, Saul was given more evidence that God was at work behind the scenes. Having been anointed by Samuel as leader of Israel, Saul was foretold that he would meet two men who explain the recovery of the donkeys, and then a group of prophets of which Saul will become a participant. Scripture tells us that God "changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day" (10:9). What an incredible gift! God precisely orchestrated Saul's calling and anointing as Israel's king, and left no room for Saul to question it. Yet look at Saul's response to God's clear calling and revelation. When asked about his encounter

with Samuel, Saul remained silent about the whole matter. Instead of responding with kingly action or testifying speech to God's providential call and care, Saul pretended as if nothing had happened.

Things did not bode well for Israel and its first king, but there is a lesson here for us as well. How often do we respond like Saul, clearly seeing God's hand so graciously at work in our lives, yet saying nothing, doing little?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Psalm 107 echoes the message of today's reading, calling us to speak out God's goodness to those around us. Meditate on these words, reflecting on the specific ways God has providentially worked in your own life through seemingly random circumstances. Make it a goal this Lord's day to find a way—writing a letter, making a phone call, meeting someone for coffee—to share something of what God has shown you and done for you in His goodness and mystery.

1 Samuel 10:17-27; 11:12-15

Let them praise your great and awesome name he is holy. - Psalm 99:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

One year from now, news reports in the American media are likely to focus on one issue national elections, including that of the President. Who will be the new American President in the new millennium? Candidates, primaries, speeches, promises, debates, rallies, editorials, endorsements, polls, and parades we'll plunge into all of it, as we do every four years. Even this early you may have seen preliminary reports or articles.

On Inauguration Day, the victor, our President-elect, will be sworn in by the Chief Justice of the U.S. Supreme Court. This person will take the oath of office, promising to carry out his or her duties faithfully and to defend and uphold the Constitution. Tens of millions of Americans will watch the festivities live on television that day.

In today's reading, in a similar way minus the television the people of Israel gather together to establish a new government. This is an historic moment, a key transition in the history of Israel.

To announce and confirm Saul's anointing as king, Samuel once again gathered the nation at Mizpah. In a culturally appropriate way (cf. Acts 1:23-26), he drew lots to demonstrate that Saul was God's sovereign choice. Despite Samuel's warnings (1 Sam. 10:19) and Saul's poor first impression (v. 22), Israel warmly welcomed its first king.

Saul, on the other hand, seemed somewhat fearful of his new role, but proved himself later in a military victory over the Ammonites. He gave credit to God (11:13) and was 'reconfirmed' as king during the victory celebration (v. 15)

Still the true leader, Samuel was the one who laid down the rules for the new government (10:25). Unlike the kings of neighboring pagan countries, the king of Israel wouldn't have absolute power. That belongs to God alone. The king would remain subject to the Mosaic law and to the word of the prophets. God's relationship with His people remains the key issue in the life of the nation.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

As the history of Israel leaves the era of the judges and enters that of the kings, God, as on many other occasions in Scripture, renews His covenant with His people.

We suggest that you learn more about the concept of 'covenant,' as a topic for additional, deeper Bible study this month. What is a covenant? What covenants are described in Scripture? What are the circumstances and conditions of these covenants? What do they reveal about the character of God or of various individuals in the Bible? Do covenants still exist today? How does Christ's redemption relate to 'covenant'? (On the last question, read especially the book of Hebrews.)

What influence do your answers to these questions have on your spiritual life?

1 Samuel 11

1 Samuel 11:1-15

Ah, Sovereign Lord, you have made the heavens and the earth ... Nothing is too hard for you. - Jeremiah 32:17

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, ancient military shields covered the left eye, leaving the right eye alone to be used for battle vision. This helps explain Nahash the Ammonite's demands on the citizens of Jabesh Gilead. He would make a

treaty with them on condition that he could gouge out their right eyes. Such action would not only render them utterly disgraced but also unable to fight should they consider a future rebellion.

Given the situation for Jabesh Gilead, things looked bleak. Surrounded by the cruel and arrogant Nahash, they were given seven days to find someone—anyone—who would rescue them. One can hear the detractors of the previous chapter, murmuring about Saul: “How can this fellow save us?” (10:27). Nothing we have learned about Saul so far gives us any confidence that he would, or could, do anything to save Jabesh.

Yet, as is so often the case, God chooses to act precisely in the moments that seem the most dire. The key point, easily overlooked, comes in verse 6: “the Spirit of God came upon [Saul] in power.” Now, with God working through him, Saul was stirred to action. He demonstrated surprising leadership ability, gathering all Israel together for battle, and then showed cunning and effective military strategy to produce a resounding rescue of his relatives.

For the first time, things were looking up for Israel and her new king. Most important was Saul's response to the entire incident. Rather than take credit, he gave it to God in celebration: “for this day the Lord has rescued Israel” (v. 13). Finally, after three chapters of Israelite missteps and a king who inspired no confidence, we are shown a picture of what things could be like with a God-oriented king.

The beginnings of Israel's monarchy were hopeful, but not because Israel was faithful or because Saul was a great leader. The true hope lay in God's empowering activity through Saul on behalf of His people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

How often do we throw up our hands in despair when confronted with the seemingly impossible? Perhaps you have situations in your life right now that tempt you to give up on God: a loved one who continues to reject God's Word; a difficult coworker who shows no sign of change; a child whose behavior takes you to your limits? Let today's message sink in that without God's empowering involvement, there is no hope. But with His involvement, nothing is impossible. How will this truth change the way you live and respond?

1 Samuel 12

1 Samuel 12:1-5

Righteousness guards the man of integrity, but wickedness overthrows the sinner. - Proverbs 13:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

This year, the sports world witnessed the retirement of three of the strongest champions in sports history. Basketball lost Michael Jordan, perhaps the greatest player of all time in any sport, who won the National Basketball Association championship in each of his final six full seasons.

Then hockey said goodbye to 'the Great One,' Wayne Gretzky, the National Hockey League's all-time leader in goals, assists, and total points. His jersey number 99 was also retired from use throughout the entire league.

And John Elway became the first quarterback in the National Football League to retire after winning consecutive Super Bowl championships.

Each of these leaders made a tearful retirement announcement, and each of them became the symbol of excellence for their sport. We see the same closure of an outstanding career in the life of Samuel. Now that Saul was safely installed as king, Samuel made a second attempt to retire, and in 1 Samuel 12 we read his moving farewell speech to the nation. He asserted his righteousness and faithfulness as God's servant to them.

Samuel not only wanted to 'pass the baton' to the new king, but also to 'close the book' cleanly on his own years of committed service. He posed a question to Israel: Who can accuse me of wrongdoing? Over many years of leadership, he had never been dishonest, never supported injustice, and never taken advantage of others for personal gain. The nation affirmed this claim. To show the seriousness of the occasion, Samuel called God Himself as witness (v. 5).

Samuel was truly a man of integrity, and set forth a personal record that any follower of God would find enviable. No doubt King Saul was learning much as he listened to this godly man!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Integrity before men and before God is one of the core qualities of Samuel's greatness, as he clearly asserts in today's passage.

Can you make a similarly bold claim?

Write a one-sentence definition of 'integrity.' What is it? Where does it come from? What is it based on? What are its results? Then personalize your definition. How will 'integrity' look in your life in your marriage, with your children, on the job, with your friends, at church, during your leisure time, etc.? To describe yourself as a 'person of integrity' in each of these areas, what standards must you meet? Do you feel you are doing so now?

Choose one area of your life that might need shoring up, and set one specific goal for this week that will bring your words and actions more into line with God's ideals.

1 Samuel 12:6-25

For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own. - 1 Samuel 12:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

The story is told that a man would only be allowed into heaven if he could bring to heaven's gate the most precious thing on earth. He went to a mint and found a brick of the purest gold, then returned to heaven. But he found the gates locked and barred no admittance! He tried again, this time obtaining the most exquisitely beautiful piece of jewelry ever made. But once again, the door of heaven was shut against him.

What could he bring? The man walked down the street, deep in thought. In a park he saw a man on his knees, praying. This man had for years made his living by crime, but now wanted to change his ways. As he confessed his sins, tears of regret and sorrow flowed. The other man rushed forward, caught one of the tears, and went up to heaven, where this time he found the gates opened wide.

'Now you have brought the most precious thing on earth,' an angel said, 'the tear of repentance.'

In today's reading, Samuel once again led Israel in a time of national repentance (cf. I Sam. 7:2-6). Tears flowed as they confessed their sins and vowed again to follow God.

This is the second part of Samuel's farewell address. Whereas the Israelites could find no accusation against him, Samuel accused them of sinful motives in their request for a king. Continuing to speak as if in a court of law, he confronted them with the evidence (12:7) an historical recitation of God's faithfulness and their faithlessness. Samuel placed their request for a king into an ongoing pattern of forgetting the Lord. As a sign that his words were authoritative, Samuel called on God to send thunder and rain (v. 18).

The good news is that it's never too late to return to the Lord. Once again, Samuel interceded for the nation. Even though they had rejected God, He had not rejected them (12:22). Samuel then taught them how to worship and serve God wholeheartedly (1 Sam. 12:23-24).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

History showed the Israelites God's faithfulness, despite their frequent disobedience. Simply recalling their own history caused the Israelites to return to the Lord.

Remembering where we've been can also be a beneficial spiritual activity for us today. God has been faithful in the past, so we can trust He'll be faithful in the future. Our responses to His unchanging love for us should be love and obedience.

With this in mind, we recommend that you return to the 'Today Along the Way' application for the 8th. If you skipped making a spiritual timeline, why not try it now? If you have already done this, review your timeline and spend time praising God for His work in your life.

1 Samuel 12:1-25

Be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. - 1 Samuel 12:24

TODAY IN THE WORD

It's a regular American custom that when a person is ready for retirement, friends throw a party. Often at this retirement party, in addition to the enjoyment of food and fellowship, the retiree is asked to speak a word: the "retirement speech." Sometimes humorous or moving, most people who reach retirement reflect on the previous years that brought them to this point.

First Samuel 12 is something of a grand retirement party, with Samuel giving his retirement speech. But Samuel does more than

reminisce; in fact, his speech worked like a three-part trial scene. First, Samuel presented himself, asking if anyone has grievances against his previous rule over the years. The people responded enthusiastically—Samuel was vindicated (vv. 1-5).

Next, God Himself took the stand, and Samuel rehearsed for the people the continued faithfulness of the Lord in delivering His people. Time and again, when the people cried out in repentance, God heard and delivered them from oppression. God had proven Himself faithful to His covenant with Israel (vv. 6-11).

Finally, Samuel turned to Israel. The message here, given both in word and in supernatural demonstration, is clear: their request for a king was nothing short of rejection of God's faithful rule over them. The people, rightly understanding their predicament, begged Samuel for his intercession (vv. 12-19).

Samuel's words emphasized the crucial point. If Israel would turn to serve the Lord, He would not reject them. Why? For the simple reason that the Lord had chosen His people as His own. His very name was stamped upon them, and He is a faithful God. How Israel will proceed with Samuel in retirement? Will it be obedience or disobedience; blessing or curse? All Israel needed to do is consider the long history of God's faithfulness to make their choice obvious. But it is one thing to see the choice clearly, another to make it.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Like Israel, we are also faced with a choice: either to pursue our own selfish ends or to serve God in faithfulness. The right choice is clear, and the text also gives us help in making that choice: "Consider what great things He has done for you" (v. 24). Take time to meditate on a passage (like Psalm 105) that reflects on the gracious deeds of our God. Read it aloud or copy a few verses onto an index card to remind you of God's goodness. Then re-commit yourself to His service in response.

1 Samuel 13

1 Samuel 13:1-22

The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people. - 1 Samuel 13:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

Robert Frost's poem, "The Road Not Taken," is a classic assertion of individualism and choice. The poem ends with the famous lines: "Two roads diverged in a wood, and I— / I took the one less traveled by / And that has made all the difference."

Yesterday's reading brought us to a similar crossroads. Would Israel choose obedience or disobedience? As in Frost's poem, that choice made all the difference; unfortunately for Saul, the difference was disastrous.

The chapter begins with the Philistines gathering their armies for a battle at Micmash. In turn, Saul summoned the Israelites for war, but he first had to wait for seven days for Samuel to come and make sacrifice. Saul waited, but then grew impatient and made the sacrifice himself.

Samuel interrupted the proceedings and demanded an explanation. From one perspective, Saul's response was quite reasonable: his army was scattering, the Philistines were preparing to attack, Samuel was late, and he needed the Lord's favor in battle. Samuel's reaction, however, makes it clear that Saul's excuses could not hide his direct disobedience to God's command (see 10:7-8). You cannot seek God's favor through an act of disobedience, and you cannot make things right through excuses.

Saul's disobedience had numerous consequences. He lost the kingdom. His troops were diminished, scattered, and without weapons. The Philistines raided Israelite camps. But do not miss the saddest loss: "Then Samuel left Gilgal and went up to Gibeah in Benjamin" (v. 15). The prophetic word of God through Samuel was taken away. Saul was left alone, not only with just a few soldiers, but without God's approval, blessing, and word.

But God does not give up on His people. He had rejected Saul, but not Israel. Instead, He had "sought out a man after His own heart" (v. 14) to lead the people. Though we and our leaders fail, ultimately, God's way prevails—and for our own good.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage reminds us that God really does care about our obedience—even in the seemingly small details. His command to love others includes loving a grouchy spouse or unkind neighbor. His demand for truthfulness encompasses even the "white lies." No disobedience is minor or inconsequential. Read Proverbs 28:13 today, and spend time "confessing and renouncing" your sin before God. Then thank Him that in His grace and forgiveness He does not abandon those who turn to Him in humble confession.

1 Samuel 13:1-15

The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people. - 1 Samuel 13:14

TODAY IN THE WORD

As new parents, Mary and Joseph brought their baby to the temple, and they met a man who had been waiting for a very long time (Lk. 2:25-35). His name was Simeon, and it had been revealed to him that he would not die before he had seen the Christ with his own eyes.

Moved by the Holy Spirit, Simeon took the baby into his arms and praised God, calling Jesus 'a light for revelation to the Gentiles and for glory to your people Israel' (Lk. 2:32). Through this child, he warned Mary, 'the thoughts of many hearts will be revealed. And a sword will pierce your own soul too' (Lk. 2:35).

Simeon's wait was over. He had seen the Lord's salvation. The Messiah had come! Now God could 'dismiss [His] servant in peace' (Lk. 2:29).

Simeon's patience stands in stark contrast to the impatience of King Saul. Simeon waited a lifetime for God to fulfill His promise, but Saul could not wait even a week for the arrival of God's spokesman, Samuel.

On the eve of a battle against the Philistines, Samuel was scheduled to make offerings to the Lord, seeking His blessing and victory. Though Saul was king, Samuel remained the spiritual leader of the nation, and Saul had been told to wait until he arrived. But as his soldiers disappeared and the enemy grew stronger, he decided to take matters into his own hands.

His fearful excuses didn't impress Samuel, who pinpointed the problem: disobedience (v. 13). This was the first major step in Saul's downhill slide. Because he did not submit to God's authority, as represented in Samuel, his kingship would not endure. In fact, says Samuel, God had already chosen another leader, 'a man after His own heart' (v. 14).

No matter how human wisdom sees things, God's way is always superior. We can never get God's blessings by leaving His path!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Saul fell into an age-old trap rationalizing his sin. He was ready with a series of excuses to defend his behavior explanations why what appeared to be disobedience was really, from a certain point of view, perfectly understandable.

Sound familiar? We still rationalize today! But there's a problem. To rationalize sin is refusal to see it as God does, to put appearances and pride before true righteousness. Rationalizing prevents us from confessing and repenting, and is therefore a barrier to ministry, relationships, and our walk with God.

With this in mind, why not return to the 'Today Along the Way' for the 6th? Confession of sin is so essential that it's worth repeating this application!

1 Samuel 13:1-15

To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. - 1 Samuel 15:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Interviews with Jacqueline Kennedy conducted in early 1964 have only recently been published to commemorate the fiftieth anniversary of John F. Kennedy's presidency. Mrs. Kennedy spoke with Arthur Schlesinger Jr., a historian and Kennedy administration aide, about her husband's presidency, her role as first lady, and their marriage. When recalling the Cuban Missile Crisis, she said that after the discovery of Soviet missiles in Cuba, "from then on, it seemed there was no waking or sleeping."

Fear steals from us our sense of time. Nights blur into days, days into weeks. That's exactly where King Saul found himself in our story today. He had only recently been anointed king over Israel. It was not a position he had sought or one he had readily accepted. There had been constant war between the Philistines and Israelites in recent memory, and as a kind of first initiative during his reign, Saul authorized Jonathan to attack a Philistine outpost, a decision he seemed almost immediately to regret.

Militarily, Israel was no match for the Philistines. The Israelites numbered three thousand, plus the additional men who had been summoned to Gilgal. The Philistines boasted at least three thousand chariots, six thousand charioteers, and unnumbered foot soldiers. The Israelite soldiers, aware of their impossible odds, were deserting at alarming rates. As military commander, Saul knew he couldn't afford to lose even one more soldier. He waited the seven days appointed by Samuel, but Samuel didn't come. Saul decided that he had to offer the sacrifices himself.

The voice of fear is never a reliable source, as Saul proved. He felt desperate, driven to take matters into his own hands. The army

and nation were on the precipice of disaster, and obedience to God's prescriptions for sacrifice didn't seem practical. Saul revealed his fundamental ignorance and lack of commitment to God. He saw God as a deity to be placated with sacrifices. Saul thought that burnt offerings would secure his favor. Fear has a way of revealing what we really believe about God.

APPLY THE WORD

It can be helpful to see both good and bad examples when we're trying to learn something. Saul exemplifies what not to do when we're afraid. He never looked to the Lord, never prayed, and never cried out. When we're afraid and when our resources seem too scarce to meet the challenge, we need to cry out to the Lord. The simplest prayers are sometimes best: "Lord, help me!"

1 Samuel 14

1 Samuel 14:1-52

Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving. - 1 Samuel 14:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

A diptych is a traditional Christian art form in which two scenes are portrayed on separate wood panels, connected by a hinge in the middle. Sometimes these two scenes depict contrasting scenarios, one positive and one negative. Each can be instructive, one as an encouragement and the other as a warning.

Saul and Jonathan work like such a diptych in today's reading: two contrasting portraits of faith—one positive, one negative. First, Saul is a portrait of empty faith. After God used Jonathan to unsettle the Philistines, Saul prepared for battle, calling a priest to inquire of God. But halfway through the conversation, things got rowdy and Saul cut it short. The divine inquiry was only a show. Saul proceeded on his own course (vv. 16-23).

Then when victory seemed imminent, Saul made a vow, not of faithful sacrifice and praise to God, but a foolish one that jeopardized his son and distressed his army (vv. 24-30). Finally, because of Saul's vow, the starving army began unlawfully eating meat with blood in it (cf. Lev. 17:10-13). Saul seemed piously horrified that they have "broken faith" (v. 33), but a short time later, he was prepared to shed the innocent blood of his own son for the sake of his rash vow. He had a clear appearance of faith, but not much substance.

Jonathan, on the other hand, offers a positive portrait of faith. He knew what God can do and acted in faith upon that knowledge: "Perhaps the Lord will act in our behalf. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving" (v. 6). He did not dictate to God what should be done (note his use of "perhaps"), but neither did he sit back in cowardice. He took on a daring and risky venture, trusting that God can save. He allowed his faith to broaden his view to see beyond the visible. While things might have looked impossible, Jonathan knew that with God all things are possible. Without fanfare or presumption Jonathan quietly and confidently acted upon a faith rooted in a sure knowledge of God's power.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Reminding ourselves (sometimes visibly) what true faith looks like, especially in contrast to its opposite, is an important lesson from today's text. Try creating your own artistic "diptych of faith" using paint, colored pencils, pens, or even images from the Internet. Perhaps scenes from the Bible, or even certain people you know, inspire you with a portrait of true faith. Depict those scenes in a visible way and display them in a place you can return to in order to remind yourself of the kind of faith God calls us to.

1 Samuel 15

1 Samuel 15:1-23

To obey is better than sacrifice. - 1 Samuel 15:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

The durian is an Asian fruit unfamiliar to most Westerners. Rather large about the size of a football it's covered with a scaly green skin. The durian's most distinctive feature is its smell, which is both pungent and unpleasant. Even on the tree, it smells like overripe limburger cheese, and the odor increases if it is picked and opened.

Those who enjoy eating durians carry this smell for days afterwards. Because of the odor, it is forbidden on airplanes and in many hotel rooms. Durian is definitely an acquired taste!

Because of its distinctive smell, there's no mistaking a durian, whether you can see it or not. In the same way, people are known by their fruit, by the 'odor' coming from their lives (2 Cor. 2:15-16). That's certainly the case with King Saul! His downhill slide continues in today's reading.

God, through Samuel, told Saul to totally annihilate the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:2-3), but the king's obedience was only 'partial' that is, he disobeyed God's command. Instead of killing everything and everyone, he kept the enemy king as a prideful victory trophy, and took some of the best livestock as spoils of war. He even set up a monument in his own honor (v. 12) a far cry from the man who celebrated his first victory by praising God (11:15).

Samuel became so troubled by Saul's disobedience that he spent the night in prayer (15:11). When confronted, Saul lied even though Samuel could plainly hear the sounds of the animals! Like a kid with chocolate streaks on his face denying he ate the candy, the king tried to make excuses until the prophet mercifully stopped him. Even after Samuel directly condemned Saul, he continued to blame others and to justify himself.

Disobedience has serious consequences. Samuel spoke a fearful judgment on Saul: 'Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has rejected you as king' (v. 23).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The principle cited in today's verse can be seen throughout Scripture (cf. Deut. 10:16). God always judges the thoughts and intents of the heart, no matter what outward actions seem to show (Heb. 4:12).

Why not devote a personal or family worship time to this theme? Choose Bible readings about obedience and true faith. Find appropriate music, such as the classic hymn 'Trust and Obey' or Keith Green's 'To Obey Is Better Than Sacrifice.' Search out other resources perhaps a reading from a good devotional book or a Bible story video. Younger children might learn from a puppet show about being obedient to their parents.

When you do this activity, claim the promise of Psalm 103:17-18: 'From everlasting to everlasting the Lord's love is with those who fear Him, and His righteousness with their children's children with those who keep His covenant and remember to obey His precepts.

1 Samuel 15:1-23

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? - 1 Samuel 15:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

The sad story of King Saul's battle with the Amalekites and God's anger with him is often referred to as the case of Saul's partial obedience. But that's actually a contradiction in terms, because God is only interested in complete obedience.

This Old Testament account may not seem related to our subject this month, but it illustrates another valuable truth for us as God's stewards. Before God accepts our offerings, He wants our obedience.

We have mentioned this principle briefly, but it's worth more study as we come to the end of the month. God's command for Saul to destroy the Amalekites was His judgment on them for attacking Israel on its exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:34). On that famous occasion the Israelites won a great victory as Aaron and Hur held up Moses' hands, and God decreed that someday He would blot out the memory of Amalek (Ex. 17:16; Deut. 25:19).

This is the historical background to the battle. Saul must have known about God's decree, but even if he hadn't, Saul still had a direct order from God through Samuel. Instead of following God's decree, this weak-willed king decided to save the best of the animals, later justifying his disobedience by telling Samuel the animals were intended as an offering to God (1 Sam. 15:15).

God wasn't pleased with Saul's half-hearted offering; He was grieved at the king's whole-hearted disobedience. There was no lack of sheep and cattle in Israel if Saul had really wanted to give God a genuine sacrifice.

Saul revealed his insensitivity to God when he announced to Samuel, "'I have carried out the Lord's instructions'" (v. 13). The king also gave away his low regard for the Lord's command when he blamed his soldiers for his bad idea of saving the best (v. 21). The price of Saul's neglect was his throne.

Samuel's riveting question to Saul (v. 22) eliminated all the excuses. It was rhetorical because Saul knew the answer. But Samuel stated it just in case the king had missed the message: "'To obey is better than sacrifice.'" No amount of giving to God or doing things for Him can replace obedience.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Obedience to God is a bigger subject than we can cover in one sitting. But that doesn't mean it is complicated.

When Joshua became the leader of Israel, God told him to be careful to obey His law. ""Meditate on it day and night,"" the Lord said (Josh. 1:8). If we want to obey God, we must know His Word. The psalmist prayed, ""Give me understanding, and I will keep your law and obey it with all my heart"" (Ps. 119:34). If you have a hunger to know the Word and obey God, why not make this your prayer today?

1 Samuel 15:22 Exodus 4:18-31

To obey is better than sacrifice. - 1 Samuel 15:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Albert Barnes said that at the time of his conversion to Christ while he was in college, he ""was entirely ignorant on the subject of religion [and] had never owned a Bible."" But God called Barnes into His service, and the young man obeyed. Albert Barnes served effectively as a pastor from 1825 until his death in 1870. He also gave us a written legacy in his well-known work, Barnes' Notes on the Old and New Testaments, which is still a valued resource for Bible study today. Moses heard and obeyed God's call, and we share in his legacy today. However, Moses' obedience wasn't complete at first, which is obvious from a strange story in today's reading. It teaches that true leadership begins with full obedience to God.

1 Samuel 15:22

Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? - 1 Samuel 15:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

The Treaty of Versailles, signed in 1919 to conclude World War I, imposed restrictions on Germany that Adolph Hitler would exploit to spur the growth of his Nazi Party. Within twenty years, Germany would move from feeling oppressed to invading its neighbors and murdering millions of people, particularly Jews. Throughout history, people who have been oppressed themselves turn into oppressors when given an opportunity—an example of this is in our passage.

1 Samuel 15:24-35

He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind. - 1 Samuel 15:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

Living Illustrations tells the story of a preacher. Some years back, this man had proclaimed the gospel faithfully and powerfully, witnessing a mighty revival. At one point, for example, fourteen taverns were closed, with thirteen of the fourteen tavern-keepers converted to Christ.

'After this came a fork in the road,' continues the story, 'and [this preacher] took the wrong course. Today he denies the divinity of the Son of God, is spiritually dried up and powerless, and has gone to lecturing for a living. He could easily say God not only answers me no more, but uses me no more. He is a shadow and wreck of his former self.'

These words could easily describe the career of Saul as well. Starting with such promise as God's anointed king, Saul took the wrong fork in the road and backslid to 'a shadow and wreck of his former self.'

Saul finally admitted his sin in the affair of the Amalekites... sort of (v. 24). But the repentance was not real and Samuel knew it. God's judgment remained (vv. 26, 28). So Saul begged Samuel to come with him to 'save face' apparently he was more worried about appearances than about his spiritual condition.

Samuel agreed, but the situation turned out differently than Saul expected. Samuel summoned the enemy king, who was by now confident that he wouldn't be killed. But God's prophet executed him, taking the military honor of the victory for the Lord. More importantly, Samuel also finished obeying God's command the destruction of the Amalekites was, after all, a spiritual task and not merely a military one (v. 2).

Samuel never visited the king again. He did not take a triumphant spirit in judging him, but instead mourned over Saul's sin. The prophet's pain came from personal disappointment he had helped give Saul his start but also from his understanding of the heart of God (v. 35).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Samuel was so troubled by Saul's disobedience that he stayed up all night praying over it (v. 11). He understood God's loving heart, and like God, he loved Saul and grieved over the path the king had chosen.

What about you? Is there a 'Saul' in your life, a friend who has been making bad choices lately? Someone who has drifted in his or her relationship with the Lord? If you can, identify such a person in your life and resolve to treat them as Samuel treated Saul. This will involve fervent prayer and loving confrontation based on the Word of God. Be sure to take your attitude and plans to God in prayer before you act.

1 Samuel 16

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart. - 1 Samuel 16:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

William Shakespeare's tragedy, King Lear, opens in the throne room. Lear wishes to retire from rulership, and plans to divide the kingdom among his three daughters. But first, he asks them to make speeches to prove their love for him.

The first daughter steps forward and proclaims her love for her father with flowery words and glittering phrases. The second daughter follows suit. But the youngest daughter, Cordelia, knowing that her sisters are speaking flattery, says simply: 'I cannot heave / My heart into my mouth. I love your majesty / According to my bond; no more nor less.' King Lear, not satisfied with this, demands more. When Cordelia refuses to make a speech like her sisters, he angrily banishes her from the kingdom.

Yet in the end, the first two daughters betray their father while Cordelia alone remains true to him. In the play, Lear learns at a high cost, that appearances can be deceiving. That's a lesson also learned in today's reading.

At the age of about 80, Samuel continued his rather active 'retirement.' Since God had rejected Saul as king, Samuel was given the task of finding and anointing a new king. Although he feared a violent reaction from Saul, and although God did not give him all the details of his assignment, Samuel obeyed the Lord, as he had throughout his life.

He went to Bethlehem, to the house of Jesse. There he found his man, or so he thought. The oldest son, Eliab, cut an impressive figure 'Surely the Lord's anointed stands here,' Samuel thought (v. 6). But God reminded Samuel to judge by the heart, not by outward appearances (v. 7; cf. Lk. 16:15). None of the sons there was chosen.

Who was missing? David, as the youngest son of the family, was out tending the sheep (cf. 2 Sam. 7:7). Although he didn't count for much in the eyes of men, he was God's choice. Samuel anointed him as the second king of Israel!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We'd like to suggest a topic for further Bible study. The goal is expressed in 2 Timothy 2:15: 'Do your best to present yourself to God as one approved, a workman who does not need to be ashamed and who correctly handles the word of truth.'

What is the ministry of the Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments? He 'came upon David in power' (1 Sam. 16:13) in today's reading. We know that He marks believers 'with a seal' (Eph. 1:13-14). What other purposes and tasks of the Holy Spirit can you find in Scripture? How did His work change after the coming of Christ? What are His special roles within the Trinity?

You may wish to use study Bibles, commentaries, and other resources as you explore this key doctrinal issue.

1 Samuel 16:1-13

Man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart. - 1 Samuel 16:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

Someone has said that it's possible to become too big for God to use you--but never too small for God to use you.

That principle helps to explain what happened to the monarchy in Israel as Saul, the nation's first king, was rejected by God due to his disobedience. Although Saul was once "small in [his] own eyes" (1 Sam. 15:17), he became too big to follow the rules, even God's rules.

First, Saul violated God's law by acting as his own priest, instead of waiting for Samuel, as the Israelite army was being pressed by the Philistines (1 Sam. 13:1-13). Then he failed to fully carry out God's judgment against the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:1-35).

After the first incident, Samuel told Saul his days as king were numbered because God had “sought out a man after his own heart” (1 Sam. 13:14) to replace Saul. That special person was David of Bethlehem. Following Saul’s second major act of disobedience, God told Samuel to forget Saul, pack up his horn of anointing oil, and head for Bethlehem.

In the context of today’s passage, God introduced the world to the future king whose name is eternally linked to God’s righteous ruler, the Messiah.

It’s impossible to ignore David’s importance to biblical history, and to the story we are following this month. David occupies a level of honor in Scripture that’s shared by only a few others. God identified Himself as the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and His Son became the Son of David when He was born in Bethlehem.

For someone so honored, David’s beginnings were small. Even his father Jesse didn’t take David into account when Samuel was looking for Israel’s new king. Being the youngest of eight sons in those days usually meant shouldering the least desirable responsibilities, which may explain why David was out in the field tending sheep.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Even though God operates by the principle revealed in today’s verse, the world has turned that formula completely around.

1 Samuel 17

1 Samuel 17:1-50

Some trust in chariots and some in horses, but we trust in the name of the Lord our God. - Psalm 20:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

The 1985 Villanova Wildcats upended the defending champion Georgetown Hoyas to win the men’s NCAA basketball championship. The 1980 U.S. Olympic Hockey squad defeated the mighty Soviet Union team and went on to win the gold medal. The 2007 New York Giants surprised many with their Superbowl victory over the undefeated New England Patriots. All of these competitions have been compared to the most frequently used Bible illustration in sports—David’s defeat of Goliath.

Like their biblical counterpart, these athletic “Goliaths” had tremendous confidence in their own power and skills. In life, just as in sports, overconfidence can be costly.

Goliath had every earthly reason to be confident. Interpretations vary among Bible scholars as to Goliath’s actual height, anywhere from six feet six inches to almost ten feet tall. His armor may have weighed twice as much as David, and his spearhead alone was as heavy as a bowling ball. He was a large man, but after falling flat on the ground his statistics became moot. It was the condition of his heart that made him so different from David.

Our attention usually turns to David in this passage because his courage and valor inspire us. But if it weren’t for his faith in God, and the fact that he acknowledged the victory was God’s to win, David would have been no different from Goliath. He would be another defiant competitor proclaiming his own success.

Goliath turned out to be just that. He repeatedly defied Israel, and therefore God, with his arrogant taunting. He was daring them to attack him, striking fear into all but one of the Israelites. We can learn a lot from David’s example of courageous reaction. But we should be clear about what transpired in this battle. Goliath wasn’t defeated by a shepherd boy with a sling; he was defeated by an Almighty God with a faithful servant.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Even someone on the Lord’s side can make the Goliath-sized mistake of arrogance. God equips us all with gifts and talents, but we misappropriate the glory when we admire them as our own. Make a list of the enemies, obstacles, and challenges you face in life, everything from national issues to personal matters. Acknowledge to God that you are relying on Him for victory in each of those areas—then ask Him to use you and your gifts to win the battle.

1 Samuel 17:1-11, 41-58

The battle is the Lord’s. - 1 Samuel 17:47

TODAY IN THE WORD

Achilles is one of the greatest warriors of Greek mythology. It is said that his mother dipped him in a magic river, making him

invulnerable except for the heel by which she held him, the proverbial 'Achilles' heel.'

In the Trojan War narrated in Homer's Iliad, Achilles is one of the Greek champions, but after a quarrel with the king, he withdraws from the fighting. Without him, the Greeks suffer several defeats. Achilles' friend Patroclus asks permission to rejoin the battle; Achilles agrees, lending him his armor. Unfortunately, Patroclus is killed by the Trojan prince, Hector.

Enraged by the death of his friend, Achilles returns to the battle himself. In an epic face-off matching the greatest champions from both sides, he defeats and kills Hector, then drags his body in triumph behind his chariot. When his anger cools, he returns Hector's body to his father for burial.

Another epic battle is found in today's reading this one for a much higher cause, God's glory. Today's reading includes only the start and finish of this battle, one of the most famous events in David's early career.

'David versus Goliath' must rank as one of the most uneven matchups in military history! On one side, a powerful giant nine feet tall, heavily armored, experienced in fighting, confident and proud. His opponent a shepherd boy, unarmed except for a sling, with no battle experience, confident in God. That spiritual fact outweighs the physical ones, for Goliath showed contempt for God and for His people. God's people, including Saul and David's jealous brothers, lacked the faith to respond to Goliath's godless challenge.

David, however, trusted God and wanted to see His enemies defeated and His name glorified. The Lord gave David a dramatic victory (vv. 46-47), and the shocked Philistines were sent running for home. The lesson for the faithless Israelites? God can do anything anytime He wants!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Several times already in this month's study we've seen God win a decisive military victory over the enemies of Israel. David's triumph over Goliath is a prime example of the truth expressed in today's verse.

A military theme runs through many Christian hymns and choruses, rousing us to action and increasing our faith. Why not learn one such song by heart today? After all, filling your mind with the words of a good hymn means you are pushing out less worthy thoughts! Our suggestions include 'A Mighty Fortress is Our God' and 'Am I a Soldier of the Cross?' The chorus 'The Battle is the Lord's' is based on today's verse. Your children might enjoy learning 'I'm in the Lord's Army.'

'Thanks be to God! He gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ' (1 Cor. 15:57).

1 Samuel 17:1-50

The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of the Philistine. - 1 Samuel 17:37

TODAY IN THE WORD

Joan of Arc was a young peasant girl, born in France during the Hundred Years War. At the age of fourteen, Joan described hearing voices telling her to lead the country to victory against England. This divine appointment emboldened a girl of common ancestry, a girl who obviously lacked formal training as a soldier. Joan of Arc rallied a listless French army to victory.

Joan was a young French heroine of the fifteenth century. David was a hero of much earlier times in Israelite history, but he was also a teenager and just as unlikely a hero as Joan. The youngest of his family, David endured the scorn of his older brothers. By all appearances a simple shepherd boy, David didn't immediately win King Saul's confidence when he offered to fight Goliath.

When David agreed to fight Goliath, he wasn't motivated by reward. He didn't set out to make a name for himself and earn respect. But unlike every other Israelite man at the battlefield—including his own brothers—he was unafraid. What was the source of courage for this adolescent boy, unarmed and inexperienced? Belief in who God said He was.

If courage gains strength from trust in an invisible God, fear takes root in believing the visible enemy. The Israelites cowered, Saul included, because all they saw on the landscape was a giant towering above the Israelite army. Goliath jeered at their powerlessness. He was dressed from head to foot in armor, with a collection of immense and frightening weapons. How could anyone face him in battle and hope to win?

David's courage came from the God who guarantees victory. David had known the protection of Yahweh. While tending his sheep, he had faced lions and bears, and the Lord has rescued him. He believed (rightly) that God would rescue him again from the hands of Goliath. Goliath was big, but God was infinitely bigger.

With one shot, David sank a stone into the forehead of Goliath, and victory was the Lord's.

APPLY THE WORD

Facing our fears is so much about perspective. What will we choose to see? Do we have faith to see what can't be seen? Elisha and his servant faced enemy forces in 2 Kings 6. When the servant realized they had been surrounded, he feared for their lives. Elisha prayed, "Open his eyes, Lord, so that he may see." The servant then saw the angelic forces fighting for them. When you're afraid, ask the Lord to see rightly, with the lens of faith.

1 Samuel 17:17-58

It is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lord's, and he will give all of you into our hands. - 1 Samuel 17:47

TODAY IN THE WORD

Twenty years ago, the Chinese government sponsored a violent crackdown on protesters in Tiananmen Square. As a line of tanks entered the square, one man stood in front of the lead tank, blocking its progress. The tank tried to maneuver around him, but he continued to move to block it. The photos of this solitary man standing up to military might spread around the world and became the defining image of the Chinese suppression of dissent.

In our reading today, David also stood alone to confront military opposition. In this case, the boldness of one young man changed the course of history.

David had already been anointed by Samuel, though it's unclear if he and his family understood its full significance (see 1 Sam. 16:1-13). The Israelites were again at war with their tormentors, the Philistines, and David obeyed the instruction of his father to take supplies to his brothers and make sure they were okay. While at the front lines, David heard the taunts of the great Philistine warrior, Goliath.

David's oldest brother Eliab was upset when he heard David inquiring about Goliath. Perhaps he was jealous that he had not been anointed; perhaps he was embarrassed that his youngest brother showed more spunk than he. He accused David of false motives and tried to minimize his responsibilities.

David volunteered to fight Goliath, but King Saul tried to deter him: "You are only a boy!" (v. 33). David revealed the source of his confidence—it was not in experience or the king's armor or his brother's approval. It was in the Lord.

David understood that spiritual matters were at stake in this battle. Goliath wasn't just challenging the Israelite army, he was challenging the legitimacy and power of God (vv. 45-47). David's confidence was well placed. He defeated Goliath and secured the victory for Israel.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

No one took David seriously, not Eliab or Saul or Goliath. But David's confidence wasn't based on the approval of others. Where do we find our confidence? Do we trust our own resources, or our shining resume, or our bank account? Do we seek approval from others, or rest secure in our knowledge of God? We will all face challenges in life, moments when we are asked to stand for what is right. To the world, we might appear insignificant. But God can use even one person willing to be courageous for Him.

1 Samuel 17:32-37

Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. - Psalm 23:4

TODAY IN THE WORD

We have seen how God in His Word has used animal imagery to teach us about His own nature. We have recounted examples of animals throughout Scripture that have entered the story of God's judgment on evil and His provision of grace and forgiveness. Now, for the final week of our study, we'll explore various passages that use animals to teach lessons about the life of a believer and the way we think about and relate to our Lord and Savior. The first four of those illustrations are brought to us by David and his son, Solomon.

David was in many ways a portrait of his descendant, Jesus Christ. Not only was he king over Israel and the pride of the tribe of Judah, David was also a shepherd. We may generally associate that image with the tender care and gentle guidance we as sheep require from Christ, but David showed in today's passage that being a shepherd also requires a fierce courage to battle fearsome foes.

David wasn't afraid of Goliath, no matter how big and boastful he was. Saul didn't just question David's assertion, he flat out rejected the possibility that David could win (v. 33). All visible evidence pointed to Saul being correct. But David informed Saul of his

experience fighting off a lion and bear that were threatening his sheep (vv. 34-36).

This was not a matter of presenting David's qualifications. He didn't think that he himself had the power to defeat Goliath—or even a lion or bear. While David did physically best the animal adversaries that attacked his flock, he didn't take credit for the victory. He attributed his protection to the Lord (v. 37).

David's faith was precisely where it belonged. He was willing to fight in the name of the Lord, and he entrusted the victory against Goliath to a power greater than his own. In comparison to the might of the Lord, Goliath garnered no respect from his diminutive opponent (v. 36). David demonstrated enough courage and conviction to convince Saul that the victory could be won. He sent David off with a prayer for the Lord's presence and partnership in his quest.

APPLY THE WORD

The symbols in today's reading can apply to us and our fears. The lion and bear could be anything that threaten us. Be it a monumental task, a difficult confrontation, or a painful trial, we don't need to fear, because God is more powerful than any danger. And we are like the sheep in David's anecdote. Just as his sheep were helpless against wild animals, we can't face the problems of our lives without God's protection. Trust in Him and not in your own strength.

1 Samuel 17:47

""the battle is the Lord's"" (1 Samuel 17:47).

Iraq's military forces rolled into the tiny kingdom of Kuwait on August 12, 1990, effectively swallowing that nation and triggering the Gulf War. Iraqi leader Saddam Hussein had been warned for weeks not to invade Kuwait, but he refused to take the warnings seriously. But when the forces of the multi-nation ""Desert Storm"" coalition arrived and when President George Bush announced, ""The liberation of Kuwait has begun,"" everything changed. When a vastly superior force joins the battle, things change, whether in earthly or in spiritual warfare. For the Christian, things always change when the Lord joins the battle. That was the promise Moses made to the people of Israel as they prepared to conquer Canaan. When the Lord your God fights for you, the outcome is assured. We want to leave you with this encouraging note as we wrap up the month.

1 Samuel 18

1 Samuel 18:20-30

I will give her to him ... so that she may be a snare to him. - 1 Samuel 18:21

TODAY IN THE WORD

John McCain's opponents called him a carpetbagger in 1982 when he first ran for Congress in Arizona, a state in which he had lived for a relatively short time. The move backfired when the former Vietnam prisoner of war gave his response. "We in the military service tend to move a lot," McCain told one critic. "I wish I could have had the luxury, like you, of growing up and living and spending my entire life in a nice place like the First District of Arizona, but I was doing other things. As a matter of fact, when I think about it now, the place I lived longest in my life was Hanoi." He's served in Congress (and resided in Arizona) ever since.

King Saul's attempt at ending David's popularity (and life) in Israel had similarly unintended results. David had experienced sudden popularity, but he had yet to ascend to a status worthy of marrying into the royal family (v. 23). Saul tried to use David's lowly social standing (and the affection of his own daughter) as a means to ensnare David into an impossible situation. But Saul's definition of impossible—killing one hundred enemy soldiers as a substitute for a dowry—proved a trifle for David and his men. In fact, they defeated double the necessary number in less time than was given (vv. 26, 27), and David married Michal.

Thanks to Saul's plotting and the Lord's power and protection, David became increasingly famous as a war hero and a part of the royal family. Those should have been good things in the eyes of the king of Israel, but Saul instead grew ever jealous and fearful of David's rise in the kingdom. Here was a godly man, a courageous warrior, and a humble servant who should have enjoyed a fulfilling relationship with his wife and her royal family. Saul's selfish hatred made David his enemy for life.

Once again in the history of Israel, jealousy caused division and discord among the forefathers and leaders of the land. We will study it further in tomorrow's study, but the biggest enemy to Israel's prosperity was not any armed opponent, but rather the sinful failures that plagued their personal relationships.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

David's humility in the wake of his military success teaches a valuable lesson to anyone who serves the Lord. Success in ministry

often results in praise from others within the church, but we should never allow the accolades to inflate our pride. Never consider yourself to be on higher ground than those who have accomplished less or are less known. Like David, we should be hesitant to accept a higher status but eager to accept a challenge to do more for God.

1 Samuel 19

1 Samuel 19:1-18

He chose David his servant... to be the shepherd of his people Jacob. - Psalm 78:70-71

TODAY IN THE WORD

How many of us have been inspired by the example of a godly father?

Author James Dobson tells how his father would often give money to poor and needy people, even though his own family was just scraping by. When the money ran out, he would gather everyone for prayer: 'Oh Lord, we have tried to be generous with what you have given us, and now we are calling on you for help.'

God always answered those prayers! Says Dobson: 'I saw the Lord match my Dad's giving stride for stride... My young faith grew by leaps and bounds. I learned that you cannot outgive God!'

Not all of us have been blessed with such a remarkable father. In today's reading, Jonathan opposed the godless actions of his father, King Saul.

Although David's anointing as king was not yet public, Saul recognized David as an enemy (1 Sam. 18:12). He directed a murderous rage at the young musician and warrior (1 Sam. 18:8-9), trying to kill him indirectly (1 Sam 18:25) and directly (19:1, 10). Even though his son Jonathan was David's friend and his daughter Michal was David's wife, Saul hated and feared David because God was clearly with him.

At first, Jonathan dissuaded his father with rational arguments, and Saul agreed that David could live. But then an evil spirit sent from the Lord (1 Sam. 19:9) prompted another attack. What does this incident suggest about the relationship between God and evil? Demons cannot do anything that God doesn't permit them to do. God is sovereign in all areas of life, including the power and influence of evil. The attack on David was not a random event, but part of God's plan.

With the help of a trick by his wife, David escaped. He ran to Samuel in Ramah and told him what happened (v. 18). This action may have been a reflection of a mentoring relationship between the king-to-be and the elderly prophet; among other things, it showed that David was seeking the counsel of the most godly man he knew.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Family trouble is a theme that runs like a thread through this month's study. Eli's sons went astray, as did Samuel's. In today's reading, we see Saul and his son Jonathan on opposite sides of a growing divide.

With these sad examples in mind, set a specific marriage or family life improvement goal for this month. Ask God to help these important relationships move closer to His ideals. To do this, you might attend a conference, such as a 'Toward a Growing Marriage' seminar organized through Moody. Read a book, such as *The Five Love Languages*, by Dr. Gary Chapman (Moody Press). Plan a special date or family outing. Change your schedule to make more time for your spouse or kids. Set up an accountability relationship to monitor your attitudes and behavior. Or act on another idea of your own!

1 Samuel 19:19-24

Let them praise his name with dancing and make music to him with tambourine and harp. - Psalm 149:3

TODAY IN THE WORD

Nineteenth-century commentator John Darby meditates on how Paul connects the filling of the Spirit (Eph. 5:18) with an attitude of praise and worship (1 Sam. 19-20):

'[Christians are] to be filled with the Spirit, that is, He should take such possession of our affections, our thoughts, our understanding, that He should be their only source according to His proper and mighty energy to the exclusion of all else. Thus, full of joy, we should praise, we should sing for joy; and we should give thanks for all that might happen, because a God of love is the true source of all... The experience of the hand of God in everything here below will give rise only to thanksgiving. It comes from His hand whom we trust and whose love we know... The consciousness that all things are from God's hand, full trust in His love, and deadness as to

any will of our own, must exist in order to give thanks in everything a single eye which delights in His will.'

Spirit-filled praise is also what we find in today's reading!

We return to the story of the July 20 devotion. After David's escape to Samuel in Ramah, Saul sent some men to hunt him down. But they encountered Samuel leading a group of prophets in praise to the Lord, and the 'hunters' ended up praising the Lord. After this happened to several groups of soldiers, Saul himself came, and he also worshipped. He was so overcome that he stayed there all day and night!

Who were these prophets? They were most likely small groups of men gathered together in spiritual community. They may have been disciples or followers of Samuel or other prophets. Their 'prophesying' was joyful, exuberant praise of God.

What came of this strange episode? Surely Saul was reminded that this event happened as a sign to confirm his original anointing as king (10:5-6, 10-11). God was also reminding Saul that He alone is the sovereign King!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The 'prophesying' referred to in today's passage was probably a form of ecstatic praise or worship of God. Thus, today's application focuses on that key area of our spiritual life.

If you have any musical talent, volunteer to do something at your church. You might prepare vocal or instrumental music for an offertory, join the choir or orchestra, or lead a Sunday night worship service. Ask your pastor or music director for other suggestions.

If something like this isn't within your abilities, spend some time this week with a praise-and-worship recording. Many good choices are available at your local Christian bookstore.

1 Samuel 19:1-24

The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them. - Psalm 34:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 1916, Ernest Shackleton and his fifty-six-man expedition to Antarctica encountered heavy pack ice, which crushed and sank their ship. Leaving his crew on an island, Shackleton and a small team traveled for help to a whaling station over 800 miles away. Four months later, through shifting icebergs, freezing temperatures, and with little food or sleep, the team arrived at the whaling station and got a rescue ship for his entire crew. In his diary, Shackleton recounted: "When I look back at those days, I have no doubt that divine providence guided us ... it seemed to me often that we were not alone."

When we read 1 Samuel 19, we should come to the same conclusion. In a chapter full of "hiding" (v. 2), "eluding" (v. 10), and "escaping" Saul's murderous plans (vv. 10-12, 17), David was not alone. God's guiding, protective hand is clear. In some ways, Saul had become another Goliath. Ignoring God's laws about shedding innocent blood (Deut. 19:10-13) and defying God in his actions and oath-breaking, Saul was obsessed with killing David.

Despite Saul's zealous intentions, David repeatedly escaped. First, Jonathan successfully (though temporarily) persuaded Saul of David's goodness (vv. 1-6). Then, after David's continued military success, Saul renewed his hatred, but David escaped yet again, this time with Michal's help (vv. 8-17). Finally, David escaped to Samuel. Saul heard of it and sent three separate groups of men to kill David. But each time, "the Spirit of God came upon Saul's men" (vv. 20-21). Instead of killing, they end up prophesying. In desperation, Saul went himself, but he too was taken by the Spirit, stripped of his kingly robe, and ended the chapter lying on the ground, prophesying day and night (vv. 22-24).

Today's reading is full of anxiety and danger for young David, but it is also full of evidence that God was with him, guiding him and protecting him from harm. All David needed was to look back on his own history to see the clear hand of God at work in his life.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Although we don't have the same kingly promises as David, we can still be confident of God's guiding, protective hand in our lives. As David wrote: "The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and he delivers them" (Ps. 34:7). Psalm 59 is also said to be written by David during this dangerous time. Read it today, and then make this prayer your own, singing with David: "O my Strength, I watch for you; you, O God, are my fortress, my loving God" (Ps. 59:9-10).

1 Samuel 20

1 Samuel 20:1-42

Remember, O Lord, your great mercy and hesed, for they are from of old. - Psalm 25:6

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the online chat world, speed is key. For that reason, a whole new vocabulary of abbreviations has replaced traditional, "time-consuming" phrases. When something is funny, you LOL (laugh out loud); when you want to explain yourself modestly, you add IMHO (in my humble opinion); if you've left your computer momentarily, you say AFK (away from keyboard); and in the virtual world, you indicate your closest friends with BFF (best friends forever).

A cursory reading of 1 Samuel 20 might lead us to think that today's reading is all about David and Jonathan as BFF. David escaped Saul and ran to Jonathan; Jonathan defended David before his father Saul; and David and Jonathan had a moving display of friendship before they part.

While the theme of friendship is apparent, there's a deeper and more important theme of "covenant faithfulness." The word covenant is used only once in the passage (v. 8), but the description of the relationship between David and Jonathan clearly echoes covenantal ideas (vv. 12-17, 30-31, 42; see 18:3-4). They bound themselves, before God, to care for one another and their future generations.

The other side of "covenant" is the word hesed. A Hebrew word often translated as "steadfast love," "loving-kindness," or simply "love," hesed entails not just warm feelings but a loyal, devoted, and passionate affection. It is far deeper than mere friendship. It is a kind of contractual disposition of faithfulness toward another. This is what David calls for when he says to Jonathan: "As for you, show hesed to your servant, for you have brought him into a covenant with you before the Lord" (v. 8).

Today's passage presents us not with a sentimental picture of David and Jonathan as best buds but with the image of covenant faithfulness. It is this covenant that gives David the confidence to seek solace from his enemy Saul by running to his enemy's son. What better place to go than to one who has pledged his hesed?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The covenantal hesed proclaimed here points us to another, stronger love: God's covenant faithfulness toward us. In fact, hesed is repeatedly used in Scripture to describe God's love for us, such as in Exodus 34:6: "The Lord, the Lord, the compassionate and gracious God ... abounding in hesed and faithfulness." Consider your own and others' trials, sufferings, and persecutions, and then turn to the One who has declared His hesed to us, confident that "He will never leave you nor forsake you" (Deut. 31:6).

1 Samuel 20:12-23, 34-42

The Lord is witness between you and me forever. - 1 Samuel 20:23

TODAY IN THE WORD

One of the most famous media partnerships (and rivalries) in recent memory ended earlier this year with the death of Gene Siskel. Gene Siskel and Roger Ebert, film critics for the Chicago Tribune and Chicago Sun-Times, respectively, started their careers as competitors only. When asked to do a television show reviewing movies, they both said they'd rather do it with someone else.

But something changed along the way. Siskel and Ebert did the show for 24 years, giving their famous 'thumbs up' or 'thumbs down' to thousands of films and becoming household names in the process. As Ebert wrote in his column after Siskel's death: 'One question we were asked, again and again, was: 'Do you really hate each other?' There were days at the beginning of our relationship when the honest answer sometimes was 'yes.'... But over the years respect grew between us, and it deepened into friendship and love.'

Such partnerships and friendships are valuable beyond words, and that was certainly the case with David and Jonathan. This most famous of biblical friendships is the focus of today's reading. As we trace our way through the events of 1 Samuel, we see that this friendship encouraged David as he waited for God to fulfill His promise and make him king of Israel.

As they cooperated to discover Saul's intentions, David and Jonathan reaffirmed a covenant of friendship. These two young men, who had been in battle together, were already friends, a relationship they kept even in the volatile atmosphere of Saul's court. Though Jonathan knew that David would take the throne, he felt no envy or anger (compare Saul in vv. 30-31); in fact, Jonathan blessed David (v. 13). Jonathan loved him as he loved himself (v. 17).

As they sadly said farewell, they bowed and kissed (v. 41), expressing respect and affection, and they promised to remember their covenant. What was the standard in their relationship? 'Unfailing kindness like that of the Lord' (v. 14). Who guaranteed it? 'The Lord is witness between you and me' (v. 42).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

What a beautiful picture of biblical friendship we see in David and Jonathan! They were friends against the odds, through tough times, wholeheartedly. Our hope is that God has blessed you with at least one such friend someone who knows you well, who sticks with you through thick and thin, and who loves you unconditionally.

Today, write a 'thank you' note to a friend. Tell him or her how thankful you are for the friendship, and mention a specific trouble or difficulty that person helped you through. Affirm the qualities you value in your friend, and encourage him or her to continued spiritual growth. You might express your commitment to the friendship in words similar to those exchanged between David and Jonathan in today's reading.

1 Samuel 21

1 Samuel 21:1-15

In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me? - Psalm 56:11

TODAY IN THE WORD

In 2003, hiker Aron Ralston became trapped for six days in a remote canyon, his right arm pinned under a massive boulder. As food and water ran out, Ralston made the desperate choice to cut off his own arm with a pen knife in hopes of saving his life. Remarkably, it worked, and Ralston lives today to tell his story.

Desperate times call for desperate measures. Such is the story of David in today's reading. On the run from Saul, David first stopped to see Ahimelech the priest. In need of food and weapons, David overtly lied to the priest that he was on a secret mission from the king. We don't know if Ahimelech believed David, but David did get what he needed: the sword of Goliath, and the sacred bread of the Presence, usually reserved for the priests (cf. Lev. 24:5-9).

Some might object that the untruthful David was undeserving of this special provision of bread. But David's request for provision should remind us of another request we are instructed to pray: "Give us today our daily bread" (Matt. 6:11). Like David, we are also undeserving of God's provision, but that is the message of the gospel. We have a God who provides for His people—even when they don't deserve it.

In the next scene, one might wonder why David would appear in Goliath's home town with Goliath's old sword! But he did, which suggests just how desperate he must have been! Again, David used deception (feigning madness), and he barely escaped.

Perhaps it seems again that David's own cunning and deceit got him out of hot water, and that David did not deserve such deliverance. This is not the point in this passage, though, and in the psalms linked with this incident (Psalms 34 and 56), David gives us his own reflections. It was God alone who rescued Him, out of His mercy, and He deserves our praise. Faced with desperate times, these psalms of David remind us of our true refuge: "In God I trust; I will not be afraid. What can man do to me?" (Ps. 56:11).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's passage might fill us with feelings of judgment, even resentment, that David "got away with" deceit. But it should highlight the grace and mercy of God in providing for His people, even when they don't deserve it. This message should move us to gratitude, and also compassion for those we might think are "undeserving" of God's love. Consider those in your life whom you have judged as deserving God's punishment; then pray for them that they might know God's liberating grace and mercy.

1 Samuel 22

1 Samuel 22:1-23

Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? - Psalm 2:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

In the natural world, an animal that feels endangered and trapped will often strike out and attack whatever threatens it. Even the most docile animal, if cornered, can become violent. Fear provokes hostility.

Saul was a man who knew fear. He knew that God had rejected him as king, that Jonathan had made a covenant with David, and that his kingdom was slipping out of his hands. And in that fear, he was driven to violence.

Today's passage is not an easy one. Doeg the Edomite (see 21:7) informed Saul that Ahimelech the priest had recently given David provisions and Goliath's sword. In his fury, Saul summoned the entire cadre of priests before him. Despite Ahimelech's reasonable defense, Saul ordered them all to death. Doeg the Edomite then willingly executed eighty-five priests, plus the entire town of Nob, including women, children, and cattle. Only Abiathar escaped.

This horrific slaughter was brought on by horrific fear. Yet, as terrifying as this slaughter was, it was also the fulfillment of God's word against Eli, some fifty years earlier (see 2:30-36). Even God's enemies carry forth God's will. It should point us to another brutal hostility—the cross—in which the enemies of God carried forth God's promises, this time for the purpose of redemption for the world (cf. Acts 2:23). This doesn't minimize the evil of Saul's massacre or Christ's death, but it does bring the hopeful realization that God's enemies, even in their most vengeful moments, are still subject to the redeeming work and plan of God. God's purposes will always be worked out.

Another pattern is apparent here as well. Abiathar's escape displays the way God so often works—preserving a remnant when His enemies try to wipe out His people. Moses was spared when Pharaoh ordered the murder of Israelite boys (Ex. 2:1-10). Joash avoided Athaliah's attempt to kill the royal family (2 Kings 11:1-3). Jesus escaped the murderous plot of king Herod (Matt. 2:13-15). God's enemies abound, but God's preserving mercy prevails.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

It's easy to look at the world we live in and see nothing but chaos, danger, and a powerful force of individuals and institutions arrayed against God. But today's text urges us to see with the eyes of faith; even in a fallen world, God is still King, and He still rules. Nowhere is this message more clearly expressed than in Psalm 2. Try memorizing some—or all—of this psalm as a way of “adjusting” your vision of faith.

1 Samuel 23

1 Samuel 23:1-29

Blessed are those who are persecuted because of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. - Matthew 5:10

TODAY IN THE WORD

Over the past ten years, Hua Huiqui, the Chinese pastor of a house church in Beijing, has been arrested several times and repeatedly harassed by the police who oppose Christian activity that is not sanctioned by the government. In October 2007, Hua was told that he could not leave his home, and officers welded his door shut. A week later, while being escorted to another police district, Hua was beaten unconscious by a mob. Even after his release from the hospital, Hua remains under house arrest, because he will not recant his faith.

As distressing as persecution of God's people is, it should come as no surprise (see John 15:20). God's enemies always hate God's people. In our reading today, David knew real hatred and violence from those who rejected God's rule. Saul had a laser-like focus to pursue David, wherever he might be found, and to kill him.

Note, though, the way God cared for David in this chapter. He did not remove the threat of Saul. The persecution and pursuit continues here and through the coming chapters. But God was clearly with David in the midst of persecution. First, after David's rescue of Keilah from the Philistines, David inquired of the Lord, who told him that Saul was coming and that the citizens of Keilah would be willing to hand him over to Saul. David exercised prudence and promptly left.

Next, while staying in the Desert of Ziph, Saul searched for David repeatedly, “but God did not give David into his hands” (v. 14). Moreover, God sent Jonathan to David who “helped him find strength in God” (v. 16). With a renewal of their covenant, Jonathan left David with encouragement.

Finally, while in the Desert of Maon, Saul was in pursuit, closing in on David and his men. Just then, a message came that the Philistines were raiding the land, and Saul cut off the chase. Saul never gave up his intent to kill David, but God never ceased protecting him.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This passage reminds us that God's people will always face opposition from the enemies of God's kingdom. The ministry of other believers can bring encouragement in the midst of suffering. Christians who suffer persecution and imprisonment around the world find great comfort in hearing from those who pray for them. One agency, The Voice of the Martyrs, works to deliver letters to such suffering Christians.

1 Samuel 24

1 Samuel 24:1-22

May the Lord avenge the wrongs you have done to me, but my hand will not touch you. - 1 Samuel 24:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

In modern times we speak of 'chivalry' only in terms of opening a door for a woman, or another gesture of politeness or respect.

But the medieval concept of 'chivalry' included much more than that. As seen, for example, in the tales of King Arthur, chivalry was a complete code of behavior. Chivalrous knights were honor-bound to defend the weak against the strong, to fight only for right and just causes, and not to take unfair advantage of their enemies. A wicked knight, for example, might strike a man when he was down, but a true knight would allow the man to regain his feet and prepare to fight again. Such behavior showed that they held to a 'higher law' that they would not sink to the level of the evils they opposed.

David's chivalrous action toward King Saul in today's reading was motivated by godly standards. During the latter days of Samuel's life, his protégé David was still en route to the kingship. He was waiting for God's timing. Through many attempts on his life and much hatred from Saul, David responded with patience and faith in God.

When Saul appeared to step into David's hands, David's men interpreted God's words according to their own desires (v. 4). David knew that this was not God's will, however, and was even hesitant to cut off a corner of Saul's robe.

From a human point of view, this makes no sense David should have seized the opportunity. But he knew that Saul was still God's anointed king. He had not yet been removed, and he was to be respected as such (cf. Rom. 13:1-2). His own anointing by Samuel was not a 'blank check' to do as he liked God fulfilled His own promise in His own time, without David's 'help.'

Momentarily touched by David's righteousness, Saul gave up the chase. But David remained in his stronghold, knowing not to trust the angry king. Both men would later sow as they had reaped (1 Sam. 24:13).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Under incredibly difficult and unfair circumstances, David held fast to a godly, forgiving attitude even against a man bent on killing him!

Are you harboring any grudges today? Is there someone you need to forgive? It might be someone who hates you, who doesn't want your forgiveness. It might be someone who has genuinely wronged you and hurt you. Regardless of who it is, forgive that person from your heart, with God's love, or you risk holding on to hatred or bitterness that will poison your life. God can heal your hurts and will one day right all wrongs. Leave these matters in His hands. If you say you can't forgive, what you're really saying is that you don't fully trust Him.

1 Samuel 24:1-22

May the Lord be our judge and decide between us. - 1 Samuel 24:15

TODAY IN THE WORD

The En-ge-di region was an important oasis lying on the Dead Sea's western shore. Filled with spring water and caves, the En-ge-di has been the location of a number of Jewish fortresses throughout history, including the one used by Jewish revolutionaries holding out against the Romans during the destruction of Jerusalem in a.d. 70 and 135.

David knew the benefits of the En-ge-di. In fact, one of the region's many caves became a hide-out for his men. What David probably did not anticipate was the rare opportunity to dispose of his enemy in the dark recesses of that cave.

Yet David resisted the temptation to take Saul's life and the kingdom. He knew it was God's will that he would have the kingdom—but David also knew that God's purposes would be accomplished in God's way. He chose instead simply to cut a piece of Saul's robe. Note the reason David gave for his restraint: "for he is the Lord's anointed" (vv. 6, 10). If anyone deserved to be cut down, it was Saul. But David recognized that the disobedient and murderous Saul was still God's anointed one. David resisted the temptation to take what was his in a manner that would not honor God.

David not only resisted revenge, he also sought reconciliation with his enemy. Rather than remain safely hidden in the cave, David presented himself to Saul and his men in a gesture of reconciliation. The tenor of David's speech contained a balance of respect and rebuke, coupled with a submission to God's judgment.

Bowing down before him, David called Saul "My lord the king" (v. 8). He then made the case that he had never intended Saul any harm. He also rebuked Saul for "the wrongs you have done to me" (v. 12), and then cast the whole matter upon God: "May the Lord be our judge and decide between us" (v. 12, 15). This is a model for reconciliation: clear respect, gentle rebuke, and confidence in God's judgment. Ultimate reconciliation was never reached, but that didn't prevent David from trying.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Perhaps you have been seriously wronged by someone—a friend, a family member, a coworker. Take the message from today's reading and choose to resist the urge for revenge and to seek reconciliation instead. Using the pattern of Scripture, go to that person made in God's image, and seek reconciliation through a balance of respect and gentle rebuke. Pray for true reconciliation and leave the rest to God.

1 Samuel 25

1 Samuel 25:1; Acts 13:16-22

For his whole life he will be given over to the Lord. - 1 Samuel 1:28

TODAY IN THE WORD

When King Hussein of Jordan died earlier this year, many observers felt that it marked the end of an era in the Middle East.

Hussein's grandfather, King Abdullah, was assassinated by a Palestinian extremist as he walked into a mosque with his grandson. The young Hussein pursued the gunman, and narrowly escaped death himself when a medal on his uniform deflected a bullet. He took over the reins of the kingdom at the age of 17. 'I would never be a schoolboy again,' he later said.

Despite these tentative beginnings, Hussein became a respected statesman, doing an intricate balancing act among the pressures of the Cold War, Arab-Israeli conflict, Western-style economic development, and democratic political reforms. His legacy? Jordan is politically stable, economically strong, and at peace with its neighbors.

Samuel's death in today's reading marks the end of an era in the history of Israel. The announcement was made rather quietly, without grand statements, yet the depth of his impact may be seen in the nation's mourning.

What a career a miraculous birth, a divine calling, and a long life of righteous service! He led in political, military, and spiritual matters. He represented His people to God, and presented God to His people.

From the reading in Acts, we can get a 'big picture' sense of the influence of Samuel's life. During a sermon on his first missionary journey, Paul summarized Israel's history, recognizing Samuel's life as a pivotal point in history, the link between the judges and the kings (Acts 13:20).

He was buried in Ramah, his hometown, where his life had begun as an answer to his mother's prayer. He had come full circle both physically and spiritually, for he lived his life, as his mother had vowed he would (today's verse), committed absolutely to the love and service of God.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We have said that Samuel's death marks the 'end of an age.' How much do you know about Old Testament history? Do you know the order of people and events, who did what when and why? Or does all this sometimes blur together in your mind?

Another way to learn Old Testament history and content is to take one of the participatory seminars offered by Walk Thru the Bible Ministries. Ask your pastor to look into having one at your church in the near future.

1 Samuel 25:1-42

Do not say, "I'll pay you back for this wrong!" Wait for the Lord, and he will deliver you. - Proverbs 20:22

TODAY IN THE WORD

Living by the values of God's kingdom, rather than the world's, distinguishes Jesus' followers in a "dog-eat-dog world" where it's considered normal to "give people a taste of their own medicine." Evaluating cultural values in light of Scripture demands wisdom, intention, and courage. In today's passage, Abigail is a keen interpreter of the conflicting values surrounding her. She encourages David not to succumb to temptation to lose sight of God's kingdom and purposes.

The author paints a stark contrast between Abigail and her husband, Nabal. He is arrogant and dishonorable in business dealings, whereas Abigail is intelligent and beautiful. Nabal foolishly ignores David's suggestion to corroborate his account with the servants, but Abigail wisely listens to their testimony. Nabal's response to David is pretentious and ungrateful, whereas Abigail bows before David in humility.

Abigail's wisdom is also distinguished from David's hasty imprudence (vv. 20-25). She points out that needless bloodshed would torment David's conscience and that his desire for revenge was ultimately self-interested (vv. 30-31). David should remember the Lord's covenant promises, to entrust himself into the Lord's care, and to live in light of His bigger story (vv. 26-31). Both Nabal and David embody folly. Nabal is short-sighted, insolent, and disreputable. David is short-fused. David felt insulted by Nabal and consequently lost sight of the Lord.

Abigail embodies wisdom, much like Lady Wisdom and the wife of noble character in Proverbs (Proverbs 1-9; 31). She quickly acted to care for her household; she was creative, industrious, and bold; she was also humble and repentant on behalf of her foolish husband. Her wisdom shone when she reminded David that the Lord fights His battles and those of His people, so it is godly to surrender to His ways rather than pursue one's own. God spoke to David through Abigail, and in turn David praised God, seeing how He protects and avenges him (v. 39).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

In what ways do you embody wisdom or folly in situations you are facing? Wisdom is cultivated in our hearts as we study God's Word and as we are transformed to become more like Christ daily. Consider studying Proverbs 1 through 9 and 31 and seek a fellow Christian to partner with you in pursuit of godly wisdom. Just as Abigail spoke wisdom into David's life, so the two of you can speak into each other's lives.

1 Samuel 25:1-44

Praise be to the Lord, who ... has kept his servant from doing wrong. - 1 Samuel 25:39

TODAY IN THE WORD

One writer described our response to God's providence this way: "Trust in the providence of God is not a heaven-sent formula for the indolent, not a way of bypassing responsibility with regard to social and material concerns ... you have to take on the affairs that come your way, knowing that they come from God and must be steered back again to him."

Today's passage is yet another example of God's providential care for David, but this time God's protection has a twist. In previous chapters, God protected David from harm from the hand of others. In 1 Samuel 25, God protected David from doing harm to others. And in that preventive providence, David also responded in obedience and faith.

The story is well-known. David's men asked the fool Nabal for provisions. Nabal hurled insults, and David gathered his men for a vindictive slaughter. It all would have been over quickly if not for the intelligent and resourceful Abigail, who intervened with provisions and apologies. She convinced David to rethink the matter.

Abigail's speech to David is the theological crux of the text. While David was set on exacting his own revenge (see the contrast with David's action in chap. 24), Abigail's wisdom brought God back into the picture: "Since the Lord has kept you ... from avenging yourself with your own hands, ... " avoid "the staggering burden of needless bloodshed" (vv. 26-31, 34). In other words, think about what you're doing; this is not the way of God's anointed!

In God's providence, He sent Abigail to bring David to his senses, and even David realized the fact: "Praise be to the Lord, who ... has kept His servant from doing wrong" (v. 39). David saw God's providential hand and responded with humility and gratitude for God's preventive care. In the end, Nabal's death still occurred, but by God's means, not by David's rage. Through God's restraining providence, David avoided the sin of needless bloodshed.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's providential care works not only to protect us from harm, but also to protect us from sin. And Scripture reminds us today that we should be just as thankful for being kept from sinning as from being delivered from suffering. Spend time reflecting on the recent days and weeks. Where has God helped restrain you from disobedience? Have you always responded to His preventive providence? Give Him thanks now for His restraining care in your life, and seek His grace to respond well in those providential moments to come.

1 Samuel 26

1 Samuel 26:1-25

I rejoiced with those who said to me, "Let us go to the house of the Lord." - Psalm 122:1

TODAY IN THE WORD

Modern biblical commentators, noting the close parallels in plot sequence, speeches, and outcome, often assume that 1 Samuel 24 and 26 are "duplicate" versions of the same event. Indeed, the two chapters are very similar; but there is no reason to suppose that these events did not happen twice. In fact, it is the re-occurrence of the same event that is so remarkable and thus worth recording in Scripture. As readers, we should take note when Scripture takes pains to emphasize a point, especially noting the differences.

As in 1 Samuel 24, David was seemingly given the chance to dispose of Saul in the night. He and Abishai sneaked into the camp and found Saul sleeping with his spear next to his head. His comrade Abishai offered to take the spear (one that Saul had previously used against David) and "pin him to the ground with one thrust" (v. 8). David's response is significant. As before, he refrained from killing "the Lord's anointed" (v. 9), but there is an important difference. In 1 Samuel 25:38, God "struck Nabal." Here, David made an application: "the Lord Himself will strike" Saul one way or another (v. 10). David had learned his lesson: he was confident that God would handle the affairs and problems of life in His time and in His way.

There's another important difference in today's reading compared with chapter 24: David's emphasis on the value of worship. In his spear-stealing conversation with Saul and his company after stealing the spear, David declared that "they have now driven me from my share in the Lord's inheritance and have said, "Go, serve other gods" (v. 19). Of course, David's enemies weren't literally forcing him into idolatry. David's point was that his exile had removed him from God's Promised Land, God's covenant people, and God's sanctuary and sacrifice. The worship of God in the manner He had directed was no small matter to David. This value placed upon the freedom to worship the Lord became the centerpiece of David's complaint against Saul's persecution. Do we share David's passion for worshiping our God?

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

We are reminded today of the importance of being able to worship our God with fellow believers. Many of us lack such a zeal for corporate worship, and many Christians around the world do not have that same freedom to gather in Christ's name. Make a two-fold prayer today. First, pray for those who live in oppressive lands, that they may gain opportunities to worship God freely. Second, pray for yourself, that God would instill in you a fresh desire and appreciation for the communal worship of His name.

1 Samuel 27

1 Samuel 27:1-28:2

There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death. - Proverbs 14:12

TODAY IN THE WORD

Ask any two fighting children what happened, and you will likely get two different stories. Typically, each child will highlight what the other child did, conveniently leaving out their own provocation that led to the argument. As the saying goes, sometimes the real story is in what's missing.

On one level, today's reading is another episode about David's escape from Saul. He took his men and family to nearby Philistia and had stunning success raiding and destroying Canaanite lands. To keep up the appearance that he had betrayed Israel, David told the king of Gath that his raids were against the lands of Judah and related clans. All seemed well. David finally had rest from Saul, victory in battle, and even the secure confidence of King Achish.

But the real story is in what's missing. There's not a single mention of God or God's perspective in this passage. The text's silence at this point is telling. Two indications in the text suggest that there's a problem with David's choice.

First, David began by telling himself that sooner or later, Saul was going to capture him, so "the best thing I can do is to escape to the land of the Philistines" (27:1). Given all we have seen of God's repeated protection, David's decision to find safety among the godless Philistines rather than in God's continued care is misguided. At no point does David speak of the Lord, His promises, or His past protection. Mention of God is entirely missing.

Second, this all leads to a prickly dilemma for David. Achish was so enamored with David's seemingly godless loyalty that he enlisted him to destroy the very people of God. The absence of God in today's text points us back to God Himself as the true source of security for God's people. We may understand, even sympathize with David's difficulties, but Scripture also warns us against

leaving God out of our decision-making processes.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Scripture reminds us today that all of God's children falter in faith. The task of discernment in the complexities of life is not always easy, and sometimes a choice that seems wise ends up leading to trouble. Confess to God those times you made decisions without seeking Him first. Then memorize or meditate on Proverbs 3:5-6 today as just one biblical prescription for sound decision-making, noting that we are instructed to lean "not on your own understanding," but on the Lord.

1 Samuel 28

1 Samuel 28:3-20

The Lord has done what he predicted through me. - 1 Samuel 28:16

TODAY IN THE WORD

Most of us are familiar with the famous story by Charles Dickens, A Christmas Carol. One night, Ebenezer Scrooge, a miserable old miser, was confronted by the ghost of his former business partner, Jacob Marley. Marley wore a chain that he forged through a lifetime of selfishness and cruelty. Unless Scrooge could change his ways, his fate would be even worse.

That night, Scrooge was visited by the ghosts of Christmas past, present, and future. Though unwilling and afraid, he was forced to face his true character. He heeded the warning and woke up on Christmas morning determined to walk a new road. From that day forth, he lived by a new code of generosity and love.

If only King Saul had responded in the same way! But when confronted with words of judgment by the ghost of Samuel, Saul retreated further from God into his doom.

In a tight military corner, Saul was desperate, and God was silent (vv. 6, 15). In his fear and sinfulness, the king decided to go to a medium, although he himself had outlawed witchcraft (cf. Deut. 18:9-13). His character sunk even lower. In a sickening irony, he swore by God that it was not a trap (1 Sam. 28:10) and asked the witch to bring up Samuel.

How could she do so? Do witches really have such power over dead saints? No. In this case God permitted the spirit of Samuel to come with a specific message for Saul. Lies and disguises end, as the king's identity is revealed (v. 12). After death, in the same way as when he was alive, Samuel prophesied God's word a judgment. The Israelites would be defeated, and Saul and his sons were to die because of their disobedience (v. 18).

Although he heard this final word from the man he most respected, Saul still did not repent. His only response was fear (v. 20).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

God's words through Samuel came true. God's words always come true. Our faith is in the Word of God, Jesus Christ.

Today, find and claim a promise from Scripture. This is not 'wishful thinking.' God's promises are rock-solid reality. What He says is guaranteed to be true! If you'd like some suggestions about which promise to claim, here are a few of our favorites:

¥ 'He who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus' (Phil. 1:6).

¥ 'The Lord Himself goes before you and will be with you; He will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged' (Deut. 31:8, cf. Heb. 13:5).

¥ 'We know that in all things God works for the good of those who love Him' (Rom. 8:28).

1 Samuel 28:3-25

TODAY IN THE WORD

Warren Smith's journey to faith in Christ led through a maze of spiritual deception and New Age beliefs.

As told in his 1992 book *The Light That Was Dark*, Warren tried many false paths, including psychic readings, the teachings of an Eastern religion guru, "channeling," and other occult practices. He became increasingly disillusioned, however, began to read the New Testament, and eventually put his faith in Christ as the one true Way.

Occult beliefs and practices have been around throughout history--there's nothing new about the New Age! Many people like Warren have been led astray by them.

In today's Bible reading, King Saul, on his last legs as king of Israel, fell into this error. He was on a downhill path spiritually, having shown his partial obedience to God in the incidents described in 1 Samuel 13 and 15. David had already been secretly anointed as king.

The Philistines, Israel's archenemies, were poised to attack; and Saul was desperate for a word from God. But the prophet Samuel was dead, and God wasn't speaking to Saul directly anymore (v. 6). The king had earlier expelled from Israel all the mediums and spiritists, those who used or consulted demonic spirits.

Saul was in a panic, so he had his men search for a medium he might have missed. They found one at Endor. What happened during Saul's visit is a source of controversy. The best explanation seems to be that God overruled the demonic world and intervened by giving Saul a true apparition of Samuel. The message of judgment that Samuel delivered was true (v. 19), for Saul and his sons died in the next day's battle (see 1 Sam. 31).

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

This account holds an important lesson for our daily spiritual warfare.

When the Holy Spirit departed from Saul in terms of working in his life (1 Sam. 16:14), he and Israel trembled before the Philistine giant Goliath (1 Sam. 17). Years later, God had withdrawn completely from Saul, and he trembled before the Philistines again.

1 Samuel 28:3-25

O Lord, when you favored me, you made my mountain stand firm; but when you hid your face, I was dismayed. - Psalm 30:7

TODAY IN THE WORD

According to the Law given through Moses, one of the "detestable practices" the Lord explicitly prohibited was using divination or using anyone "who is a medium or spiritist, or who consults the dead." In fact, God says that it was because of these practices that He was driving out the nations in the land (cf. Deut. 18:9-13).

We see how far Saul had fallen in 1 Samuel 28. Finding no answer from God through the prescribed means of communication with God, Saul turned to illicit means: a spiritist. The irony is that Saul, following the commands of the Law, had previously expelled all mediums from the land. Now in desperation, he put on a disguise and consulted one himself.

Saul's disobedience here is obvious. But note also the resounding consequence of his disobedience, and the theme of the entire chapter: fear. When Saul saw the Philistine army, "he was afraid; terror filled his heart" (v. 5). When Samuel actually appeared, the woman cried out in fear, and Saul had to instruct her, "Don't be afraid" (v. 13). In speaking with Samuel, Saul confessed that he was in "great distress" (v. 15). After receiving Samuel's terrible message, Saul fell to the ground and was "filled with fear" (v. 20). Finally, the encounter ended with Saul being "greatly shaken" (v. 21), rendered as "terrified" in the rsv and nasb.

Sin often leads to a downward spiral of more and more sin. Recall that Saul brought this upon himself. He was once considered among the prophets (10:11; 19:24), but his continued rejection of the Lord left him with no prophetic word. He once used priestly means to consult God (see 14:18-19), but then chose to slaughter the priests at Nob (22:6-19) and now the priestly Urim did him no good. Saul removed himself from the grace and presence of God, and he was left with a terrifying fear and an inability to lead his people. Such is the consequences of unchecked sin.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

The message about the debilitating consequences of sin is a powerful one for us all, but is especially relevant for the leaders of God's people. If, like Saul, God's ministers choose to reject the light of God's Word and Spirit, there will be nothing left by which to lead God's people. Pray today for the leaders in your church and across the nation and world, asking God to send upon them the continual grace of His Spirit, and that they would openly receive it.

1 Samuel 29

1 Samuel 29:1-11

Who has understood the mind of the Lord, or instructed him as his counselor? - Isaiah 40:13

TODAY IN THE WORD

"Chapter plays" were a popular type of film entertainment in the early part of the twentieth century. Usually shown in theaters along

with a full feature film, these brief episodes would bring the hero into a predicament for which there seemed no possible escape, leaving the viewers with a cliffhanger ending. The audience would have to return the following week to see how the hero escaped.

Leaving the fate of Saul and Israel hanging in the balance, we move from one cliffhanger to another. Recall that 1 Samuel 28:2 left us with a similar uncertainty. David was so convincing in his betrayal of Israel that King Achish enlisted David to fight with him against Israel. How will David escape the dilemma?

We don't know at first what David was planning, but in the end it doesn't matter. Although Achish had perfect confidence in David—emphatically defending David three separate times (vv. 3, 6-7, 9-10)—the Philistine rulers had their doubts. They realized this would be the perfect opportunity for David to turn on the Philistines and regain favor with Saul. So David was sent home with his men.

The contrast between the dilemma of Saul in 1 Samuel 28 and David in today's reading is important. Both Saul and David find themselves in difficulty because of their lack of faith. Saul repeatedly rejected God; David failed to trust God's protective care. Yet, notice that while God left Saul to his own devices, He never left David. Quietly, but surely, the Lord delivered David from his dilemma with a subtle and surprising move. God's role is nearly hidden (the only mention of the Lord is by Achish in v. 6), but it is there nonetheless.

The idea that “God moves in mysterious ways” is often overused, but it still contains much truth. We do not know the mind and ways of God (see Isa. 40:13-14), but He can use any and every means He wants to bring grace and deliverance to His people—even if it includes using His enemies.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading doesn't suggest that we can lead lives of faithlessness and sin, simply expecting God to bail us out every time there's trouble. But it does encourage us that despite our foolishness and failings, God does not give up on us. Perhaps you have a friend or family member who needs to be reminded of God's constant faithfulness despite repeated failing. Make a point to share that message and today's text with that person today.

1 Samuel 30

1 Samuel 30:1-31

When he ascended on high, he led captives in his train and gave gifts to men. - Ephesians 4:8

TODAY IN THE WORD

Typology is a figurative reading of the biblical text where historical events find their greater fulfillment in the later events of Christ or His church. For example, in 1 Corinthians 10:1-13, Paul argues that Israel's Red Sea crossing and wilderness wanderings could be read typologically as pointing to Christ and Christian baptism. And as the Gospel of Luke declares, “beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, [Jesus] explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself” (Luke 24:27). All Scripture points to Christ.

Today's reading might also be read as a typology that finds greater fulfillment in Christ. At one level, 1 Samuel 30 records the stunning success of David over the raiding Amalekites. On this level, our reading again describes God's provision to David in granting him success over his enemies.

But consider how this text may also be showing us a pattern that finds its fulfillment in Jesus. David, the Lord's anointed, finds his enemy enslaving His loved ones in a seemingly crushing victory (vv. 1-6); yet “on the third day” (v. 1), this anointed one ascends victorious over his enemy, restores his family, and distributes the gifts of plunder to his men and the nearby clans and cities of Judah (vv. 7-31). So too, Christ (literally “the anointed one”) finds His beloved creation captured in the slavery of sin, and suffers a seemingly crushing blow at the cross; yet, “on the third day” this Anointed One ascends victorious, restores His family, and distributes the gifts of God's grace to His people (cf. Eph. 4:8).

Today's passage is, of course, about God's goodness to David in providing victory over the Amalekites. But following the example of Paul and Jesus Himself, it may also be read as prefiguring of Christ's victorious resurrection on the third day and the distribution of grace to His rescued children.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Whether we read today's passage as a message about David's victory over the Amalekites or as a typology about Christ's victorious resurrection and distribution of grace, we should be humbled at the rescuing power of God on behalf of His people. Whatever the captivity or enslavement may be (challenging circumstances, besetting sin, physical persecution), today's reading calls us to put our

trust in a God who can save abundantly. Turn over to Him all your troubles and sorrows, and rest today in His loving, powerful arms.

1 Samuel 31

1 Samuel 31:1-13

He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man. - 1 Samuel 15:29

TODAY IN THE WORD

If a televised sporting event or political speech runs longer than the networks anticipated, viewers are often taken to the scheduled program with the words, "We join this regularly scheduled broadcast already in progress." This tells the viewers that they are running late and must catch up with what's going on.

First Samuel 31 reads like a modern-day television program: "Now the Philistines fought (literally "were fighting") against Israel" (v. 1). We now join the battle already in progress, and quickly learn the results: Israel suffered a devastating defeat. Saul's sons, including Jonathan, were killed, and Saul fell on his own sword to avoid Philistine disgrace. The Philistines occupied Israelite towns, stripped the deceased Saul of his armor, and desecrated his body. The brave men of Jabesh Gilead rescued Saul's corpse and provided a more honoring burial.

We end the book of 1 Samuel on a terribly depressing note. Israel has been defeated, Israel's king has been killed and humiliated, and Saul's armor ends up in the temple of the Ashtoreths. The message is clear: the idols have won; Israel's God has been defeated. Or so it seems.

At first, there may not appear to be much hope in these dark verses, but here we need to remember 1 Samuel as a whole. Yes, Israel is defeated and Saul dies in a horrible way, but recall what this means. First, God has kept His word. He said that He had rejected Saul and would take the kingdom from him (13:14; 15:26-29), and we see now that this is exactly what He has done. Our God is a faithful God; His word can be trusted.

Second, with the removal of Saul, the moment we have been waiting for since chapter 16 has finally come. Saul is gone, and David, God's chosen one, can take his place as king over God's people. The book ends with death, destruction, humiliation, and sorrow; but if we've been careful readers, we know this is not really the end, but only the beginning of something new and better for God's people.

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today's reading forces us, in our darker moments of struggle and circumstance, to turn to the trustworthiness of God's Word. Sometimes we must look past the immediate in order to see (perhaps in just glimpses) God's faithful and sustaining hand still at work. Take time today to make a list of all that God has taught you through His trustworthy Word this month. Then give Him thanks for those lessons, asking Him for the grace to live them out in your own life.

1 Samuel 31:1-13

O daughters of Israel, weep for Saul... How the mighty have fallen in battle! - 2 Samuel 1:24-25

TODAY IN THE WORD

At first, Adolf Hitler seemed a successful leader for a new Germany. When he took office as chancellor in 1933, he launched a rapid economic recovery and restored the country's military strength and pride, which had languished after World War I.

But very soon, when Hitler invaded neighboring countries in 1939 and started World War II, however, his evil nature became plain to see. His politics were those of conquest and dictatorship, and his policies were set by a belief in German racial superiority. His plan of Jewish genocide shocked the world.

After D-Day on the beaches of France, German forces retreated across Europe and Hitler's defeat began. When Russian troops advanced into Berlin, Hitler committed suicide in his bunker.

Along similar lines, Saul's career as king turned into a spiritual disaster. In today's reading, we see the conclusion of his tragic story.

God's word of judgment, spoken by Samuel, was fulfilled. The Israelites lost the battle to the Philistines. Saul's sons were killed, including Jonathan. To avoid capture and disgrace, the king fell on his own sword. He had already destroyed himself spiritually, and now he took his own life physically. The aftermath was not pretty, as the gloating Philistines abused the body and fastened it to a city wall as a trophy of victory.

But Saul had been God's anointed, and surely God was displeased that his armor was offered to idols (v. 10). Maybe that's why He spurred the warriors of Jabesh Gilead to rescue the body and cremate it to protect it from further indignities. (Later David would properly rebury Saul's remains in his family tomb, see 2 Sam. 21:12-14.) The warriors of Jabesh Gilead were motivated by their memories of Saul's first military victory, a rescue of their town from the Ammonites (1 Sam. 11). Since that day, what a sad and sinful road Saul walked!

TODAY ALONG THE WAY

Today, we suggest you do something creative in connection with the story of Saul, concluded in today's reading. Show the tragic lessons of his life through a poem, song, painting, or other art form. What you do can show the truth of Saul's life and bring glory to God.

Here are a couple of ideas:

(1) Write and perform a dramatic monologue. You are Saul, on the field of battle, about to fall on your sword, reviewing how you got to this point in your life. What will you say?

(2) Draw and write a comic book that illustrates major events from the life of Saul. Your children or Sunday School class may enjoy making this a group project.

DEVOTIONALS BY THEODORE EPP

1 Samuel

2 Samuel

A MAN AFTER THE HEART OF GOD

1 Samuel 16:1-13

When Samuel was sent to the house of Jesse to anoint one of his sons to be king, the old prophet apparently assumed that since Saul (the present king) was a man of striking physical appearance, God would choose another like him.

As Eliab, Jesse's oldest son, stood before him, Samuel said in his heart, "Surely the Lord's anointed is before him" (1 Sam. 16:6).

Then God showed Samuel that the divine standard was not according to a man's physical appearance but according to his heart attitude toward God.

"Look not on his countenance," the Lord said, "or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the Lord looketh on the heart" (v. 7).

Paul referred to this fact when he said in Acts 13:22,23, "And when he [God] had removed him [Saul], he raised up unto them David to be their king; to whom also he gave testimony, and said, I have found David the son of Jesse, a man after mine own heart, which shall fulfil all my will. Of this man's seed hath God according to his promise raised unto Israel a Saviour, Jesus."

So God's choice was a heart choice. It is clear from this that God's thoughts are not our thoughts, and our ways are not God's ways (see Isa. 55:8,9). God looked for a man whose heart was right toward Him and found him in David.

"But know that the LORD hath set apart him that is godly for himself" (Ps. 4:3).

A LIFE THAT BLESSES OTHERS

1 Samuel 16:14-23

Having been anointed king of Israel, David's life could never be the simple life of a shepherd boy again. He was able to return to his flocks for brief periods, but those times soon ceased.

As Psalm 23 indicates, David never forgot that the Lord was his Shepherd. The reminders of the Lord's majesty and care and the benefits of the quiet pastures and still waters steadied David in many a crisis. And they helped bring about the restoration of his soul when he sinned.

The quality of David's life was such that when he first appeared at the royal residence, Saul "loved him greatly" (1 Sam. 16:21).

David came to dispel with his sweet music the evil spirit that often troubled Saul. He, of course, did not know that David was to be his successor.

On the other hand, David behaved so well and was so humble that Saul had no reason to dislike him; rather, he admired and loved him. He made David his armor-bearer and sent word to Jesse that his son was now attached to the inner circle of the king's bodyguard.

Do our lives give off a sweet fragrance that is a blessing to others? Others should see Christ's life reflected in our lives as believers in Christ.

"By this shall all men know that ye are my disciples, if ye have love one to another" (John 13:35).

THE WAY OF VICTORY

1 Samuel 17:17-37

Saul stated that David was not able to go against the Philistine. Saul said, "Thou art but a youth, and he a man of war from his youth" (1 Sam. 17:33). Here was a man of gigantic stature and who had been trained for war from his adolescent years.

In this way, Saul sought to discourage David just as Eliab had tried to discourage him with criticism and slander. But David knew his God and would not be put off.

Many centuries later Paul put into words the truth that God does not choose the great things of this world to do His work, but He calls on those things that the world considers as nothing to confound the world's wisdom (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29).

Herein lies a basic difference between human reasoning and God's reasoning. David knew his God and had already seen the hand of God upon his own life in a remarkable way.

David said to Saul, "Thy servant kept his father's sheep, and there came a lion, and a bear, and took a lamb out of the flock: and I went out after him, and smote him, and delivered it out of his mouth: and when he arose against me, I caught him by his beard, and smote him, and slew him" (1 Sam. 17:34,35).

All of us face lions and bears and Goliaths who defy the living God and scorn His people. But where is the Lord God of David? He is still the same today, and those of us who put our trust in Him will be victorious.

"God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble" (Ps. 46:1).

STANDING STRONG FOR GOD

1 Samuel 17:38-51

God's own program for the ages calls for the complete subjugation of all enemies.

"Then cometh the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he hath put all enemies under his feet. The last enemy that shall be destroyed is death. For he hath put all things under his feet" (1 Cor. 15:24-27).

When Goliath died, the Philistine army began to run in terror, and the people of Israel followed them to take the spoils.

This is always true. Wherever the faithful servant or servants of God carry through some project to victory, the unbelieving and faithless crowd will always come in, seeking what it considers its share.

That same crowd may have held back the victory for a time through envy and jealousy, but as soon as the victory is won, they want to climb on the bandwagon.

May God give us grace to believe Him and, through faith, not to be defeated Christians but victorious children of the living God. May God stir our hearts so that we will not be ashamed of Jesus Christ our Lord.

"What time I am afraid, I will trust in thee" (Ps. 56:3).

THE PRICE OF POPULARITY

1 Samuel 18:1-16

Popularity has its attractive side, but it carries with it spiritual dangers. There is always a price to pay for it, and sometimes it is too high. Some can handle popularity and not be hurt by it; others cannot.

Pride arising in the human heart for any reason is not good. Then there are always those who become jealous of anyone who seems to be well liked by others.

Perhaps these dangers, internal and external, help keep a person on the alert. The Lord knows how much any of us can take of these things and always provides a way of escape (see 1 Cor. 10:13).

David knew the source of his strength so that praise only caused him to give God the glory. It did not change his humble attitude toward life. On the other hand, Saul's reaction to the praise given David changed Saul for the worse.

Let us not become discouraged if, after we surrender our lives to God, He permits testings and trials to come. They will always come.

Young people write to me or speak to me in services about this. One of their most common questions is why things are so adverse after they have given themselves completely to the Lord.

We know first from the Scriptures and then from experience that testings are essential for our spiritual training. They are needed before God can trust us with the responsibilities of spiritual leadership.

"Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Col. 3:2).

THE EFFECTS OF SIN

1 Samuel 21:1-10

When he fled to Ahimelech, the priest, David resorted to an untruth.

Ahimelech was afraid that David's presence before him was the beginning of trouble, but David sought to quiet the priest's fears by saying, "The king hath commanded me a business, and hath said unto me, Let no man know any thing of the business whereabout I send thee, and what I have commanded thee: and I have appointed my servants to such and such a place" (1 Sam. 21:2).

This was a sad chapter in David's life, but he was not forsaken. God permitted these tests in order to teach David some very valuable lessons. The Lord was preparing him for the throne where he would have to meet much greater tests.

David did not know that his lies would bring trouble to Ahimelech. David was hungry and asked for food.

While conversing with the priest, he saw Doeg, chief herdsman for King Saul, near the sanctuary. This man was an Edomite, not an Israelite, who wore a cloak of religion to cover up the true condition of his heart.

He was a tool of Saul's, cruel and unscrupulous, and it is likely that David's heart skipped a beat when he saw this wicked man.

Had David stayed with Samuel no harm would have come to Ahimelech and his fellow priests; but David's presence among them, of which they were entirely innocent, proved to be their death warrant (1 Sam. 22:9-18).

One person's sin can sometimes have far-reaching effects on others.

"For he that soweth to his flesh shall of the flesh reap corruption; but he that soweth to the Spirit shall of the Spirit reap life everlasting" (Gal. 6:8).

Rejected but Strong

1 Samuel 22:1-5; Psalm 34:8-22

We find in 1 Samuel 22 that David has stopped hiding among his enemies and has returned to his own land. It was during this period in his experience that he wrote psalms 34, 57 and 142.

David was God's anointed king in exile. These men gathered around him, recognizing him as God's chosen one. They were willing to wait for God's time with him and were willing to suffer with him if necessary.

They did for David what we are admonished to do for Christ in Hebrews 13:13: "Let us go forth therefore unto him without the camp,

bearing his reproach."

Paul reminded us in Romans 8:17 that we are "heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him."

Our Lord is now rejected but is gathering together a group to reign with Him. This is only a small army. They are equipped to fight, not with carnal weapons but with the spiritual weapons that are mighty through God. With Christ as Captain this army will conquer.

We can only do great things in the future as we learn to do the right things now. We learn from Ephesians 2:6 that God has "raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus."

This is something that is true of us now. We are being trained by our Lord now and can learn to say as Paul did, "I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me" (Phil. 4:13).

"Though he fall, he shall not be utterly cast down: for the Lord upholdeth him with his hand" (Ps. 37:24).

BEWARE OF CIRCUMSTANCES!

1 Samuel 23:6-14

We learn from this chapter that people who intend evil can also speak of the Lord and His work in a very pious way.

Saul was told that David had delivered Keilah, and he said, "God hath delivered him into mine hand; for he is shut in, by entering into a town that hath gates and bars" (1 Sam. 23:7).

This was Saul speaking, a man who had been so disobedient to God that the Spirit of God had departed from him. He was a man who, no matter how he prayed, received no answer from God because his heart was not right toward God.

Yet here he was saying that God had delivered David into his hands. We must always be careful of our interpretation of circumstances.

On a number of occasions I have counseled with different persons who were very obviously following a selfish path. Their one strong argument was that the circumstances favored the course they wanted to take; but it was obvious to me, at least, that they were viewing circumstances in a false light.

I was able to check the subsequent history of some of these people and found them miserable in heart with no joy in the Lord. If our wills are not wholly submitted to the Lord, we are bound to misinterpret the circumstances around us.

"There is a way that seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 16:25).

FAITH WAITS ON GOD

1 Samuel 24:1-15

No sooner had Saul dealt with the Philistines than he turned and followed David into the wilderness of En-gedi. With an army of 3000 chosen men, Saul went into the area of "the rocks of the wild goats" (1 Sam. 24:2).

When Saul decided to enter the cave, he did not know that David and his men were hiding in its recesses.

David's men jumped to the conclusion that these circumstances were designed by God so that David could take the life of Saul. It does not take a strong imagination to picture how they must have argued and pleaded with him to get rid of his enemy once and for all.

Had David reasoned about this--and he possibly did--he would have recognized that this was a golden opportunity to get rid of his enemy. But David had been learning that reason alone was not sufficient.

He decided to wait on God. What his men urged could be true, but it would be at the sacrifice of faith and of a humble will that was submissive to God if David took matters into his own hands.

"My soul, wait thou only upon God; for my expectation is from him" (Ps. 62:5).

CAN OTHERS TRUST YOU?

1 Samuel 24:16-22

When Saul realized how close he had come to death and how David's integrity had kept him from taking his life, the king said, "Thou art more righteous than I" (1 Sam. 24:17).

Irritating Saul all the time was this thought: "Behold, I know well that thou shalt surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel shall be established in thine hand" (v. 20).

Though Saul was momentarily stopped in his evil intentions, he had not bowed his heart to the will of God with regard to David's succeeding him on the throne.

Would our enemies be able to rest on our promises as Saul did on David's? Unbelievers have often had good reason to point an accusing finger at Christians for their lack of consistent living.

Some Christians have even observed that it is easier to work with unbelievers than it is to work with some professing Christians. If others should ever have reason to distrust us, the fault will lie in our failure to keep a proper relationship with God.

David, of course, first gained the victory over himself before he triumphed over Saul. This cannot be done at a church altar, though we can make very momentous decisions there.

But the decisions only open the door to a life of walking in victory with God. The life of victory is accomplished through a moment-by-moment fellowship with God.

"Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful" (1 Cor. 4:2).

YESTERDAY'S VICTORY INSUFFICIENT

1 Samuel 25:2-13, 23-27, 32-35

While David and his men had been hiding from Saul in the southern part of the land of Canaan, they were not idle.

They contributed in a great measure to the peace and security of the people in that area. David, with his 600 men, was very active in protecting these Israelites.

Nabal acted as though he did not know who David was, though he undoubtedly knew a good deal about him but was using this method of showing his contempt.

David did not meet this testing as he had met the testing concerning Saul. Then he was gracious and noble and kindhearted, but now he was ready to destroy a whole family.

Abigail was of different stuff than her husband. She decided to do what her husband failed to do and had donkeys loaded with all kinds of food and then went out to meet David.

She recognized that David was fighting the Lord's battles and that he had a right to be incensed against Nabal for his churlishness, selfishness and greed.

God did not permit David to fulfill his basic intention of killing all the males of Nabal's household. God used Abigail to perform this special service to David and to bring him back into fellowship with God.

This should remind us that yesterday's victory is not sufficient for today. We must have a moment-by-moment walk with the Lord so that when each testing comes, we will be victorious for Christ.

You therefore, beloved, knowing this beforehand, be on your guard so that you are not carried away by the error of unprincipled men and fall from your own steadfastness" (2 Pet. 3:17, NASB).

1 Samuel 26:5-14, 17-21 Sin Must Be Judged - **not available**

ACTING IN PANIC

1 Samuel 27

David was in very difficult circumstances because Saul was constantly hounding him. David had 600 men with him, and undoubtedly there were many families also that had to be provided for.

How do you hide 600 men and their families? It is no wonder, from the human standpoint, that David said, "I shall now perish one

day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1).

For the second time David fled to Israel's enemies, thinking he would find a safe place among them. Apparently his reasoning was that if he went to the land of the Philistines, he would be safe from Saul because Saul was afraid of them.

That sounds like good reasoning, but it was only human reasoning. It led David into difficulties that could have been avoided had his trust remained strong in the Lord.

David had acted in panic when he had said in his heart that there was no hope for his safety while he stayed in Judah. This is something all of us need to be aware of. We should never act in panic.

When troubles strike, let us carry them to God and let Him bring peace and quietness of heart to us. We cannot quiet ourselves, but we can be quieted in God's presence. His mercy is there for us at any time.

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and he knoweth them that trust in him" (Nahum 1:7).

ACTING IN PANIC

1 Samuel 27

David was in very difficult circumstances because Saul was constantly hounding him. David had 600 men with him, and undoubtedly there were many families also that had to be provided for.

How do you hide 600 men and their families? It is no wonder, from the human standpoint, that David said, "I shall now perish one day by the hand of Saul" (1 Sam. 27:1).

For the second time David fled to Israel's enemies, thinking he would find a safe place among them. Apparently his reasoning was that if he went to the land of the Philistines, he would be safe from Saul because Saul was afraid of them.

That sounds like good reasoning, but it was only human reasoning. It led David into difficulties that could have been avoided had his trust remained strong in the LORD.

David had acted in panic when he had said in his heart that there was no hope for his safety while he stayed in Judah. This is something all of us need to be aware of. We should never act in panic.

When troubles strike, let us carry them to God and let Him bring peace and quietness of heart to us. We cannot quiet ourselves, but we can be quieted in God's presence. His mercy is there for us at any time.

"The LORD is good, a strong hold in the day of trouble; and He knoweth them that trust in Him." (Nahum 1:7)

The Dilemma of the Disobedient

1 Samuel 28:1-19

David and his men became bodyguards to Achish, king of Gath, and this soon put David in a dilemma. The Philistines decided to go against the Israelites, and David apparently could see no way out of going along and fighting against his own people. He had a weakness for telling lies when doubts came into his heart. This was one of his besetting sins. He had lied to Jonathan and, through Jonathan, to Saul. He had lied to Ahimelech, and that had brought death to 85 priests.

When Saul saw the Philistines, he desperately wanted help to know what to do. The story of his visit to the witch of En-dor is well known. Samuel had been dead for some time, and Saul had no one he could turn to who would reveal to him God's will. It was in keeping with Saul's character to have issued orders to destroy everyone who sought contact with the dead, such as the witch of En-dor, and then, when he found himself facing a real difficulty, to seek the help of just such an evil person.

The witch of En-dor was terrified when she discovered that it was not the evil spirit for whom she was a medium who appeared to Saul. It was Samuel himself. Once again we see that Saul's great sin was the sin of rebellion against the will of God. May we always seek to know God's will in order that we may do it.

"But the wicked are like the troubled sea, when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked" (Isa. 57:20,21).

A Believer Out of Place

Now we can see how God delivered David from the dilemma sin had gotten him into in Gath. He must have been a troubled man when Achish told him that he and other Philistine princes were going against Israel.

But when those princes came, they were alarmed and indignant to find Hebrews in the army of Achish. They said, "What do these Hebrews here?" (1 Sam. 29:3).

That was a good question and is a question the world has a right to ask when Christians are out of place. Worldly people seem to know better than some of us who claim the name of Christ that we ought to have standards different from theirs.

We often think that we must mix with the world in order to win the people of the world. We think that by compromising we will win them to the Lord.

This is often an argument given by Christian young people who marry unbelievers. They feel that after they are married they will be able to win their mate to Christ. But it rarely works out that way. Disaster often follows.

God in His mercy has His way of keeping a person from going completely to ruin. David was dismissed from the army by Achish, and this dismissal was his way out. Achish was satisfied with him, but the other princes of the Philistines were not.

This was how God made it possible for David to escape from this great dilemma. God kept David from falling into the greater tragedy of actually fighting against his own people.

"Do not be deceived: 'Bad company corrupts good morals'" (1 Cor. 15:33, NASB).

Seeking God's Will

1 Samuel 30:1-8, 18-26

When David and his men found Ziklag burned with fire and their wives and their children gone, they wept. This was a bitter blow to all of them. David in particular, however, tasted the bitterness of being without God's protection. He had been miraculously taken care of on many other occasions, but now that protection had been removed for the time being. David had exchanged the king of Gath and a walled city for the Spirit of the Lord and found no protection in man. It is the Spirit of the Lord who protects God's people. How often we forget this.

Some of us might be inclined to think that the normal thing would have been for David to start out after the Amalekites without even asking the Lord about it. We might think this was the obvious thing to do. But remember, David had had enough of his own reasoning. He had followed his own reasoning in going to Gath and by it had escaped from the hand of Saul, but he got himself into more difficulties than he ever expected. The seemingly natural thing to do may not always be the right thing as far as God is concerned. When David's fellowship with the Lord was restored, he let the Lord guide his steps.

God's Word admonishes us: "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding" (Prov. 3:5). David sought God's will, and God eventually gave victory.

"But who so hearkeneth unto me shall dwell safely, and shall be quiet from fear of evil" (Prov. 1:33)

GOD DOESN'T NEED HELP

2 Samuel 1:1-16

Second Samuel opens with the account of a messenger coming to David and telling him that Saul and Jonathan and many others were dead.

Thinking to gain David's approval and possibly receive a reward from him, this messenger, who was an Amalekite, told David that it was at his hands Saul had died.

He said he had come upon Saul, who was still alive even after falling on his own sword. Saul had pleaded with him to kill him before the Philistines came upon him and mutilated his body while he was still alive.

The young man claimed he did as Saul requested. Some Bible students believe the young man told the truth; others believe he lied, but whatever the correct version is, he took his story to the wrong man.

David had always had a strong aversion to raising his hand against God's anointed. Neither would he permit any of his own men to

do it. So when this young Amalekite claimed to have killed Saul, David had him put to death.

David did not want what the Lord did not give to him. He would not take by force what God had promised.

So many of us make the mistake of feeling we have to help God fulfill His promises.

"Thine, O Lord, is the greatness, and the power, and the glory, and the victory, and the majesty: for all that is in the heaven and in the earth is thine; thine is the kingdom, O Lord, and thou art exalted as head above all" (1 Chron. 29:11).

WAITING FOR GOD'S TIME

11 Samuel 2:1-11

Second Samuel 2 opens with these words: "And it came to pass after this, that David inquired of the LORD, saying, Shall I go up into any of the cities of Judah? And the LORD said unto him, Go up. And David said, Whither shall I go up? And he said, Unto Hebron" (v. 1).

David found, as we will too, that we never lose anything by believing God and then patiently waiting on Him. But we will surely suffer if we take things into our own hands and rush blindly ahead.

The word "Hebron" means "alliance" or "communion" in contrast to Ziklag, which refers to self-will. Being allied with God and being in communion with Him, David was in a place to be led in the will of God.

David's reign began by reigning first over Judah. It was not necessary for David to take the throne; God saw that he received it. God moved him back to Hebron, and his own tribe anointed him king.

Seven and a half years went by, however, before the whole kingdom was put under his hand. David still had to wait, but it was God's time he was waiting for, not people's.

"There is a time there for every purpose and for every work" (Eccles. 3:17).

NOW THEN DO IT

2 Samuel 3:1,7-18

David's waiting on the Lord indeed paid off. At the end of seven and a half years, God began to arrange events so that David was finally crowned king of all Israel.

Abner, who was general of the armies of Israel, had put Ish-bosheth on the throne of Saul to reign over 11 tribes. However, when Ish-bosheth quarreled with him concerning one of Saul's concubines, Abner retaliated by scheming to turn the kingdom over to David.

A very practical admonition comes from a statement made by Abner that we can apply to our own hearts. Abner went to the people of Israel and said that they had sought for David in the past to be their king, and he added, "Now then do it" (2 Sam. 3:18).

Make Christ king in your life. He is God's appointed King as David was appointed and then anointed for the kingship of Israel.

Remember, the name "Christ" means the "anointed of God," and as such He has been appointed and anointed to be king in our lives. So make Him king today.

The work of redemption that Christ did for us is a finished work. The work of the Holy Spirit, on the other hand, which is forming Christ in us, is progressive. Have we ever progressed beyond Calvary?

"Therefore leaving the principles of the doctrine of Christ, let us go on unto perfection" (Heb. 6:1).

THE KING GIVES VICTORY

2 Samuel 5:1-10

So impregnable did the Jebusites think their fortress to be that they jeered at David and his men, saying that the blind and the lame could hold it against David's army.

"Nevertheless," we are told, "David took the strong hold of Zion: the same is the city of David" (2 Sam. 5:7).

David then moved into the city and made it the headquarters for his government, and later on it became the central place of worship for God's people. Eventually Solomon's great temple was erected in Jerusalem.

From this city the Lord Jesus Christ will rule in the Millennium and establish His New Jerusalem of which the Prophet Ezekiel spoke.

There is a rich spiritual lesson for us here. Some habits of sin are so deeply entrenched in our minds and bodies that we have struggled in vain against them from the day of our new birth.

We may have felt it was no use to try to overcome these habits and that we might as well give up. What we need, of course, is to let the King, the Lord Jesus Christ, lead us in the battle against this entrenched sin.

We can never defeat the Enemy by ourselves. It must always be done through the strength of Christ.

"What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?" (Rom. 8:31).

WHEN GOD SAYS NO

2 Samuel 7:1-13

Nathan commended David for his desire to build a temple and then went to his own house. That night God spoke to the prophet, and as an obedient servant, Nathan brought the word to David. The message was no.

God was not going to allow David to build a house of worship for Him. The Lord, however, was pleased with the intentions and the attitude of David's heart in this matter.

Years later, after David's death, Solomon built a magnificent temple and in his dedication message said, "It was in the heart of David my father to build an house for the name of the LORD God of Israel. And the Lord said unto David my father, Whereas it was in thine heart to build an house unto my name, thou didst well that it was in thine heart" (I Kings 8:17,18).

Though God said no to David's building a temple, He was so pleased with David's attitude that He made a covenant with him in which He promised to establish the house of David forever.

Can you take a no from God? He knows what is best for all of us. Remember, His promise to David was "I will be with thee for ever" (see 2 Sam. 7:16). This promise is ours also, for He has said He will never leave us nor forsake us (see Heb. 13:5).

"As for God, his way is perfect" (2 Sam. 22:31).

FACING SIN

2 Samuel 11:1-5

We have seen before that God does not gloss over the sins of His children. David, though a man after God's own heart, was not sinlessly perfect. We come now to the darkest hour in this great man's life.

It seems that the higher the peak of victory, the deeper the fall a believer can sustain. Though David was one of God's choicest men, he gave way to selfish desires that have left a blot on his name that time has not erased.

David's sin of adultery was not the end of his fall. It led him to commit murder also. David sank into spiritual deadness with no apparent thought of repentance until God shook him to the very depths of his soul, and then he returned to his senses and sought God's forgiveness.

David's sin was recorded for our learning. The Bible does not hesitate to reveal and denounce sin. God's Word conceals nothing. When necessary, it pulls aside the curtain and discloses the human heart.

We are stunned as we think of a man like David, wondering how he could have fallen so low. Will God be able to consider him the man after His own heart following this terrible incident?

But can we point the finger at David and excuse ourselves? Are we able to face sin in our own lives, not just in David's life?

"He who conceals his transgressions will not prosper, but he who confesses and forsakes them will find compassion" (Prov. 28:13, NASB).

The Unchanging Flesh Nature

2 Samuel 11:6-15

David's scheme was to bring Uriah home on a military furlough, hoping that he would be considered the father of Bathsheba's child. Uriah was much more righteous than David in this. He would not permit himself to relax until the war was over.

David then resorted to extreme measures. To the sin of adultery he added the sin of murder. He wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. It contained instructions that Uriah must meet death in battle.

Uriah--honest, upright and fully dedicated to his nation and to his king--was given a letter with his own death warrant in it to be handed to Joab, the leader of Israel's army.

If David could not cover up his sin by his plots, then he would seal Uriah's lips so that he could not accuse David of being the father of Bathsheba's child.

Some of us think that when a person such as David falls into such terrible sin, the reason must be that he was not a true believer. We must never forget that the evil nature inherited from Adam, or the flesh, in the believer is no different than in the unbeliever.

Until we see this, we will never understand the sovereign grace of God and God's sovereignty in the methods He uses in our lives.

"The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately wicked: who can know it?" (Jer. 17:9).

SOWING AND REAPING

2 Samuel 12:1-10

David's harshness and lack of pity were due to his being out of touch with God. No wonder he failed to remember the judgment prescribed by the Law. At this point the Holy Spirit gave Nathan boldness to say to David, "Thou art the man" (2 Sam. 12:7).

Through Nathan, the Lord reminded David of His sovereign choice of David, of His protection of him through the years of Saul's bitter enmity, of his elevation to the throne and of the abundance of God's provision for him.

In spite of God's mercies, David had despised God's commandment. God hid nothing from His servant. David was forced to face his sin.

Nathan's message to David not only reminded him of God's tender mercy, love, abundant gifts and honor but also warned David that, because he had sinned, he would reap a harvest of sorrow.

"Now therefore the sword shall never depart from thine house; because thou hast despised me, and hast taken the wife of Uriah the Hittite to be thy wife" (v. 10).

The Lord made it very plain in the New Testament that believers cannot escape reaping the kind of harvest they sow. We cannot hide our sin; we will not get away with it. The secrets of the night are not hidden from God.

"Be not deceived; God is not mocked: for whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap" (Gal. 6:7).

GETTING RIGHT WITH GOD

Psalms 51:1-17

David asked God to create in him a clean heart (see Ps. 51:10). With regard to the unbeliever, this would be a matter of regeneration, but for the Christian it involves renewal and restoration.

David said, "Cast me not away from thy presence; and take not thy holy spirit from me" (v. 11).

This is Old Testament doctrine and has to do with the fact that when a person had the Spirit of God and was disobedient, the Holy Spirit might leave him as He left Saul. David did not want this to happen to him.

In this Church Age the Spirit of God comes into the believer's life to stay. Nevertheless, many Christians, some of them Christian workers, have been put on the shelf and are useless to God because of some sin that they have allowed to control, or dominate, their lives.

Our position before God in Christ is assured, but our condition, or experience, if it is to be victorious, must be one of living in fellowship with the Lord.

Then the grace of God comes into full view as we see David saying, "Then will I teach transgressors thy ways; and sinners shall be converted unto thee" (v. 13).

Once the individual has been restored to fellowship, then, by the grace of God, he can effectively share the Gospel with others.

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

GOD'S PURPOSE IN CHASTISING

Hebrews 12:1-13

God's purpose in chastening us is so that we might learn not to sin. We cannot expect forgiveness and then be turned loose to go on living in the sin that brought God's displeasure.

God fixed a gulf between sin and righteousness. This must be maintained. Absolutely no compromise is possible. No attempt should ever be made by us to reduce or detract from the absolute holiness and purity of God.

Sin is always sin, and righteousness is always righteousness. There can be no blending of them in any way, shape or form. God cannot forgive us at the expense of lowering His standard of righteousness.

In order to teach us to hate sin, God chastens us. If He did not, we would be crawling to Him every five minutes for more pardon because of our continuing to live in sin.

God's people are taught by Him to hate sin by its bitter consequences and are also taught to love righteousness, or holiness. God chastens us as He pleases "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

God does not want us to come to heaven with nothing to show for our spiritual lives and service. He wants to see abundant spiritual fruit.

"As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten: be zealous therefore, and repent" (Rev. 3:19).

RESTORATION FOLLOWS FORGIVENESS

2 Samuel 12:11-23

When God forgives, He at once restores. He never carries a grudge. Nevertheless, we must expect to face consequences because of our sin.

The Lord uses the rod of discipline on His children, and one aspect of that discipline is to let us reap what we sow. While He restores us to fellowship, the bitter cup we have brewed for ourselves has to be drunk.

David lived for 20 more years, but the seeds of murder and lust that he had planted bore fruit in his own family.

Another son was born to David and Bathsheba, and David "called his name Solomon: and the Lord loved him. And he sent by the hand of Nathan the prophet; and he called his name Jedidiah [beloved of the Lord], because of the LORD" (2 Sam. 12:24,25).

David and Bathsheba's first son was taken from them because of their sin. But in the grace of God, their second son was chosen of God to succeed David on the throne.

Surely this was an indication of God's complete forgiveness of David and a fresh evidence of God's mercy. On one hand we see the severity of God. On the other, we see His grace, since the lesson He taught His child had been learned.

"I acknowledged my sin unto thee, and mine iniquity have I not hid. I said, I will confess my transgressions unto the LORD; and thou forgavest the iniquity of my sin" (Ps. 32:5).

A MISPLACED CONFIDENCE

2 Samuel 24:1-14; 1 Chronicles 21:1

This last attack of Satan upon David took place about 38 years after David had ascended the throne and about two years before his death.

Satan was successful for a brief time in enticing David into sin, which should remind us all that we are never free from being tested. At the same time we can have God's victory.

If we fall, we can find forgiveness and restoration if we are genuine in our repentance.

Ordinarily nothing would be wrong with numbering people. Census taking is done periodically by any alert government.

But numbering the children of Israel was a matter of pride. David wanted to know how strong his nation was militarily. His strength really was in God, but David was putting his trust in his armies when he numbered the people.

God's advice was, "You do not need to number the people. I have taken care of this situation." The strength of Israel's army meant nothing if God was not with them.

The same is true in our spiritual life. Until we can say with true conviction, "I am nothing," God cannot do much for us. He has chosen that which is nothing to confound the wisdom of the wise (see 1 Cor. 1:26-29). Our sufficiency is of God, not of ourselves (see 2 Cor. 3:5).

"It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man" (Ps. 118:8).

WHEN IS IT A SACRIFICE?

2 Samuel 24:18-25

The Lord not only stayed the plague, but through Gad He also instructed David to build an altar to the Lord on the threshing floor of Ornan, the Jebusite (1 Chron. 21:18).

The Lord was very specific about this and left no alternative in the matter.

Why this particular spot was chosen does not appear in the narrative, but later on in 2 Chronicles 3:1 we have this statement: "Then Solomon began to build the house of the LORD at Jerusalem in mount Moriah, where the Lord appeared unto David his father, in the place that David had prepared in the threshing floor of Ornan the Jebusite."

If David had been a grasping, selfish man, he might have looked on this as an opportunity to fulfill the will of God without any cost to himself.

He had been passed over when the plague struck men in Israel, and now a rich man had offered him a threshing floor for an altar and animals and grain for the offerings.

But David refused to bring before the Lord that which cost him nothing. "And the king said unto Araunah [Ornan], Nay; but I will surely buy it of thee at a price: neither will I offer burnt-offerings unto the LORD my God of that which doth cost me nothing" (2 Sam. 24:24).

What a tremendous lesson for us. It is one thing to serve on boards and committees that handle the affairs of others; it is quite another to make decisions that affect us personally.

It is not a sacrifice to the Lord if we give of that which costs us nothing.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit: a broken and a contrite heart, O God, thou wilt not despise" (Ps. 51:17).