



1 SAMUEL DEVOTIONAL

By Pastor Phil Emerson

NAME: _____

OUR DISCIPLESHIP FLOW

At Emmanuel Church, we are passionate about living out the call to be disciples of Jesus Christ, and make it our goal to see His Kingdom come in our lives and the world in which we live. We recognise that in Biblical times, a disciple was someone who followed a teacher or rabbi, not simply to gain head knowledge to pass an examination, but to be fully immersed in the life of the rabbi, and *learn his ways*, so that they in turn could replicate this to the world around them. As Christians, we are now those who have been invited to ‘follow’ Jesus and all of His ways, and we therefore call ourselves His disciples.

“This is how we know we are in him: Whoever claims to live in him must live as Jesus did.” 1 John 2:5,6

We therefore want to take seriously the words of Jesus in Matthew 28:19-20 to make disciples and also commit to an ongoing journey of teaching and discipleship together.

We all have differing personalities and learning styles. At Emmanuel, we recognise this diversity within the church body and therefore desire to support and journey together as we relate with God and each other in some of the following environments:

- **Public (20+)**

In the Bible, we see Jesus seeking to make disciples as He engaged with larger numbers of people, e.g., His interaction with the crowds (Matthew 4:25; Luke 14:25), and the 72 (Luke 10:1-24).

At Emmanuel, we want to use each of our **larger gathered environments** as an opportunity to make disciples, e.g., **Sunday services, Friday Youth/Kids’** environments, **men’s/women’s** gatherings.

- **Social (10-15)**

Jesus demonstrated the necessity for **smaller accountable relationships** as an essential part of the life of a disciple. He did this by teaching and doing life with his twelve disciples (e.g., Matthew 10).

At Emmanuel, small accountable relationships are offered through:

Lifegroup 12s

These are **gatherings of 10-15 people** who meet bi-weekly in homes or around specific interests, e.g., crafts, football.

- **Personal (2-5)**

As well as having smaller accountable relationships amongst His twelve friends, Jesus also seemed to go to even deeper levels of trust with three in particular – Peter, James and John (Matthew 17; Mark 9). At Emmanuel, we seek to do this through:

Lifegroup 3s

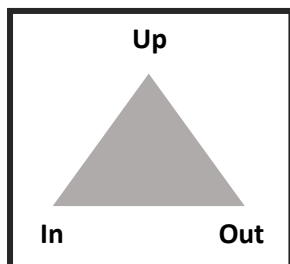
These are smaller **gatherings of 2-5 people** who are committed to transparent and accountable relationships in order to grow together in following Jesus. The aim for these groups is that after 1-2 years, each person in the group would be able to lead a smaller number of people themselves and replicate the process... **disciples making disciples!**

- **Intimate (1-1)**

Jesus regularly withdrew to spend time alone with the Father. This is the ultimate goal of discipleship, that each member of our church family would increasingly spend time alone with the Father and grow in devotion and desire to see the Kingdom come.

A TOOL TO USE

As stated previously, 1 John 2:6 makes it clear that for those of us who call ourselves disciples of Jesus, our goal should be to daily *walk in the ways of Jesus*, our Rabbi. As we examine the New Testament we see that Jesus lived His life based on three relationships: **Up** – with His Father; **In** – with His chosen followers; **Out** – with the hurting world around Him. This is illustrated in the following triangle:



Jesus *taught* and *modelled* out to His disciples how to live into each of these areas in life.

Up

Jesus frequently left the disciples to spend personal time with the Father (Mark 1:35; Luke 5:16). He taught them the significance of prayer, and how to pray and communicate with the Father (Luke 11:1-13). When comparisons with one another or insecurities presented themselves, He spoke into it in love and challenged them into a greater depth of living (Mark 9:33-37; Matthew 18:1-5).

In

Jesus had significant relationships with others in which He intentionally invested (12s and 3s). When He went to engage with the Father He brought the three with Him (Matthew 17:1). He taught them and modelled out the significance of Sabbath and rhythms of rest (Mark 6:31). He demonstrated with His life the significance of generosity and sacrificial love for others (John 13:1-17).

Out

Jesus personally lived a life that engaged with the crowds and the broken world around Him. He healed the sick (Matthew 8:1-4), fed the poor (Mark 6:30-44), and cast out demons (Matthew 8:28-34). But with the people who were closest to Him, He challenged them to do the same (Mark 6:37), and when they took risks themselves He critiqued and gave honest feedback to call out more for them (Luke 10:17-20).

As we spend time alone or together in this devotional, we want to help and encourage you to engage in each of these ways – UP, IN, and OUT.

HOW TO USE THE BOOK

First

If you haven't already done so, please take a second to fill in your name on the inside of the front cover. There'll be a lot of identical books floating around, and we don't want yours to get lost.

Prepare

Get ready for each session by spending some time to invite the Holy Spirit to speak to you. The Bible is a written word (logos), which becomes a living word (rhema) as the Holy Spirit breathes upon it and speaks directly to our lives through it.

Commit

Commit to the journey. Discipleship is not a commitment to a moment, but to a lifetime journey. As you personally commit to journeying with God daily, commit to others by sharing what you are learning (possibly in Lifegroup 12s or 3s), and in this way encouraging one another in what God is saying.

Reflect & Respond

Each day, as you spend personal time with God, we encourage you to ask the following two questions:

- 1) What is God saying to me?
- 2) What am I going to do about it?

This is how we become doers and not just hearers of what God is saying.

INTRODUCTION TO 1 SAMUEL

As I introduce 1 Samuel today, I am introducing one of my favourite books, a book that reminds me of when I was a boy. My hero was Superman. Like him, I wanted to run faster than a speeding train, fly through the air like a bird, and bend iron bars with my bare hands, bringing baddies to justice and freedom to the world. Using a towel for my cloak, I flew around the house performing imaginary acts of strength and courage. As I grew up, however, I discovered that Superman was not the best kind of hero. I found it impossible to be like him, no matter how hard I tried. Bullets simply wouldn't bounce off me and neither would harsh words, fears, disappointments, illnesses or a hundred other weaknesses that are common to frail, fallen humanity.

Bullets didn't bounce off David either. As I read about his life, I am astonished by how open and vulnerable he was. He records his weaknesses and struggles for all the world to read:

"I am worn out from groaning; all night long I flood my bed with weeping and drench my couch with tears. My eyes grow weak with sorrow; they fail because of all my foes" (Psalm 6:6,7).

"I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against You, You only, have I sinned and done what is evil in Your sight" (Psalm 51:3-4).

You will meet David in these quiet times in 1 Samuel. David's life extended from around 1040 to 970 BC. 2 Samuel 5:4,5 records that *"David was thirty years old when he became king, and he reigned forty years. In Hebron he reigned over Judah seven years and six months, and in Jerusalem he reigned over all Israel and Judah thirty-three years."* The biblical writers view David as the greatest of Israel's kings and the one through whom the ultimate king, the Messiah, eventually came, as Matthew 1:1 and Luke 3:31 record.

It is my prayer that as you study 1 Samuel, you too will develop a passionate heart for God – just like David, my hero.

Phil

Live

I love how this book kicks off ... there was a certain man who lived in a certain place. It even tells us about his marital status and who his dad and grandad were. Why is this significant? Well, I'm glad you asked! God knows all about you, in case you weren't sure. He knows your state, your finances, your mind and heart, even your dad and grandad! Every story starts with a person and a place. As you read through this chapter today and further into the book, I want you to think about who you are and where your place is. God could do it all without us but chose to co-partner with us. Beautiful indeed!

It was a great shame in Old Testament times for a woman to be barren, yet despite the pain of Hannah, God had a purpose in it all to accomplish something great – both in her life and in the whole plan of salvation. Even though things were hard, God was still in charge. This is a great point to remember in our own stories. It is difficult, maybe even impossible, to understand all the reasons and dynamics behind the plan of God, but if God wanted this little boy to be dedicated to Him in a special way, He had to allow Hannah to come to this place of desperation. I can assure you that this was not the first time Hannah had prayed for a child, although I wonder if this was the first time she prayed with such a desperation of soul – not just in her heart but in this vow as well. Old saints of the past have said that prayers and tears are the best weapons. Hannah, like many of us, would not resort to these best weapons until bitterness and anguish forced her.

The rest of the chapter is beautiful and reminds me of Proverbs 10:22, “The blessing of the LORD makes rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.” The child Samuel is born, weaned and given back to the Lord!

Pray

Father, I think that if I tried to number all the expressions of Your glory and grace to me, I'd have to count every grain of sand on every beach. Thank You a million times over. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Waiting is one of the hardest things we have to do. So much of life involves waiting and in an age of instant products, quick fixes and fast foods, this irritates us. But waiting is hardest when we see the clock running on, the years going by, and our hopes and dreams still unfulfilled. Hannah knew about waiting. In a society that measured a woman's worth by her children, Hannah was barren. Year after year she waited in misery for the answer to her prayers. She had two choices: to be bitter or to continue seeking God's help. This devotional reading looks at Hannah's journey from misery to praise and how when we wait on the Lord, things work out in His time and in His way (neither of which will probably be ours). In the context of having to wait for her answer, we have the amazingly beautiful ten verses known as 'Hannah's prayer of praise'.

Samuel is left to serve and grow in the house of the Lord under a diminishing leader – in age, sight, and spiritual maturity. Eli had failed to discipline his own sons, not just as a father, but also as a high priest. He chose to ignore their actions. They had blatantly ignored the laws of God and became evil men who abused their position. This did not go unnoticed in the heavenly courts. When the warning comes from a man of God in verse 27, God's judgment on all the family is revealed, but with a promise that God will raise up a leader, a faithful priest who would serve Him and do all that He desired.

I love how God works. Here you see a little boy in the house of corrupt, disenfranchised leaders. This boy would become the prophet who would anoint a new generation of leader. What cherished hope do you increasingly fear may never be realised in your life? Talk openly with God about your physical, emotional and spiritual response to this experience of waiting.

Pray

Father, *"My heart rejoices in the LORD! The LORD has made me strong. Now I have an answer for my enemies; I rejoice because you rescued me. No one is holy like the LORD! There is no one besides you; there is no Rock like our God."*
In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Amid the hustle and bustle of daily life, we often find it hard to hear God's voice. Many voices shout for our attention. There are deadlines to meet, bills to pay, meetings to attend, phone calls to make, WhatsApp's to be answered, children to care for. And then we have Facebook, Messenger, Twitter, Instagram, and God only knows how many other social platforms we feel the need to respond to or we will get left behind! We try to read our Bible but struggle to be still and receive a word from God. Our attention is taken away by the purr/vibration of the phone we say is on silent mode ... but is it really?

In the days of Samuel, few people were listening to God's voice. It actually says in verse 1, *"The word of the Lord was rare and there was no frequent vision."* Politically, emotionally, and spiritually Israel was in terrible shape. They had no king and everyone did as he saw fit (Judges 21:25). Even the priest in the house of the Lord had grown old, weary, hard of hearing, and blind. Unfortunately for old Eli, all these ailments were deeper than physical.

In this study, we observe Samuel as a young man hearing the word of the Lord for the first time and beginning his prophetic ministry. One of my favourite things about studying Scripture is watching how God always has the right person in the right place at the right time. He is never caught off guard. He does not operate in stress management. He calls young Samuel, a boy raised for such a time as this, and keeps calling until Samuel responds.

Think about how God is speaking to you today. Let me encourage you. Verse 19 says, *"And Samuel grew, and the Lord was with him and He let none of Samuel's words fall to the ground."* I love this. I wonder if this was because the Lord knew He could trust Samuel's words and that it worked both ways – Samuel didn't let God's words fall to the ground either. May you be a person who will decide to never let one of God's words fall to the ground!

Pray

Today, Father, instead of me rattling on, I want to ask You to make me more attentive to Your voice. I am going to be quiet now and listen for that still, small voice. Speak, Lord, for Your servant is listening. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

There is an old proverb that says, “Long runs the fox.” It means that eventually someone will get their comeuppance, justice will be served. Surely chapter 4 has to be one of the saddest chapters in the Bible. It marks the end of an era, reminding us that everything comes to an end, only God’s kingdom endures. I’m sure Eli didn’t get up that morning and think that both he and his sons would be dead before the end of the day. Nor did he ever imagine that thirty thousand Israeli soldiers would die and the ark of the covenant of God would be captured. For years, the people of Israel were just going through the motions of religion when all the time God’s glory had departed.

When the news of defeat and death came to Eli’s heavily pregnant daughter-in-law, she was thrown into a complicated labour that would take her life and bring forth a son. The passage is as heart-breaking as it is disturbing. It says she neither listened nor paid attention to the announcement of a son, such was her grief and pain. In that moment, she unknowingly declared prophetically what had happened. She called her child Ichabod, meaning ‘the glory of the Lord has departed’. What a desperate name. I’ve never heard anyone use this name in their lineage; David, Samuel, and other great names live on into modern society, but not Ichabod.

We live in a post-modern society that in many ways is similar to the day we read about in 1 Samuel 4. People today get up in the morning and never think about God or wonder if, before the end of this day, God could call His Church home. What if that happened today? What’s going on inside you right now? Is there anything that needs realigned if He did call us home? Let’s fight and pray that our hearts will be realigned to His will and desires and that we will understand the *kabod* ... the weighty presence of God.

Pray

Father, may I make a fresh allegiance to You today, like Moses who said, “If You don’t go with us, then I’m not going either.” May the name *Ichabod* never be one I associate with, rather may the *Kabod* of Your weighty presence rest and abide on me forever. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Even though it's a dark time in Israel's history, I must admit I love this chapter. When the Philistines stole the ark, they believed that they were stealing the God of Israel too. They soon discovered that the God of Israel was different from all other gods. He is very powerful and does not live in a box. They did what they thought they should do with this box (which to them just symbolised Israel's God) – they put it with their false god, Dagon. When the people of Ashdod woke the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen on his face before the ark of the Lord! They took Dagon and put him back in his place, but the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face again before the ark of the Lord! This time his head and hands had been broken off and were lying on the threshold, only his body remained. To this very day, in some of these lands, people won't walk on a threshold because of what happened to Dagon. In ancient times, when men won a battle, they often cut off their enemies' heads and hands. This makes me wonder ... what idols do I need to decapitate and dismember today?

The Lord then afflicted the people of Ashdod with tumours. When they saw what was happening, they said, *"The ark of the God of Israel must not stay here with us, because His hand is heavy on us and on Dagon our god."* Who says God does not have a sense of humour! So, they sent the ark to the people of Ekron, who responded with, *"They have brought to us the ark of the God of Israel to kill us and our people ... send it away and let it return to its own people."*

An important lesson today – if one is not right with God, it's hard to know what to do with His presence. It is His presence that is the true revealer of hearts!

Pray

Father, what will it mean for me today to be in Your presence? To love mercy, do justice, and walk humbly with You in the broken places of Your beloved world. I rest in Your promise to give me all the grace I need to follow You. I trust You wherever You send and place me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Today's chapter is summed up in the penultimate verse, a verse that faces us with a huge question: *"Who is able to stand before this Lord, the holy God?"* After seven months, the Philistines decided they've had enough and need to get rid of this ark. Through a series of weird events (where we see cows being more responsive to God than people), it ends up in a place called Beth Shemesh. In their foolishness and disrespect for God, the men of Beth Shemesh offended the holiness of the Lord. The primary idea behind holiness is not moral purity (although I need to say it includes moral purity); the primary idea is that God is separate, different from His creation both in His essential nature and in the perfection of His attributes. When men encounter the holiness of God, they are not necessarily attracted to it. When Peter saw the holy power of Jesus, he said, *"Depart from me, for I am a sinful man, O Lord!"* (Luke 5:8). On another occasion, when the disciples saw the holy Jesus shining forth at the transfiguration, they were greatly afraid (Matthew 17:6).

When we meet the Holy God, we, like the disciples, are excited and afraid all at the same time. It's like going up on a roller coaster; you want to be there, but at the same time you don't want to be there. Many of the thrill-seeking pleasures of our modern world are simply weak attempts to imitate the fulfilment we can only find by meeting the Holy God. Even when the ark came back to its own people, they had become so far removed from the presence of God that they didn't know what to do with it. Seventy men died as a result. As the writer today rightly pens, *"Who is able to stand before this Lord, the holy God?"* God's enemies couldn't handle Him, and, sadly, His own chosen people couldn't handle Him either. So today I want to keep my heart open and my mouth shut as I seek His presence afresh in my life.

Pray

Father, forgive me for my attempts to try and control You, the Author and Finisher of my faith. This chapter today shows how fickle mankind really are when it comes to understanding the holiness of You, our God. I love You, Father. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

Twenty years roll by and the people mourn the fact that God had abandoned them but without taking any personal responsibility. Then Samuel took a stone and called it 'Ebenezer'. We saw in chapter 4 that Ebenezer was the name of a place where Israel suffered defeat, but now Samuel uses this name in setting up a memorial to victory. He set it up in an open plain over which the people chased their enemies. Ebenezer means 'Help Stone'. Samuel explains this choice of name, saying, *"Up to this point Jehovah helped us."* There is a plain indication in these words of the need for further assistance.

What 'Ebenezer' do I need to raise today to remind me of God's faithfulness? Oh how easily I forget! Growing in grace is great, but it gets messy and intense. The only reason I now delight in His law is because the law drove me to Him. I needed a substitute and a Saviour, not a model and a coach. Jesus perfectly met all the demands of the law, and He exhausted its judgment against us. The messy part of this involves God's commitment to make me like Himself. Sanctification is needed. It is a process, and painful at times. God is more committed to getting heaven into me than getting me into heaven. There's great joy and peace in knowing that one day I'll be as loving and as lovely as Him, for He will complete His work in each of His children.

Now that we are robed in His righteousness and free of all guilt and condemnation, let us fearlessly see our sins, ruthlessly hate our sins, and relentlessly repent of our sins. May it not take the next twenty years to get us to realise this; rather, may God increase our love for holiness and decrease our self-contempt today. Only God's Word can bring us such freedom. Only by seeing more of Him will we delight in this liberating journey.

Pray

Father, I love Samuel. He was such a man of authority who led Your people to victory. I'm really glad, though, that I live under the New Covenant and Jesus is my Leader, my Saviour, and my Friend. So today I look to Jesus, not to Samuel. As great as he was, there is none like You, Lord. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The text in 1 Samuel 8 in no way suggests that Samuel is another Eli, a weak and pathetic leader. There is no greater judge in all of Israel's history than Samuel, a man who devoted his entire life to the house and people of God. Samuel often speaks for God to the Israelites; no prophecy of Eli is ever recorded, how sad. In fact, Eli received his revelations second-hand. Samuel is a great man of prayer; we do not read of Eli's prayers. Samuel is a decisive leader who acts when Saul would not; Eli could not be called decisive, and some may not even call him a leader. Samuel is instrumental in the military defeat of the Philistines; Eli is associated with a period of military defeat in Israel. Let us allow the Scriptures themselves to sum up the life of Samuel.

I feel that the people snubbed Samuel in asking for a king. It was like saying, 'We don't want you anymore. You're old. Give us a king to rule us like the other nations.' Has this ever happened to you? How did you react? Verse 6 tells us how Samuel reacted – he went to the Lord for guidance. Good example!

We see in Samuel a picture of Jesus. Scripture records that when He was reviled, He threatened not, like a sheep before his shearers is dumb so He opened not His mouth. As I read 1 Samuel 8, I wonder about all the times I have been like these people and have looked past Jesus for another. I love how Matthew 6:33 reminds us to seek Him first and all His right ways, then everything else will be added on, or, as the NIV puts it, *"All these things will be given to you."* What are the *"all things"*? Jesus had just talked about what we wear, eat and live. Imagine that. If we seek Him first, God looks after even the practicalities. Pretty cool. May we all today fix our gaze afresh on the Lord, the Author and the Finisher of our faith, the One who, according to Ephesians 2:10, created the very works for my hands to do.

Pray

Father, when I'm feeling snubbed or ill-treated, I want it to be recorded of me that like Samuel I went to You for guidance. Help me to not be a moaner or a huffer, and please never let me be a gossip. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Through an amazing set of circumstances, God brought Saul to Samuel. Some people see God move in such remarkable ways and think, *“If God moves like this, I can just sit back. If God wants to reach me, He will arrange it and force Himself on me.”* No. Though God may deal in special ways with certain people, He has commanded us to seek Him with all our hearts. Are you seeking Him diligently today or just waiting for God to act?

Saul’s response was, *“But I’m only from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe! Why are you talking like this to me?”* I believe God is a God with great purposes. Just like He did with Saul, He has placed you and me in a particular family in a particular place in a particular time in history. I don’t see what God sees, but I ask Him to show me because I don’t want to betray or be ungrateful for what has been given to me.

The tribe of Benjamin is an interesting detail in Saul’s story. Benjamin was the younger brother of Joseph; both were children of Rachel. Genesis 35 tells the story of Rachel who had been lied to by her father. He gave her sister to Jacob instead of giving her. Laban then agreed to give Rachel as a wife to Jacob, but she remained barren while her sister Leah gave birth to many. It felt like nothing would go right for poor Rachel. Then the Lord opened her womb and she gave birth to her firstborn, Joseph. Later, when Benjamin was being born, complications of the birth took her life. In her dying moments she named the boy ‘Benoni’ which means ‘son of my sorrow’. I feel as if Rachel, as her life ebbed away, summed up her brokenness in the naming of her boy. But Jacob says, *“No, he shall be called Benjamin”*, meaning ‘son of my right hand’. Interestingly enough, Philippians 3:5 records Paul’s announcement, *“I am a pure-blooded citizen of Israel and a member of the tribe of Benjamin.”*

Pray

Father, please give me courage. Grant me wisdom to learn from the past but not to be crippled by it. May I be a blessing to my earthly family, spiritual family, and the world at large. In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This chapter makes me sad. Saul is anointed the first king of Israel, chosen by God Himself and pointed out to the prophet Samuel. At this point, Saul was not orientated with wrong motives. He was just a good son doing what his father had asked – search for some lost donkeys. When Samuel finally anoints him king, he sends him home with a prophecy of who he would bump into along the way. One was a group of prophets. When Saul encountered these folks, he too would begin to prophesy. We are told in verse 6 that when this happened, he would change into a different person. How did it all go so bad for this man? When did his pure motive turn into a stinking one? How did he go from being a totally changed person for the good to an envious, jealous person? When they went to announce him as the new king he was hiding among the baggage (verse 22), probably not even believing in himself. But unfortunately, we will see his low confidence shift to a wrong confidence, one that never got placed on the true source of his calling – God.

Interesting thoughts for us today. When I read this chapter, I get a desire for a fresh anointing of the Holy Spirit upon my life. Saul couldn't be king without it and we can't function properly as a son or daughter of God without it. I must admit, though, that I am so thankful I can stand before God in the righteousness of Jesus, in His perfect record and performance, not my own. As believers under the New Covenant, we are reminded in 1 John 2:20, "*But you have an anointing from the Holy One.*" In the New Testament sense, anointing has the idea of being filled with, and blessed by, the Holy Spirit. This is something that is the common property of all believers, but something we can, and should, become more submitted and responsive to. I would love that by that anointing God would not just heal the symptoms of what is not right in my life, but that He would surgically remove everything in me that does not belong to Him. I'm asking for a fresh anointing today!

Pray

Father, please anoint me again today and pour light over everything that is hidden in me. May I see clearly as You hold me tenderly. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The Spirit of God came powerfully upon Saul. The ESV says, *“The Spirit of God rushed upon Saul.”* It was time for Saul to act and God was with him. The Spirit did not come to entertain him or to thrill him; the Spirit came to equip him for service. This is always God's pattern. He doesn't want us to seek the Spirit selfishly for our own desires, but to be empowered by Him to touch others. Jesus told His disciples before He ascended into heaven that they were to wait until they were endued with power from on high. In Acts 1:8, the power was given and received to do something for the Lord. Actually, it was given to reach from the centre of who they were to touch the nations of the world.

Gilgal is mentioned at the tail end of this chapter. This place is an interesting wee study in the Bible. Gilgal was the first camp of Israel after crossing the Jordan (Joshua 4 and 5). Twelve memorial stones were taken from the bed of the river and set up in Gilgal by Joshua as a remembrance of the God who miraculously brought them over the Jordan. It was here the people were circumcised to prepare them for possession of the land. It was at Gilgal the Passover was celebrated and the manna ceased. It was to Gilgal the ark returned every day after compassing the city of Jericho during its siege.

Gilgal is a place we read about time and again. It reminds me of a good local church – a place where people heal up and share their victories and defeats. After each defeat or victory, the Israelites would either march back or limp back to Gilgal. Here they would renounce, remember, refill, restore, and replenish. From here they would live to fight another day and serve the king. Where is our Gilgal? The local church isn't perfect ... yet! But I believe it is the hope of the world and there is nothing like it when it's pumping on all cylinders!

Pray

Father, I praise and adore You for Your finished work and affection for me. Thank You that You left the Holy Spirit to be my comforter and helper, my guide and my friend. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Samuel knew the nation would now begin to look to their new king for leadership, so he told Israel that his day was over and Saul's day was beginning. In some way, he was helping them with the transition. It is true that Samuel judged Israel his whole life, but now that a king was raised up, his role would change and diminish. Samuel never officially stopped leading Israel as a judge, but he didn't allow his shadow to eclipse Saul, a great characteristic of transition. In this, Samuel showed himself as a truly godly man. He was willing to pass from the scene when God brought up another leader. Samuel didn't grasp onto a position when God wanted to change it.

I love how Samuel could honestly remind the people that he had not defrauded or oppressed them or been corrupt in any way. He wanted the nation to know that he was passing a good legacy of leadership to the new king, Saul. He wanted Israel to recognise that he didn't hand Saul a mess to clean up or a poultice that would drain him dry. If Saul proved to be a poor leader, no one could say it was because of Samuel's bad example.

It is interesting to note the advice Samuel gave the people in the last couple of verses of this chapter. Even though they had done evil, he encouraged them to serve the Lord. There is not a believer on earth who has not sinned and fallen short, but Samuel's advice to us all is not to quit, but continue to do our very best for the Lord. His little phrase is both powerful and challenging: "*Consider what great things He has done for you.*" What a great wee exercise for us all today, to sit with a clean page in our journal and scribble down all the great things He has done for you. Go on, write some down and rejoice. If you're struggling to know where to start, look up Galatians 4:4-7. This wee section of Scripture totally wrecks my emotions. It makes me weep and rejoice all at the one time. Read and enjoy!

Pray

Father, make me a channel of Your energy and help me understand legacy in its purest form. I thank You for giving me another day, another unused opportunity to do it right. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If I were to write a title over today's chapter, it would be, 'Enter David'. It's clear to see that Saul had not risen to the chance God had given him. Saul's greatest sin as the king of Israel was that he had no heart after God. Although God had changed Saul's heart, he quickly let it be hardened by unrepentant sin. David, who would be anointed king next, also had struggles with sin, but would turn to God and repent. This is what it means to have a heart after God – not to be completely free from sin, but to be completely given to confession and repentance. That's why today I've included most of Psalm 51, a prayer David prayed after a big failure in his life. Pray it in the first person!

Pray

"Have mercy on me, O God, because of Your unfailing love. Because of Your great compassion, blot out the stain of my sins. Wash me clean from my guilt. Purify me from my sin.

For I recognise my rebellion; it haunts me day and night. Against You, and You alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in Your sight. You will be proved right in what You say, and Your judgment against me is just. For I was born a sinner—yes, from the moment my mother conceived me. But You desire honesty from the womb, teaching me wisdom even there.

Purify me from my sins, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Oh, give me back my joy again; You have broken me—now let me rejoice. Don't keep looking at my sins. Remove the stain of my guilt. Create in me a clean heart, O God. Renew a loyal spirit within me. Do not banish me from Your presence, and don't take Your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of Your salvation and make me willing to obey You.

Then I will teach Your ways to rebels and they will return to You. Forgive me for shedding blood, O God who saves; then I will joyfully sing of Your forgiveness. Unseal my lips, O Lord, that my mouth may praise You. You do not desire a sacrifice, or I would offer one. You do not want a burnt offering. The sacrifice you desire is a broken spirit. You will not reject a broken and repentant heart, O God."

In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Boredom is an awful thing, especially when you know something needs to be done but whoever is calling the shots is otherwise occupied or simply doesn't see the imminent need to move. Such is today's story. Jonathan has to creep out of a cave when his dad is unaware, climb over two rock faces and up a hill on all fours, all with the little notion, 'Just maybe the Lord will act on our behalf...' I think what he was saying is this, 'I'm not sure if God will turn up, but anything is better than sitting in this cave bored to tears.'

I am drawn to the wisdom of God in choosing men and placing them where He wants them. Jonathan is one of those men. He shows depth, honour, friendship, humility and courage – all the things his dad lacked, actually. Here we see the strong faith of Jonathan, King Saul's son, and one of the greatest battle victories in the entire Bible. God sends all kinds of confusion among the Philistines, so much so that they start slaying each other. At the same time, we see the foolishness of King Saul and his unreliability in ruling as king.

What we learn from Jonathan's faith is that with God anything is possible. Spiritual leadership begins with a man's faith in God, faith that compels him to take action in the face of obstacles and opposition, and motivates others to follow him in his obedience. Ultimately, spiritual leadership is not about looks, charm or motivational and management techniques. Spiritual leadership is about men and women who trust God and obey His word, and in so doing, attract others to trust and obey with them. Saul was not a spiritual leader, but Jonathan was. As a matter of fact, Saul had all but burned his bridges and proven that he was a man motivated by his own importance and flesh. In today's terms, he seemed more interested in how many Facebook and Twitter followers he had than what his God and King thought.

Pray

Father, thank You for choosing me. Your Word says that even before the foundation of the earth I was in Your plans and on Your heart. This bowls me over. I am eternally indebted to Your love. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

It is really sad to read the biblical report of Saul's disobedience. Sadder still is reading Saul's response to Samuel's rebuke. Saul starts by claiming to have obeyed God's command. Then, when his sin is exposed, he admits his failure to fully execute the command but tries to sanctify his disobedience by claiming it was to worship God. When Samuel casts aside this weak excuse, Saul finally confesses that he has sinned, but he lays some of the blame on the people. He claims that he feared the people and thus gave in to the pressure they applied on him. His concern when Samuel confronts him is not that he has sinned against a righteous God, but that his public image will be damaged if Samuel openly severs his relationship with him. He does not have a deep conviction concerning the vileness of his sin; he only fears that he will look bad. And so, he pleads for Samuel to go back and worship with him, giving the appearance that all is well. All this leads me to ask myself, how do I deal with my sin? Excuse it? Blame others? Worry that I'm going to get caught? Or humbly repent before a righteous, loving God?

There is a powerful little line here that bears expounding, *"to obey is better than sacrifice."* Religious observance without obedience is totally empty before God. Romans 12:1 reminds us that the best sacrifice one can bring to God is a repentant heart and a body surrendered to His service for obedience. We could make a thousand sacrifices unto God, work a thousand hours for God's service, give thousands of pounds to His work, but all these sacrifices mean little if there is not a heart surrendered to God, shown by simple obedience. You see, in the Old Testament sacrifice they offered the flesh of another creature; in obedience, we offer our own will before God. Samuel speaks this line, *"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry."* A rebellious, stubborn heart rejects God just as certainly as someone practicing the occult. Scary stuff!

Pray

Father, while Saul made an excuse of sacrifice over obedience, thank You that Christ first obeyed and then sacrificed. That is everything to me today. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is such a beautiful narrative that appears in Scripture of not judging the book by its cover. Even the anointed prophet/judge of Israel, Samuel, was fooled by this in the choosing of a new king. David, the boy in the field whom God saw as the warrior king, the man who would carry God's own heart for a nation, was anointed by Samuel. The start of this chapter is daunting. God said to Samuel, *"You have mourned long enough for Saul. I have rejected him as king of Israel, so fill your flask with olive oil and go to Bethlehem. Find a man named Jesse who lives there, for I have selected one of his sons to be My king."*

There are different theories about the evil, or harmful, spirit from God that came upon Saul. The appearance of this spirit, like the disappearance of the Holy Spirit, is from the Lord. Think about this little statement, *"Now the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul."* It is the Lord who directed the Holy Spirit to forsake Saul. Is it possible that David's plea in Psalm 51:11 that God not let His Spirit depart from him was, in some measure, the result of what David saw with his own eyes in Saul? Saul was finished, as is anyone who is without the Spirit of God at work in their lives. The evil spirit was also from the Lord. This should not be surprising because God is sovereign. Satan cannot do anything to anyone without God's permission (see Job 1 and 2). To Saul's servants, this evil spirit was not new or unusual. They had seen this before; they recognised it in his life and knew the best treatment for his condition. All of this leads me to conclude that this was a demonic spirit which now oppressed Saul. From what I know about history, it seems that men like Joseph Stalin and Adolph Hitler experienced something remarkably similar. Maybe there just comes a point when God says, 'Enough is enough.' Hence my prayer today, 'Take not Your Holy Spirit from me.' If you don't use it, you lose it!

Pray

Father, this chapter today reminds me of my prayer two days ago (Psalm 51). *"Take not Your Holy Spirit from me."* In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We are not told what David thought in his heart when Samuel anointed him as Israel's next king, Saul's replacement. I imagine he might have felt like the virgin Mary when Gabriel informed her that she was to become the mother of God's promised Messiah. Her response was, *"How can this be, since I am a virgin?"* David, likewise, must have thought, 'How can I possibly become Israel's king when I am but a boy, not even old enough to be in the army? The only authority I have is over a small flock of sheep!' The last verses of chapter 16 begin to tell us how God will accomplish His will for David and chapter 17 is another significant part of the plan to make David king. It is marvellous to see how God goes about accomplishing His Word. What God promises, God provides. His Word is sure. Believe this for yourself today because with God all things are possible!

In this story of David, I love how God knew his wee heart, as this Scripture affirms, *"Lord, you know everyone's heart"* (Acts 1:24). We often speak of being drawn to someone's heart or of being offended, confused, or shut out from their heart, but only God really knows what is in each of our hearts. I grieve the fact that I often act otherwise. That's why I pray with humility and joy, *"Search me, O God, and know my heart"* (Psalm 139:23). I cannot, and dare not, trust my own diagnosis. According to Jeremiah 17:9 there's nothing more deceitful on the face of the earth than the heart, including mine. Only God can cure its great sickness and release its great beauty. Sometimes I think of myself much more highly than I ought. Sometimes I fall into shame and contempt, acting like a complete stranger to His mercy and grace, and like an orphan without a Father above, empty of His Spirit within. What a generous and powerful God He truly is, One who promises to complete this good work He has begun in each of us and in all of creation (Philippians 1:6).

Pray

Father, thank You that we justified sinners are destined to be Your glorified children, according to Romans 8:30. Oh, how I praise You for the peace and assurance I enjoy. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

We would have to admit that probably the darkest times in life are when we allow bitterness to root and grow in our heart. We get hurt and then refuse to forgive or risk being hurt again. Our whole person becomes engulfed by this monstrous plant that grows inside us. Others get defiled by it and if we continued to disobey God in this way, it would certainly destroy us. Saul knew those feelings and they were directed toward David, a young man from the hill country. David had changed the course of a forty-day stand-off with the Philistine army by singlehandedly killing their giant leader, Goliath. Suddenly, all the people were praising this boy from the sheep pastures. Rumour had it that David would someday be king. How do you respond when you are afraid that someone or something important to you will be taken away? Or when you feel someone is outshining you?

This chapter reminds me that I can make some things more complicated and dramatic than they need to be. This is certainly the case when it comes to spiritual warfare. When I think about all the different teaching I've heard about engaging in spiritual warfare, much of it promoted wrong thinking – more fear than faith, more phobia than freedom, more preoccupation with darkness than fascination with the Light of the world. Somewhere along the line, I missed the image of a fleeing devil. I know I can ill afford to be naïve about the destructive schemes of the enemy and his prowling, devouring plans. Because of the cross of Jesus, the devil knows his time is short and he's filled with fury. En route to his sure demise, he ramps up his seducing, tempting, and condemning ways every opportunity he gets. This seems to be what has happened to poor Saul. He has given the enemy an entrance with his jealous heart. BUT, *"The reason the Son of God appeared was to destroy the devil's work"* (1 John. 3:8) and He has succeeded. So today, in full view of Jesus' finished work, I humble myself before God and submit to Him.

Pray

Father, with the eye of faith, I set my gaze on You – Your might, Your past triumph and current reign, Your perfect sacrifice and constant intercession. No more jealousy, in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Saul wanted David dead. That's just the way it was. I like watching story documentaries about crime. (I know I'm a little weird.) Recently, on one such show, a wife wanted her husband dead to inherit his wealth. She conspired and hired hit-men to get the job done. He was snuffed out and her wishes were accomplished. However, she's in prison, where she'll be until the day she dies. Two lives were needlessly wasted because wickedness crept into her heart like a thief unnoticed at midnight. Saul had actually softened up a few times previous to this incident in 1 Samuel 19. However, he was no longer under the Lord's protection, due to a number of circumstances that resulted in him hardening his heart and crowding the Lord God out of his life. He was now possessed with evil spirits, riddled with jealousy of David's success and rising popularity. He was afraid of David and he simply wanted David dead. Knowing that David and Jonathan were friends didn't seem to matter to Saul. He ordered Jonathan and all of his attendants to kill David upon sight. Saul was so blinded by his hatred that he had become extremely unreasonable. Common sense was long gone.

It is really sad how far Saul seemed to slip from God's Spirit and truth. Unless God breathes new life into our spirits, we could never have believed the gospel of Christ. He seals us for eternity by the Spirit, marking us as His very own possession. According to Scripture, we are controlled by the Spirit and no longer under the dominion of sin. He has given us all the gifts of the Spirit to live as an active member of the church and a caring servant in His kingdom. What a generous God He is. I love the fact that God gave the Spirit to us as the first-fruits and guarantee of the full inheritance of the salvation that Jesus completely earned for us. This assurance brings me incredible peace and joy.

Pray

Father, meditating on this Scripture generates huge gratitude in my heart for the person and work of the Holy Spirit, so please keep me close and never allow bitterness to rule in my life. In Jesus' strong and eternal name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love the little headings at the top of each chapter in my Bible. I understand they're not part of inspired Scripture, but whoever thought of it was pretty cool in my books. Today's heading in my Bible simply says, 'Jonathan helps David'. Good on you, Jonathan! I'd love that to be written over some chapters in my life. David wants to know what he has done for Saul to be so intent on killing him. Jonathan finds it hard to believe, stating that he really didn't think that dear old dad could do such a thing. David told him how Saul had apparently decided to hide the extent of his murderous intentions from Jonathan, due to the two boys' friendship. Jonathan needed to be at the New Moon festival the next day; he would be able to size things up then. At this point, Jonathan finds it hard to believe that his dad could actually be as cruel and vicious as we see he really was. I suppose it comes back to that old phrase, 'Blood is thicker than water.' But even blood can go bad. That's just what was happening here. Jonathan would have to see once and for all what his dad was really like.

What a friend we have in Jesus Christ, a friend for whoever will repent, accept Him as personal Saviour and Lord, and allow Him to come in the fullness of His sanctifying love and grace. As we trust Him, He's more than willing to be close to us, guiding us and protecting us through the Holy Spirit. At times, we may find ourselves in very threatening situations. But even if the worst that can happen happens, we have the assurance that He will never leave nor forsake us. Through life or death, He abides with us daily. He will see us all the way from here into eternity. Be encouraged today, you have a Friend who sticks closer than a brother. We could write over our lives today, 'Jesus helps us.' I love this!

Pray

Father, as You help me, may I help others. I am not beyond the need of Your grace, and, thankfully, not beyond the reach of Your grace. I love You, Lord, and I love my friends. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

I love that our text today kills the myth of David as a kind of Superman, portraying him as a real man. He does not always think or do the spiritual thing. There is no doubt he has a heart for God, but he also has feet of clay. He flees to Philistia, looking to his enemies for sanctuary rather than looking to God. He then flees to Moab where a prophet must tell him to go home. David does not do everything right. He is a real man, not superhuman, and not a mythical creation of some author's mind. It is often because of David's failures that we are encouraged and given hope, for he was a man with a nature like ours. God deals graciously with us as He did with David.

One could quite easily pass over the events of today's chapter without taking a second look. To the untrained eye, it looks as if David has very good luck, at least twice. First, David manages to escape to Nob where there is no bread, except that reserved for the priests. Ahimelech makes an exception and gives David some of this bread. Second, David escapes to the land of the Philistines, and, bearing Goliath's sword, finds himself at this giant's hometown. He seems marked for death, but his feigned insanity gets him kicked out of town. I think God was definitely protecting him, even though he was in error. Can you think of a situation when God rescued you? A position where you even knew you were operating outside God's parameters?

In David and Saul we see a rip in relationship between father-in-law and son-in-law. It was a partnership that could have blessed Saul, yet it eats him like a cancer. Of all the pains in life, the most draining are relational pains. We have medication for physical pain, but for pains of heart we usually end up running away, numbing up, checking out or worse – reacting destructively. My prayer today is that God will give me a gentle and lowly heart that will have a stilling and quieting effect in the hurt and chaos of others around me.

Pray

Father, I long for the first-fruits of the new city, the perfected relationships, and the sinless existence of life in the new heaven and new earth. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

As we see David in the cave of Adullam, it is interesting to turn to Psalm 142. The title of this psalm is, *“A contemplation of David. A prayer when he was in the cave.”* It describes David's discouraged heart: *“I cry out to the LORD with my voice; with my voice to the LORD I make my supplication. I pour out my complaint before Him; I declare before Him my trouble.”* Psalm 57 is also worth reading, *“A Michtam of David when he fled from Saul into the cave.”* This psalm describes how the Lord strengthened David in the cave and prepared him for what was next.

Psalm 57 shows David with a humble heart, a prayerful heart, a realistic heart, and a heart of trusting praise to God. The Lord brought David into this place of praise while he was still in Adullam cave. Many times we think we can't have the heart David had in Psalm 57 until we get out of the cave, but we can have it now, no matter what our circumstances. I love this psalm and the centring, settling, liberating vision contained in it. Of all the things God could have shown David during a time of confusion and crisis, He chose to give him a clear sighting of the lost, broken and most despised of the earth. My prayer is that by the Spirit through God's Word, He would give to each of us the same thing – a deep love for those who can't return the favour.

Life isn't random, stuff doesn't just happen. Jesus reigns, not circumstances. There's no panic in heaven, no head-scratching or furrowed brows, no consternation or perspiration, no crossing of fingers or hoping against hope. I have found in my life that even though God doesn't do all things *easy*, He does all things *well*. Even though He doesn't work on my timetable, in His time He makes all things beautiful. Even when I shake my fist at heaven, He tightens His embrace around me. God won't give me all the details, but I find great peace in knowing that all things can only take place according to His bidding. Hairs are numbered, and kings are sitting only by His decree alone.

Pray

Father, thank You that when things go wrong, it is often not as it appears. You are in control and You love me. That is enough. In Jesus' name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

Two different approaches to God's sovereignty are highlighted in this chapter. One is from Saul who arrogantly proclaimed; the other is from David who humbly enquired. Our approach to God should be one of enquiring, not proclaiming. Saul is like a mad lunatic whose only quest in life is to destroy David, even though he knew David was anointed to be king. He continues to fight against the very will and nature of God.

The people of Keilah make a plea for help to David, not to King Saul. It was Saul's job to protect Keilah and it was his job to fight the Philistines, but Saul wasn't doing his job and so the Lord called David to do it. I love this. God loved His people too much to let them suffer at the hands of an unfaithful king. If Saul wasn't up to the task, God would raise up a man who was. David was that man. *"Therefore, David enquired of the Lord."* This showed David's wisdom and godliness. He could easily have said, 'This isn't my responsibility. Let Saul deal with it.' The reply from God was to go, attack the Philistines, and save Keilah. Looking from the outside in, this was a crazy move. First, David's so-called army were a rag tag bunch of needy men with definitely no references from their last employer! Defending Keilah would also throw David into the open before King Saul (this is exactly what happened). I love David's two reasons for acting regardless: he had the command of God, and he saw the need of the people. Loving God and loving people is the greatest commandment. David is then betrayed by the very people he fought to save.

We see in this chapter the final meeting of two great friends, David and Jonathan. By this stage they both know that David will be king and Jonathan was prepared to support and help him. Alas, it would never come to pass. Jonathan would die before David ever made the throne. They renewed, or at least reaffirmed, their covenant and parted company, never to meet again.

Pray

Father, I'm affronted by the fickle attitude of humanity. I'm sure David was disappointed with the people of Keilah whom he had blessed and helped. Help me keep my eyes on You. No other will do. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

This is truly an amazing story. Who would ever have thought that ‘nature’s call’ would result in the peaceful parting of David and Saul? God is indeed sovereign. He is in absolute control of all things, and all things include things as basic as ‘the call of nature’. By means of this very natural event, some very supernatural things happened. First, David and Saul met and parted without the shedding of blood. Saul’s confession would make you think he had a complete change of heart. David repented of cutting off a portion of Saul’s robe. He also kept his men from killing Saul, all of whom tried to convince David it was God who had delivered Saul into his hand. And all of this was the result of Saul looking for a pit-stop and finding it in the cave where David and his men ‘just happened’ to be hiding. God is able to employ even nature itself to bend to His will and achieve His purposes.

What a marvellous God we serve! It would have been easy for David to think about the promise from God and justify killing Saul. And yes, God *will* fulfil His promises, but He will do it His way, and do it righteously. David knew not only how to wait *on* the Lord, but also how to wait *for* the Lord. F.B. Meyer puts it this way, *“We wait on the Lord by prayer and supplication, looking for the indication of His will; we wait for the Lord by patience and submission, looking for the interposition of His hand.”* David wanted God’s fingerprints on this work, not his own, and he wanted the clean conscience that comes from knowing it was God’s work. David kept taking it to the Lord, and he received the cleansing from hurt, bitterness and anger that only the Lord can give. Huge challenge today about the condition of our hearts and how we need to continually cleanse ourselves from bitterness and anger, lest we justify our sin with a wrong action or reaction.

Pray

Father, thank You for the reminder of David’s heart today. Like You did with David, You removed my stony heart and gave me a heart of flesh, a heart that beats for You and Your glory. What a generous and powerful God You are! In Jesus’ strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

The old prophet Samuel dies and all the nation mourns his loss. Even though he was a powerful prophet and servant of God, he was still under the fall and death came his way. Interesting little thought I noticed in verse one ... Samuel died and David moved! When even the greatest of people die (and they will), God's work continues as another rises up. It would be good to ponder today who God is raising up behind you.

I heard someone preach years ago on four kinds of riches – what you have, what you do, what you know, and what you are. The final one I really like, the riches of character. Nabal was a very rich man but only in what he had, probably the lowest kind of riches if the others aren't in order. If you are rich in worldly wealth, one of the key things there must be in the heart to live as a godly person is generosity. My dad used to say, "It takes a steady hand to hold a full cup." The name Nabal is an indication of his character; it means *fool*. In the ancient culture of Israel, names were often connected with a person's character. We don't know if Nabal was given this name or if he earned it, but we will certainly see that he matches his own name. Nabal was a fool in that he weighed his net worth in money. Our net worth, however, is in Jesus, in whom we've been made alive and now live as an object of His affection and delight. He rescued us from the kingdom of darkness and planted us squarely and securely in the kingdom of the Son of His love.

In a twist of fate, Nabal dies and his widow Abigail marries David (along with another woman). David enquired of the Lord for many things but having a wife wasn't one of them. Because David never really followed God's plan and purpose for marriage, his family life was never blessed and peaceful. Family trouble brought David some of the greatest trials of his life.

Pray

Father, thank You for my eternal riches in Christ Jesus. Your gospel has done something in me beyond my wildest calculations and dreams! So, thank You, in Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

In today's chapter, David has yet another opportunity to kill Saul. We might think that he had a righteous reason to kill Saul now because Saul went back on a previous promise to leave David alone. You would think David would say to himself, 'I need to sort this out once and for all.' But not David. He still has such a pure heart. The greatest thing in all the world to a truly spiritual person is not the rise and fall of people nor the marches of victory. David didn't seem to care for the crown; rather, his admiring gaze was wholly fixed upon his God and His cause. This makes me wonder about me ... is Jesus the soul and core of my purpose? Are my greatest concerns about my Redeemer and Lord – what He has done, what He is doing, and what He will do? What is your chief concern today?

Again, David confronts Saul with the truth. I love how David trusted in his God who blesses the righteous and the faithful. David understood the principle that Jesus, hundreds of years later, would speak of in the Sermon on the Mount, *"With the same measure you use, it will be measured back to you."* David knew he needed all of God's mercy, so he gave Saul all of his mercy. That generous measure would be a great blessing to David later in his life. David refused to take the throne through murder or rebellion. He would wait until it came to him in God's way and time. David knew that God would reward righteousness.

Saul makes another fleshly apology and invites David back home but 'once bitten, twice shy', as they say. David, wisely, did not take the invitation. He waited to see if the repentant words Saul spoke showed a genuine repentance in his life. Saul's past record was not wonderful, it was unstable and deceitful, so David decides to keep his distance. It's quite sad. With nothing more to be said, David and Saul part, never to see each other again.

Pray

Father, it's only because You've declared me righteous in Your sight that I declare myself needful of Your grace to change me, heal me, and free me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

If someone says in their heart, ‘God doesn't care about me,’ it will definitely lead them down a wrong path. (Isn't it funny how we say in our heart what we might never say out loud?) I think this is what David was saying in this statement, *“Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul.”* It was understandable, of course. This man had been hounded by a lunatic, someone who should have been his greatest advocate. David's statement was a word of discouragement coming from a heart that was weary. God had protected David so many times before; why wouldn't He continue to protect him from the hand of Saul? But, in his discouragement, David, just like we tend to do, forgets God's past deliverance and allows it to drive him into the hands of the Philistines. No person, not even Saul, could possibly have done this, but discouragement did! Oh, the desperate power of this enemy and marauder.

David now becomes a bandit of all things, a *“raider”* according to verse 8. The Hebrew word ‘raided’ means to strip or to loot. David attacked villages or encampments, killed all of the men and stripped them for treasure or armour. Poor David. This was no way of life for a man after God's own heart. Further down the road in David's life story, David will have a far more notorious season of sin with Bathsheba when he would end up killing her husband to cover his sin. We are probably all more familiar with the story of Bathsheba than with this story in 1 Samuel 27, but one has to wonder ... was this the spawning ground for such a sin? Here, David killed men and women in his raids to cover his sin. The roots of sin must be dealt with or they will come back with greater strength. The problem with a lie is that when it is told, it has to be lived. David was not only telling a lie; he was living one too. This makes me look inward today, to not only the lies I've told, but the ones I am currently living. If you are living a lie today, confess it, repent, and seek a fresh anointing of forgiveness from our all-forgiving God.

Pray

Father, let fear, discouragement and doubt be far from me. Instead, fuel my thoughts with faith. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

What is God saying to me?

RESPOND

What am I going to do about it?

Live

What a disturbing chapter this is. Saul is in a terrible place. The Philistines threaten Israel, Saul's courage fails him, and now, worst of all, God is silent when Saul seeks Him. Saul hoped that God would speak to him through dreams, but nope, God was silent. He hoped God would speak through the Urim, but God was silent. He wanted to hear from God through the prophets, but God would not talk to Saul. Why was God silent towards Saul? Doesn't God answer everyone who seeks Him? The answer is no, not always, not when a man is in a place of judgment like Saul was. God will not move you past your last act of unrepented disobedience!

I feel really sorry for Saul today. He is in a place of his own making, I know, but he is so isolated. Unbelievably, he turns to a witch. Yes, you read right, a witch. This shows the depth of Saul's fall from God and how it affected his mind. He obviously isn't thinking clearly. Once Saul rejected the truth, it becomes a downward spiral of deception and folly. I find verse 12 strange. When the spirit of Samuel spoke, the witch cried with a loud voice. She was probably so shocked because she was a fraud and most of her dealings with the spirit realm were mere tricks. Now Samuel really appeared from the world beyond and she was terrified to have a real encounter with the spirit realm. It's a hard read, full of emotion as Samuel recalls what God had already said. Saul is alone now. God has departed and, unfortunately, innocent Jonathan will get pulled into this as well.

May I remind you that God never leaves a person until that person first leaves Him. Samuel tells Saul of his imminent death. He will be killed by the next evening. The witch then comforts Saul with a meal and they eat this together, Saul eating a final meal like a man on death row waiting for his execution. Strange that a witch would eat with the king of Israel. Each lived in rebellion to God, and each was under judgment from the Lord.

Pray

Father, give me the grace to deal with problems in a loving way that honours You and others. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

David is in a really bad place. As a matter of fact, the enemies of God are thinking more clearly than he is in this chapter. They could see what David was blinded to. They saw that David was starting to think and act like a Philistine and was ready to fight with them against the people of God. They could see, even when David couldn't, that this wasn't right! David was a Hebrew, part of God's people. It's unbelievable that the leaders of a foreign army would have to remind David of who he truly was. David seems to have forgotten. He would never have slipped into this sinful place if discouragement hadn't marred his true vision and identity. This is a sad moment, a time when we wish David had the wisdom of the Philistines! F.B. Meyer writes, *"It is very terrible when the children of the world have a higher sense of Christian propriety and fitness than Christians themselves."*

No one likes to be rejected, and no doubt David didn't like being rejected by the Philistine rulers, but God would use this rejection by ungodly people in David's life. I have often said from the platform that the unhappiest person is not the unbeliever in the world, but rather the believer in the world. It is like a fish trying to survive on the motorway! In many ways, David was in the worst place for any child of God. He had too much of the world in him to be at peace in the Lord, and he had too much of the Lord in him to be at peace in the world.

If you are challenged by this today, then allow the convicting voice of the Spirit to draw you back to your true north. That's what David had to do, and, incredibly, God used a heathen king and nation to do it! Just like in the life of the prodigal son, there is a Father's house that awaits you. Better still, there's a Father's open arms of welcome, security and love.

Pray

Father, You are Holy and True. I will not forget Your benefits as daily You help bear my burdens. I will set my eyes upon the hills and look forward with confidence of the future You have prepared for me. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Live

This is one of my favourite chapters and have preached on it quite a few times. While David and his men were to the north trying to join the Philistine army, their own city of Ziklag was a sitting duck. The ruthless Amalekites took advantage of the unguarded city, attacked it, and burned it to the ground. David and his men returned home exhausted, no doubt looking forward to welcoming wives and children, not to mention a hot meal and warm bed. Even from a distance they knew something was wrong. A feeling in the air, smoke in the distance, everything just didn't sit right. When they arrived, all was lost. At this point, David had nothing to support him. No one in Israel could help him, the Philistines didn't want him, his family were gone, all he owned was gone. Even his friends turned against him and his followers spoke of stoning him. Not a wonderful place to be – every support gone, except the Lord. Actually, this is a wonderful place to be – if the Lord doesn't deliver, he's goosed! David wept not only because everything and everyone was lost, he also wept because he knew it was all his fault. He is about as low as a snake's belly, as low as a man can be, like the prodigal son sitting in the pigpen.

I love this statement, *“David strengthened himself in the Lord.”* There is no one else who can, or wants to, strengthen him at this moment, so David grabs hold of the boot laces of his soul and gives a huge tug upwards into the throne room of heaven. I wonder if he declared, *“Who have I on earth besides You, oh Lord, and who is like You in all the earth?”* David began to remember some things. At this point of total loss, David saw that the love of the Lord had always been his source. He could remember God's calling on his life. With all this in mind he starts where he went wrong and enquires of the Lord. Read the story and rejoice at the outcome!

Pray

Father, You took my sin and have already overcome the world for me. In the world we will have tribulation and broken stories, but in You we are given all the grace, peace, and hope we need. Thank you. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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Again, the heading for this chapter in my Bible says it all, 'Saul takes his life'. A brutal introduction to a desperately sad end to the first anointed king of Israel. Oh how different it could, and should, have been if only Saul had allowed his heart to turn to God. Tragically, Saul's sons were affected in the judgment of God against their dad. The brave and worthy Jonathan died as we might expect him to – loyally fighting for his God, his country, and his father the king unto the very end. Three of Saul's sons were killed alongside him in battle. Saul, seeing his own imminent defeat and seeking to escape torture from the enemy, falls on his own sword and takes his own life.

When David heard of Saul's death, he did not rejoice. In fact, he mourned and composed a song in honour of Saul and Jonathan, known as 'The song of the bow' (we will read that in the first chapter of the second book of Samuel). In spite of all that Saul did against David, it could be said that David truly loved Saul and even spoke well of him after his death. Choosing this kind of heart showed David to be a true man after God's own heart. It showed that the years in the wilderness escaping Saul really were years when God trained him to be a king after God's own heart.

Although he sinned, David never followed in the same tragic footsteps as King Saul. He seemed to have a much clearer idea of quick repentance and also a deeper understanding of how he needed God daily in his life. As we close out this amazing story today, may the challenge to every heart be to stay tender, stay in touch with the Source, and love God with ALL your heart.

Pray

Father, help me, like David, to respond humbly and gladly to You. Don't let me go Saul's route. Grant me a teachable heart and quick repentances. In Jesus' strong name. Amen.

REFLECT

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