

1 Samuel 1

As for Hannah, she was speaking in her heart, only her lips were moving, but her voice was not heard. So Eli thought she was drunk. 1 Sam 1:13 As I read this today, I tried to think back to those people that I wanted to have praying for me. There are some people who say "I'll pray for you", but there are those that you know will do it. I remember going to a See You At The Pole event while I was in college at Mizzou. We were standing on the steps, and some adults had shown up to support us and pray with and for us. In my group was a man from my church named Robert. As people went around the circle and prayed, Robert would utter quietly "Yes Lord", "Make it so Lord", and other statements to this effect. At first it bothered me, but then I realized what I am normally doing when I'm in a large group to pray. I pray, and then I sometimes listen to the other people, but more often I just start thinking of unrelated things and my mind would wander. Robert's method was odd to me at first, until I realized that he wanted to really be in prayer with every person as the prayers went around the circle. When I pray in a large group now, I listen to the person so I can pray with them and for them.

In this passage, Eli the priest has never truly seen, experienced or uttered fervent prayer. If he had, he never would have accused Hannah of being drunk. He would have prayed for her, encouraged her, done something different than accuse her of sin. He saw her behavior as a distraction, when she was probably the most authentic person of prayer at the temple that day. **Do you really have a time of prayer in your life? Is it a time you gloss over requests and maybe even some failures in your life, or do you really speak to God as the friend He is to us. Adrian Rogers mentioned in a recent devotional of his, that God is often called "Abba" which means essentially "Daddy". Do you see the special relationship you have with God through Christ that allows you to pray in a way that most people never fully realize? He loves you, and cares about the desires of your heart. If they match His desires, get ready to see some spectacular things in your life! If they don't match God's, get ready for Him to mold you to His will. Don't just "pray" as the church defines "prayer", but call out to God. He is listening, and in the myriad of voices that come to Him every day, hour, and moment, He hears you as if you're the only person speaking to Him.**

Read 1 Samuel 2

Then Hannah prayed and said, "My heart exults in the LORD; My horn is exalted in the LORD, My mouth speaks boldly against my enemies, Because I rejoice in Your salvation. 1 Sam 2:1 There is nothing quite as exciting as knowing a new dad. I admit that the birth of each of my children has been a bit overwhelming and always brought me great joy and excitement. But, there's something about having a friend who is going through the process for the first time. They have constant updates for you, carry around the ultrasound pictures, and on and on. And then the baby comes and the daddy acts like he's the one who went through labor! I thought I was going to pass out just cutting the cord...I'm glad there was no labor involved for me! And when that baby comes, those daddies are just beaming! They could be harnessed to power a small city on

their excitement. But later, as diapers need changed and sleep becomes a commodity, the excitement that once existed can wear off.

I remember the night I was saved. It was a pretty emotional night: in the same evening I walked into church on my way to Hell, realized that I had lots of sin and God wasn't cool with it, found out Jesus died for that reason, and walked out of church on my way to Heaven. It was exciting! But, over the years we lose some of our excitement. We get bogged down in discussions of Calvinism, eschatology, and we find ourselves living an academic faith, or no faith at all. We call it good when we go to church, and if we even looked at the Bible that week. **Where is your joy in Jesus? Have you lost the excitement you once had? Maybe you need to evaluate your life. Has sin taken up residence and caused you to feel a disconnect with Jesus? Are you in a church for the wrong reasons and need to go somewhere the people truly worship God? Do you need to end your allegiance to a denomination, because you feel that the message of the Gospel and the joy of the Christian life has been lost? Then do what is necessary. Our lives aren't always happy (which is a superficial emotion...I get unhappy when I get the wrong drink in a drive-thru), but we can be joyful. Remembering what we owe to God for saving us. Thank Him today. Just thank Him for saving you and making your life worth something. That should bring you great joy.**

Read 1 Samuel 3

Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, "Samuel! Samuel!" And Samuel said, "Speak, for Your servant is listening." 1 Sam 3:10 My son really cracks me up sometimes. He's six now, and every once in a while his mother will call for him by simply calling out "Tyler". Early on he would sometimes ignore her voice or not come when she called, and he would get in trouble for ignoring her. But for at least the last year, when his mom calls him he shouts back "I'm coming" as he runs out of his room to find his mom. It's as if he's reassuring her that he's on the way, so please don't punish him for not listening! As he approaches his teenage years, I hope he doesn't trade "I'm coming" for "What do you want?" and just sticking his head out his door. We'll see.

When the Lord calls us, He wants our full attention. He wants us to respond immediately and to come running to Him. How does God speak to us? Generally He speaks to us as we pray and as we read His Word. **When you read the Bible and see things in your life that don't match up, do you listen, or do you attempt to ignore the message God is giving to you? As I pray, I often begin to sense God's leading as I speak to Him regarding a certain situation or person. I cannot ignore that leading as I begin to have ideas for how to handle the situation. If you find yourself wondering what God has in store for you, make sure you're listening and ready to accept whatever He says. Listening and obedience have to go together in serving the Lord. As you pray, do so without rushing through, so that the Spirit can speak to you as you bring up things in your prayers. As you read the Bible, do so without rushing through, and see how the Lord is speaking to you today in the Bible.**

Read 1 Samuel 4

As the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth resounded. 1 Sam 4:5 It's amazing how quickly people will trade a relationship with Jesus for religion. When I talk to people about Jesus, I often hear the same response. I'm talking to them about their sin, their need to follow Jesus, and the new life they can have in Jesus. And how often does the person respond by saying "I know I need to be in church more." What does that have to do with the price of tea in China? I can't think of a more useless response to give to the Gospel, than to say that you need to go to church more. As a Christian, church attendance is important to me, but not so that I get a gold star from God on my attendance chart. I love going so I can visit with fellow Christians, and learn from the Word of God.

In this passage, Israel picked religion over relationship. They were facing a defeat at the hands of the Philistines. Did they get down on their knees and pray? Israel's losses constantly came as a result of their own sin, as was the case here. To receive God's blessing they put their trust in religion and bring out the ark of the covenant. While there's nothing wrong with the ark itself, they were essentially putting their trust in a religious idol to bring them victory instead of the Lord. **Could you be accused of trading in your relationship with Christ for religion? Do you find yourself just reading the Bible because you "have" to? Do you rush through your prayers as if you were trying to pray just to say you did? Do you worry more about making it to church than you do in living for Christ daily? I don't read my Bible, pray, or even attend church because I have to. I do it because I want to after seeing the change that it makes in my life for Christ. I live for Christ in a greater way, and find myself farther from my life of sin, when I am obedient in these areas. Ask Jesus to strengthen your relationship with Him today.**

Read 1 Samuel 5

When the Ashdodites arose early the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen on his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and set him in his place again. 1 Sam 5:3 I like medieval movies with knights, swordfights, and kings. I've never met a king on this earth, but when I watch these movies or see a story about a king on history channel, I notice how people approached them. They would seek permission, they would bow, and they would stay still as they were spoken to. You don't see people fidgeting around, or even looking around, but simply being very still before their king.

In this passage, even a lifeless statue shows proper respect before the Lord. The emphasis was not on the ark, but that it was the "ark of the Lord." Twice this statue is brought down low before God. I think of Christians that don't show God half the respect this statue did. When we come before our king in worship at church, it seems that people are distracted and not focused on their King. Maybe I'm the sinner, but when someone prays I often have been getting ready for the next song or something else to keep the service moving, and I can see how people are reacting. Some are looking around, some

are moving, digging through a purse. I'm confident that if God was in a physical form in the room, there would be no such movements. **Have we forgotten the invisible God? He has made Himself seen and known in many ways, yet when we do not see Him before us, we so often fail to respect Him. When you pray, you are speaking to the Creator of everything. When you worship, you are worshipping the One who gave His life for you, even though you don't deserve it. Show reverence to God. Bow down before Him without hesitation, as you live a life of submission to Jesus. Be still before your God.**

Read 1 Samuel 6

"Why then do you harden your hearts as the Egyptians and Pharaoh hardened their hearts? When He had severely dealt with them, did they not allow the people to go, and they departed? 1 Sam 6:6 There are really only two kinds of people in the world: lost people and saved people. You can make any other designations you want, but after life is over, this is the only thing that is truly important. Why are some people saved and some people lost? A big reason is hardheartedness. Simply put, a person may be unwilling to listen to a message that says he has to admit he's a sinner, change his life, and live for an unseen God. The hearer decides that the message of the Gospel is not that important for his life, and goes on living as a lost person.

The Philistines were warned not to ignore God as the Egyptians did. When Egypt hardened their hearts, they lost a great many things from possessions to people. To be hard in your heart means to simply place your will above that of the will of God. **Do you sometimes harden your heart towards God? How do you react when you read of sin in the Bible that you know you're guilty of? Do you immediately repent of it, or do you try to ignore the conviction? Do you make decisions on your own, without seeking the Lord? Have you ignored God's call on you to do ministry, either as a full-time lifestyle or a volunteer inside your church? Anytime you are doing the opposite of what God wants, you are being hard hearted. Have you asked God to forgive you of those times when you've ignored His words to you? Don't just repent of times you were hardened against God, but also ask Him to work in your life to stay obedient to Him. Always be ready for Jesus to give you a course correction for your life. The moment you hesitate or tell God no, you are making a choice against your Savior.**

Read 1 Samuel 7

They gathered to Mizpah, and drew water and poured it out before the LORD, and fasted on that day and said there, "We have sinned against the LORD. 1 Sam 7:6 I would never claim to be an expert in police work. Really, all I know about police work I learned from two places: ride-alongs with my brother in law who is an officer, and watching COPS. There is a constant theme that I have discovered in police work...criminals don't know anything. They're driving a car that belongs to "some guy". They're coming from "some dude's house, I don't know his name", they never saw the cocaine that was in the passenger seat next to them. A recent episode had a young man

who robbed a diner. The police caught him standing a few feet away from a backpack he was spotted with. But, since he didn't have the backpack on, the suspect said he didn't know whose backpack it was, just lying on the ground. The officer said, "Can I ask you something? Do you really think I'm buying any of this?"

In this chapter you see Israel admitting a difficult thing: that they have sinned against the Lord. And when Israel's enemies come up against them, what happens? God protects them! Probably the people were more willing to explain away their sin or make up an excuse, but they simply admitted their faults. And in doing so, they found favor from the Lord. It's true that God loves to hear from us, even if we're saying that we're sorry for our sin. **Have you confessed your sins to the Lord? Are you choosing not to talk about something in your prayer times? Are you explaining in your mind why it's ok for you to do something that the Bible says is wrong? Your life will be different if you simply admit to God "I have sinned." God does not bless sin, and He wants you to be honest with Him. Take time today, and ask God to show you your sin, in case you have become used to it and can't even see the problem. Whatever God brings to your mind as you sit quietly, ask Him to forgive you for those sins, and ask Him to help you in turning away. He'll help you, but you're the one who must make the choice. And, He will not turn from you as you open yourself up to Him. He loves as He listens.**

Read 1 Samuel 8

The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them. 1 Sam 8:7 Here in Missouri, our denomination is dealing with a decline in baptisms for the fifth straight year. An article was recently written on the issue, but only one sentence was needed from it: baptisms are going down because Christians aren't telling others about Jesus. I have wondered many times why people don't witness like they should. I believe it comes down to rejection. Christians worry they will be rejected by friends or family who feel that the message of Jesus is offensive. And they're right! It's offensive to be told that you are a sinner and that you never please God. But, it's also the truth.

In this passage Samuel is distraught that the people of Israel are asking for a king. God tells Samuel that his priorities are misplaced. Samuel's worrying that he's been rejected, when truly it is God who has been rejected. Do you know what would embolden Christians? If they realized that Jesus was being rejected, and not them. I don't want anyone to reject my Jesus, but at least I know it's nothing personal against me. We are simply the messengers responsible for carrying the message. **Do you carry the message of Jesus, or do you worry what people will think of you? Go forward in time. What do you think that person will think of you when they stand before God at the end of their life? They will know the truth, whether they accepted it or not. It would be nice to convince them of that truth on this side of eternity, but simply be obedient to share the message. The Gospel of Jesus Christ may not be the most popular message**

in the world, but it's the only one that will save people from their sins and from themselves.

1 Samuel 9

Saul replied, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel, and my family the least of all the families of the tribe of Benjamin? 1 Sam 9:21 Have you ever felt like a nobody? Well you just need more self-esteem! That's what I used to hear growing up in high school. You need to believe in yourself so you can attain your dreams and goals. Many books on the best-seller list are often books to improve yourself and raise your self-esteem. These books come from secular and Christian authors, who both stress that you are valuable. I would agree with them on that point...you are valuable. Every human life is valuable to God, so much so that He sent His Son Jesus to die for your sins and redeem you. However, this value isn't wrapped up in who we are, but who God is. We do not need more self-esteem in this country. We need more God-esteem.

When Saul is told that he is to be king, he says he's a nobody. The world would have agreed, but God disagreed. But did Saul need a greater trust in himself to be king? No, he needed a great trust in the great God who chose him. **The Bible is clear not to think too much of yourself (Rom. 12:3), so self-esteem is never the answer. It's true that if you believe you will fail, you probably will. But, if you believe you can succeed, why is that? Is it because of the trust you have in yourself, or in Jesus? (Philippians 4:13)** The problem with self-esteem is that since you are a sinner, you will at some point do something disappointing, and then thinking highly of yourself will be a difficult task. But, when we're at a low point, God is still the same as He's always been. Today, place all of your faith in God. Don't trust yourself for anything, but in every decision and action, seek God's approval that you might be successful. Self-esteem can rise and fall; esteem God and watch real results come into your life from an unfailing God who thinks the world of you.

Read 1 Samuel 10

Then the Spirit of the LORD will come upon you mightily, and you shall prophesy with them and be changed into another man. 1 Sam 10:6 As a minister one of the most difficult expectations that people place on you is to have an answer to all their questions. People want to know what God has said or is saying and they want to know now. I began praying a prayer that I think is appropriate for any follower of Christ, in the ministry or not. I began praying "Lord prepare me for the situations, questions, and people that I can't possibly anticipate today." I prayed this prayer because I was feeling overwhelmed at times by the needs and requests. But, when I started praying that prayer, things changed. I didn't feel blindsided by people anymore, and I felt that I answered their questions and situations with a greater wisdom than I ever had before. I firmly give credit to the Holy Spirit living within me, who gave me the words and wisdom I needed for the situations I faced.

As you read, you'll find out that Saul was not the greatest king in Israel's history. However, to show the life changing power of the Holy Spirit, when the Spirit came upon him he was changed into another man. He was able to do things he couldn't do before. Even with the Holy Spirit in your life, the change only occurs if you are willing to allow the Holy Spirit to have free reign in your life. Without that, you'll just be the same person you have always been. **Would you say that since your relationship with Jesus started, that you've been a different person? Do you have priorities now that you never would have imagined before you were saved? This should certainly be the case. And there may be tasks that you simply feel you are unable to fulfill: perhaps teaching a Sunday school class, or teaching your own children at home about Jesus. If you know there is something you should do, but you feel you can't do it, talk to God about it today. He has the power to make you into a different person, meaning that He can transform your desires, if you honestly and willingly seek out change in your life. Christianity is all about change. We must change from who we were to who God wants us to be. The first step is accepting Jesus, but we have a responsibility at every turn to be a willing participant in the change that Jesus wants to make in our lives.**

Read 1 Samuel 11

Then the Spirit of God came upon Saul mightily when he heard these words, and he became very angry. 1 Sam 11:6 Is it wrong for a Christian to be angry? It depends on what you're angry about. If you're angry because your team blew a ballgame, not a good choice. If you're angry because people are ignoring the Bible, that's a good choice. The Bible says in Ephesians 4:26 "Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger." Anger is not wrong, as long we respond to the situation that brought on the anger. God isn't saying "You can stay angry until suppertime, but then let it go." The call is that if there is some injustice that makes us angry, we should do something about it. If we are unwilling to fight for the Bible or other godly issues, then we just need to let it go.

In this passage we see the Spirit of God and anger both at the same time. God was angry over the treatment of His people, and so God the Holy Spirit came upon Saul to work through him to deliver the people, and to do something about the situation that God was angry about. People often get angry and speak privately against people, but they never take a public action to help right the wrongs. **Is anger a problem in your life? Getting angry is wrong when we don't get angry over the things that anger God (sin, ignoring sin, degrading the Bible). Don't just get angry, but take action. If you see injustice, don't remain silent about it. But, also be careful how you respond. Though Saul was angry, he still took the time to bring the people together, and didn't just strike out in his anger. Even when Jesus drove the moneychangers from the temple (an issue that made Him angry), the Bible says He "made a scourge of chords" in John 2:15. He didn't keep a whip in His back pocket. He saw a sinful attitude in the church that made Him angry, and He responded to it instead of just reacting. Are you keeping a whip in your back pocket to constantly fight against people, or do you respond when God leads you to? Don't excuse your anger as "how God made you". Take responsibility for your actions and attitudes.**

Read 1 Samuel 12

If you will fear the LORD and serve Him, and listen to His voice and not rebel against the command of the LORD, then both you and also the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God. 1 Sam 12:14 Many times the quality of a team is determined by its leader and not its members. When I was in the National Guard, we had a great artillery officer, Captain Parker. He loved artillery, and turned us into a well-oiled machine. His goal was that we were able to send a fire mission and get guns shooting within 45 seconds of the time the request was made. If it took much longer than that, in real combat, the target might be gone by then. Every time our control center received a fire mission, everyone yelled out "Fire Mission!" as we all got to work on our jobs. There was no slacking off and we loved the pace. Eventually, Captain Parker's effectiveness took him through the ranks and we lost him and received Captain Rohlfing. I liked Rohlfing as a person, but not as an officer. He wasn't as motivated, and asked why we were all yelling everytime we got a fire mission. He could have continued the great tradition that Parker had set up over the years, but instead our efficiency as a unit went down under his command.

I've been preaching through the kings of Israel lately, and I noticed that when the king was good, the people were. It was becoming clear that the people followed the spiritual lead of their leader. Then I read this verse today, where Samuel indicates that people who are seeking the Lord will find Him. God does not play hide and seek with His people. It's just that sometimes His people are better at hiding than seeking. We need good and godly leaders in our churches, college campus ministries, and in our homes. People are looking for a leader, and they will generally rise and fall with their leader. **Do you have a solid Christian leader in your life? Is the pastor, youth minister, etc in your church calling you to a greater walk with Jesus, or letting you coast? You need someone to encourage you to greater heights in your walk with God. Is God using you as a leader? Then live your life fully for Jesus if you want to see a change in the people you lead. Doug Fields is a youth leader who taught me an important principle when I worked with youth: if you want your students to walk close to God, you have to do it first. They're watching you to get their cues.**

Read 1 Samuel 13

therefore I said, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not asked the favor of the LORD.' So I forced myself and offered the burnt offering." 1 Sam 13:12 I recently related this statement of Saul in a different way. By saying "I forced myself", he's making the statement that he had no choice because of the bad choices of Israel, and the might of the Philistines. He had to try to obey God, yet his actions were disobedient. Just because we tell people we had no choice, doesn't make it true.

Saul absolutely had a choice, but in telling Samuel that he didn't, indicates he was unwilling to accept responsibility for his actions. He wanted the credit for his victories,

but not for his defeat. **What things do you force yourself to do? Do you force yourself to have a quiet time? Do you force yourself to go to church? In doing so you act as if you have no choice. You have choices everyday. If you are in a situation where you "have no choice" or you are "forced into sin", then you need to find a different place to be. Those situations should not happen, and only do because we allow them. Stop blaming other people for your bad choices. When you stand before God, there will not be a line of witnesses brought to explain away your deeds. It will simply be the content of your life, and the testimony of Jesus who knows where your loyalties truly lie.**

Read 1 Samuel 14

But the people said to Saul, "Must Jonathan die, who has brought about this great deliverance in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." So the people rescued Jonathan and he did not die. 1 Sam 14:45 Have you ever had people stand up for you in a difficult situation? I served a church as youth minister, and I made a statement in a business meeting that we had a vital issue of growth that had to be addressed. I had studied the history of the church and found previously when they had refused to take growth steps, the church dwindled. One man took offense to this statement and said immediately that I was constantly degrading the church by my talk. My wife stood up and responded by saying "You have talked about my husband, and now I will." She proceeded to lay out the ways God had been using me in the church and essentially defending me. When she finished and sat down, the congregation answered with applause. Several others spoke up in my defense as well, and after business meeting, there was a line of people trying to get to us and tell us they supported us. A sidenote, is that I called that man the next day to apologize for any way I offended him, and he came right to my office and cried and prayed with me and we forgave each other. Jesus was honored that day by his actions as much as mine.

Now look at Jonathan. He was guilty of disobeying a silly order of his father that the people who just got done with all this fighting were not to eat. Jonathan didn't hear the order and ate something. But, when he was brought before his father, Jonathan admitted what he had done, and that he should die in line with the order. His father Saul was ready to take care of the matter and kill his son. But Jonathan's defense came not from his own lips, but the lips of the people. They said that Jonathan was a God-server, and certainly God wouldn't want this thing done to Jonathan. **Being blameless is not only a biblical command, but a big one to me. It means that you are unaccuseable. If a charge were to be leveled against you by others, you wouldn't even have to defend yourself, because others would quickly speak on your behalf. Are you living a blameless life? Are you serving God in such a way, that others see your life and are motivated to similar action? It doesn't mean you're perfect; you can motivate people even by your repentance before God. If you were to be arrested but were not given a reason by the officer, would you be totally confused because of the innocent life you lead, or would you be able to suspect the charge being leveled against you? A Christian lives**

to be blameless. It's part of our testimony for Jesus, that our lives are different because of Him.

Read 1 Samuel 15

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I did obey the voice of the LORD, and went on the mission on which the LORD sent me, and have brought back Agag the king of Amalek, and have utterly destroyed the Amalekites. 1 Sam 15:20 I get a real kick out of the relationship my wife and son have. It's amazing how much she knows about him that apparently I don't get to see on a regular basis. She had told the kids to clean their rooms a few days ago, and Tyler came into the kitchen and asked to play a video game. Nikki asked him "Is your room clean?", to which he responded "Yes, Ma'am." If it had been me I would have told him he could go play the video game for a while, then Nikki asked the follow-up question "Is your closet clean?" Tyler immediately looked down and said "OK, I'll go clean my closet." If I had walked into his room it would have looked spotless, but apparently he's gotten very good at bulldozing his mess into his walk-in closet.

A favorite pastor of ours once said "Partial obedience is still disobedience." That certainly held true in the life of Saul here. He gained the victory that God had sent him to do, but he spared some of the people and most of the possessions that God had said to destroy. Yes, Saul had taken care of the main issue, but had left other things undone in disobedience. **Let me take a moment here to mention something else here in Scripture. It says that God regretted or repented that He made Saul king. Does this mean that God made a mistake or is changing His mind? The Bible is clear that God does not sway in the wind with His decisions (Mal. 3:6, Num. 23:19). The Hebrew here means, "to be sorry for". Specifically here He is sorry for the people who will endure difficulty because of their disobedient king. God's character is blessings for obedience and discipline for disobedience. God does not enjoy bringing difficulty on people. He loves us so much, that even when He brings needed discipline, it still hurts the heart of God. God was not surprised by the actions of Saul, but He allows people to operate in free will, and our sin still hurts an all-knowing God. This scripture shows God holding to His character, which is clearly shown throughout the Bible. Do you pick and chose when it comes to obeying God? Are there some areas that you willingly bend to Him, and others that you refuse to even listen? You cannot pick and choose obedience anymore than you can pick and choose which parts of the Bible you are going to believe. When we come to God through the blood of Jesus, we are accepting everything He says about us. Don't just admit you're a sinner when you're saved, but keep on admitting it. Allow God to continue to have free reign in your life, because when you pick sin, you hurt God. But, when you pick repentance, no matter how terrible your acts were in your eyes, He's lovingly waiting on you to just talk to Him. Don't expect a clear outline of God's will for your life if you are living in known disobedience to your Lord.**

Read 1 Samuel 16

But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart." 1 Sam 16:7 It's getting close to True Love Waits time once again, which is an abstinence campaign among Christian teens. I usually separate the guys and girls out so that they can ask and answer questions honestly. It never fails that I will ask the guys what they look for in a girl, and they are suddenly so sensitive! They want a girl who is honest and likes to laugh, and they never make any mention of her looks. I have to tell them, "Be honest with yourselves; you're not going to marry a woman that you aren't attracted to." Then they finally admit they care about her outward appearance. And there's nothing wrong with that, as long as looks are not your only reason for a relationship. Hollywood sees handsome men and beautiful women get married all the time. And yet, so few of these marriages seem to have a lasting commitment.

As Samuel is going to choose a king, he sees the son that he is sure would be the new king. He just looked kingly! However, God was looking on the inside; looking for a heart that was ready to serve the Lord and lead Israel to serve Him as well. The point is clearly made that you cannot use worldly standards to pick a godly leader. **Do you find yourself judging people by the wrong standards? Perhaps you find yourself quick to make impressions based on race. You might find yourself even creating impressions based on where a person lives. We have to be ready to see people as God sees them, from the inside out. God is looking at people in light of eternity, seeing their eternal souls when He is dealing with them. He also is looking at our hearts. No one knows you better than the God who made you. He knows where you're best suited to serve Him, which is why we have to be open to His will at all times. If you find yourself judging people too quickly, ask God to help you. I prayed about a similar situation last year, that I would be able, ready, and willing to minister to any person in any situation, and I can see how God has made those adjustments in my life, and led me to people I might not have gone to before.**

Read 1 Samuel 17

Then David said to the Philistine, "You come to me with a sword, a spear, and a javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have taunted. 1 Sam 17:45 A great battle goes on everyday for the cross. As believers share the gospel around the world, each gospel witness is a spiritual battle. As you share your faith with an unbeliever, they must come to an agreement that they are a sinner and they can't live this life on their own. That's a pretty big admission, to acknowledge that you can't get to Heaven on your own, let alone please God. When you share the gospel, never let the message be about yourself, but about the God who loves the lost person.

In this famous biblical account, David was successful because the message wasn't about him, but the Lord. David was tired of a lost person deliberately and maliciously speaking

out against a God he did not know. David made it clear that he was on the battlefield in the name of the Lord. He wasn't relying on his experience in defending his flock, though he used that experience when telling King Saul he could fight the fight, nor was he relying on weapons, though he had a sling. David was relying on the Lord for the victory. **Do you realize that as a believer, you go out everyday in the name of the Lord? He is with you every moment of the day, through the presence of the Holy Spirit. Don't feel alone because you are not. Your testimony of daily actions reflects not just on your life, but the name of Jesus who saved you. Lost people look at your life to see if you're really the changed person you claim to be. And when God calls you to a difficult task, remember that He called you to it. Whether it's sharing the gospel with a difficult person, or confronting a friend who's living in sin, you must respond when God moves you to action. Do not fall into the trap of believing that you can refuse to take action when spiritual battles look difficult. Inaction is still an action, and can cause greater damage than anything else you may do. Today, remember that you are a child of the Lord. You come in His name, and serve Him completely.**

Read 1 Samuel 18

Then Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as himself. 1 Sam 18:3 I had a close friend in seminary that was having difficulty finding a job. He finally was led to a small church, but still struggled to make ends meet. At the time, I had finally found a job myself, and we were getting set to make a move. My friend was in need of relicensing his car in a new state, and paying the property tax when he did it. He just didn't have a lot of money to pay that and other bills. I just felt led to pay it for him, even though we weren't doing too much better financially. My wife agreed and so we gave him the money to pay this bill. If I had been in his situation, I would hope someone might help me out.

Loving others as yourself is the Golden Rule of Matthew 7:12, to treat people as we want them to treat us. Jonathan was truly a person who understood this concept. He didn't withhold anything from David, even his royal clothing. **So how do we really love others as ourselves? Truly it means that we don't just think about our priorities, but the priorities and needs of others. It means we become the person who takes the smaller of the two pieces of pie. It means that we don't just pray about someone else's financial need, but see how we can help to meet it. You think about how you wish people were stepping up to the plate for you, and then you do the very same thing for someone else. I'm not a rich person, but every time God has led me to give financially, I have never gone without anything, and it's a joy to know you helped someone who was praying, but didn't know how God would answer. Literally, God used you to answer the prayer of another.**

Read 1 Samuel 19

Michal took the household idol and laid it on the bed, and put a quilt of goats' hair at its head, and covered it with clothes. 1 Sam 19:13 This is the oldest trick in the book on making someone think you're asleep, though I never realized it was in the Bible. I've

seen it in a million different movies, and every time it throws off the parents or bad guys at least for a short time. In this situation, we see David running, despite being a great warrior, because he does not want to take the life of the king. Even though David had been anointed as the next king, he was unwilling to take the life of someone else who had been anointed for the job. While the deception only worked for a short time, it's interesting what his wife used to make the "David dummy"; A household idol, a violation of the commandments of God. Why was it in the house of a God-lover like David? Perhaps he simply didn't know about it. That seems unlikely, since it was big enough to look like a sleeping man. The only other option is that David knew about the idol and tolerated it.

What have you allowed in your home that is a violation of the Lord's commandments? You cannot claim ignorance for the things your children might bring in your home. Consider what comes in over your television, computer, phone, and various other ways. If right now you're thinking of violations of the Lord's commands that are coming into your Christian home, then you must work to remove them for your sake and the sake of your family. Do not allow yourself to tolerate the things that God does not tolerate.

Read 1 Samuel 20

But Jonathan answered Saul his father and said to him, "Why should he be put to death? What has he done?" 1 Sam 20:32 When people are in conflict, to solve the conflict they must be honest about what is causing it. Imagine you were asked to mediate between two Christians in conflict. You ask the first one: "What are your issues with this person?" and he says, "He is stealing from me, lying to me, and gossiping about me." This person has raised three biblical issues that cause him conflict. Then you go to the other person and say, "What are your issues with this person?" and he says, "I just don't like him." There may be a conflict, but each side doesn't hold equal merit in the squabble. One person has biblical complaints, while the other person just has complaints.

In this situation Saul clearly wanted David dead. He tries to get Jonathan to understand by saying that David is trying to steal the kingdom away, which Jonathan knows isn't true. David and Jonathan both ask in this chapter for an explanation of the charge. The charge against David: I hate him. **As believers in Jesus Christ, we must have a different standard in conflict. When we have an issue with someone, we should want to resolve it. Going to a person can be difficult, but perhaps by you taking the first (and hardest) steps, this person may listen. Don't level charges, but simply point out in Scripture where you feel the issues are. Give the other person an opportunity to do the same thing, and be ready and willing to listen in regards to your own sin. Conflict happens not because of the spark, but the willingness to keep fanning the flame. Don't let conflict sit around in silence or secret. Do everything to bring about a resolution.**

Read 1 Samuel 21

Then the priest said, "The sword of Goliath the Philistine, whom you killed in the valley of Elah, behold, it is wrapped in a cloth behind the ephod; if you would take it for yourself, take it. For there is no other except it here." And David said, "There is none like it; give it to me." 1 Sam 21:9 Do you remember when you found out that sweat was a good thing? I remember thinking how stanky (that's a word where I come from), I would get after gym class and I didn't understand what the point of it was. Later I learned that our bodies use sweat to regulate our body temperature when we're participating in rigorous activities. If you're working hard, you're going to sweat. It's just going to happen, because sweat is a byproduct of exercise and physical activity.

In our Christian lives, there are byproducts that result from our obedience to the Lord. In this passage we see David leave his house to get away from King Saul. As David's going down the road, he realizes he forgot to bring a lot of things. He didn't have any food, weapon, and probably even forgot his house keys. So he meets a priest who gives him some of the bread of the synagogue. Then David asks if there are any weapons around. And sure enough, Goliath's sword is the only thing there. If David hadn't been obedient and used by God during that earlier time, there would have been nothing there for David to use in defense. **I read a quote recently: "Joy is a byproduct of obedience." I believe this also applies to blessings for a believer. I think that just like sweat happens when you exercise, blessings happen when you obey. In this case, David's past obedience was still bringing him blessings. Do you seek God to bless your life? Do you seek blessings in your marriage, with your kids, in your finances, and other areas? Then be obedient in those areas to see God bless you! Love your spouse as Ephesians 5 instructs us. Love your children and do not provoke them to sinful actions as Ephesians 6 instructs us. Give to the Lord what belongs to Him, and watch your finances stabilize in a way you've never seen as Malachi 3 tells us to. When you are living obediently with the Lord, blessings will come. You may even be like David and find blessings where you didn't expect them.**

Read 1 Samuel 22

Everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him; and he became captain over them. 1 Sam 22:2 Greg was one of those guys that people just gravitated towards in high school. He was fashionable, athletic, funny, the whole package. He was liked by the popular people, who loved to talk to him. He was liked by the "cowboys", "preps", "jocks", pretty much everyone. And I never saw Greg ignore anyone or make fun of anyone that came to talk to Him. Greg loved Jesus. He talked about Jesus all the time. Because of Greg's influence, and other Christian friends I met through Greg, I become bolder about my own faith in high school. I think people were drawn to him, because he wasn't fake, and he authentically accepted anyone who wanted to be his friend, whether they were rich or poor, popular or unpopular.

I think David had a similar testimony. People were drawn to him. When he was in favor, everyone sang the song of David killing his tens of thousands. But now, David is no longer in the popular crowd and a large group of people gravitate to David. Some were poor, social outcasts, or just tired of the ungodly reign of Saul. They saw something different in David. He didn't try to keep his distance from them, but accepted them and folded them into his cause. **Are people drawn to you? If so, why? Is it because of outward appearances, or is it because you have a relationship with God that is genuine and real? The outward stuff will fade, and then you'll be alone. But, if you will accept people for who they are, you will find friends in some of the most unlikely people. Jesus never rejected anyone that came to Him, so don't be "better" than Jesus. Even in your church. Befriend everyone, and don't allow yourself to keep certain brothers and sisters in Christ at arms length from you. Embrace them as you would want to be embraced.**

Read 1 Samuel 23

Then David inquired of the LORD once more. And the LORD answered him and said, "Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand." 1 Sam 23:4 Maybe you'll forget I already used this example by the time we get to Jeremiah, but my favorite example of God's unchanging word is in Jeremiah 37:17. The last king of Judah, Zedekiah, imprisoned the prophet Jeremiah for saying that Babylon would come and destroy the nation. Well, Babylon shows up on Judah's doorstep, and King Zedekiah secretly brings out the prophet Jeremiah and asks, "Is there a word from the Lord?" Jeremiah simply replies "There is!", and proceeded to give the exact same message as before. Zedekiah was hoping that perhaps with enough time passed, God would give a new message. However, God's message and outcome were still the same, as Zedekiah and the people made no changes.

Prophets delivered God's messages not just to tell what would happen, but to give time for the people to change. David was in a similar situation. God clearly showed him where to go and what to do, but the hesitation of David's men caused David to ask again. God once again gives the same word, even reassuring David. The difference between Zedekiah and David, was that Zedekiah was hoping for a different word, while David was just making sure of the instructions. **How exactly does this apply to us today? Obviously when we read the Bible, we are reading an unchanging message. We must respond to the message in a timely manner. Don't allow yourself to be convicted in church or in your quiet time, and then to just walk out and ignore that conviction. As Christians, the Holy Spirit brings the specifics of the message to us. He gives us a clear indication that we must change those habits and attitudes in our life that are against God's Word. If we hesitate, God will use more drastic measures to get our attention. Though some changes may seem difficult, our lives are always made better when we yield to conviction. I don't have any areas of my life that I have yielded to God that I wish I could now have back.**

Read 1 Samuel 24

He said to David, "You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. 1 Sam 24:17 One of my favorite movie lines comes from the golf classic, Happy Gilmore. Happy is an amateur who can drive the ball 500 yards, but doesn't have all the skills to play the game. He tries to distance himself from his golf instructor, and realizes he needs more teaching. So Happy goes back to his old golf coach and has to show that he realizes he made a mistake and convince his golf coach to take him back with the following line: "I'm stupid, you're smart. I was wrong, you were right. You're the best, I'm the worst. You're very good looking, I'm not very attractive." My wife and I often quote that when we're acknowledging the other person was right about some situation.

Saul in essence takes this approach as well. When he realizes that David has proven himself as a man of righteousness, not only does Saul recognize that about David, but recognizes his own wickedness. This is actually a very wise approach. Isaiah 5:2 warns us against calling evil good, and good evil. Saul calls it like it is, but he recognizes the deeper issue. Saul says that he acted wickedly because he's wicked, and that David acted with righteousness because he was righteous. **Who you are comes out in what you say and do. You can attempt to put a different spin on your actions, but ultimately people are able to judge motives in the long run. Are you calling sin like you see it or like God sees it? Saul knew these things before, but until David took this action to show he would not harm Saul, Saul would never admit it. When faced with this conviction, he finally admitted who was right and who was wrong. Admit sin without someone cutting up your clothes. The bad part for Saul, is that we'll see him ignore this conviction in the future.**

Read 1 Samuel 25

David had also taken Ahinoam of Jezreel, and they both became his wives. 1 Sam 25:43 I am a pack rat. Some things I keep because I'm a pretty sentimental guy and I don't like to get rid of things that have specific memories for me. However, sometimes I keep stuff that makes no sense. I was at a garage sale once and found a huge floppy disk holder that held the old 8-inch disks from back in the day (Apple II anybody). I don't have any disks that size, but I thought I could store CD's or something else in it. I already had plenty of CD cases and storage for computer files, but I decided I could really use this thing. It sat in my office with one 3-inch modern floppy in it for about 2 years, before I decided it wasn't something I really needed, despite convincing myself that I did for so long.

In this chapter we begin to see David start to pack away wives. This woman Abigail said that David would stay from evil all his life, but she was wrong. In taking her as his wife, he was doing evil as he now had three wives (also Michal, Saul's daughter). Eventually we're going to see this sin in David's life take him to his darkest days, because of his inability to be content with what and whom he had. David was clearly not content with his first wife, or he never would have taken a second. It's interesting that the beginning of

the chapter shows Samuel passing away. I'm sure he might have had some words for David regarding this course of action. **Are you content in your life, or are you driven by a desire for more? Do you remain discontent in your work, marriage, children or possessions? You have to learn to be thankful for what you have. The only place that we should never be content is with sin, as David was in this situation. Never simply accept it as having a natural place in your life. A Christian living in sin is as unnatural as a fish living out of water. Ask God to give you contentment in whatever area you are struggling with. Read 1 Timothy 6:6 regarding the value of contentment.**

Read 1 Samuel 26

Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has delivered your enemy into your hand; now therefore, please let me strike him with the spear to the ground with one stroke, and I will not strike him the second time." 1 Sam 26:8 I took the youth of my church on a mission trip, and my wife went also. I gave her my hammer, and I had to borrow a small hammer from the church. The hammer my wife had could drive a nail in about three blows, even with her swinging it. My little hammer took about ten, and I told the men around me it was a "precision hammer". Honestly, it was just wimpy and I didn't want to admit it. Other people were driving nails while I was simply torturing them. It took me 10 swings where others could do the same work in 3.

In this case, I have to give Abishai credit. Many times when a king was captured, they would cut off his head, and put it on a pole to ward off other enemies. Or they would capture the king and torture him in other ways. This guy said, "Give me a shot at Saul's head with his spear, and I promise I won't need a second chance." **Minus the spear this is the attitude we should have as Christians. Don't dilly around when something needs done, but just do it. If there is a difficult conversation that you need to have with someone, then do it. Don't dance around the issue but be very direct. If you know you need to share the gospel with someone, be very direct and share the whole truth of the cross. If you need to apologize to someone, do it completely so they know that you are truly sorry. When you get a shot to do something, treat it as your only opportunity. It may be your only chance to tell someone you're sorry or to share with them the love of Jesus.**

Read 1 Samuel 27

Then David said to himself, "Now I will perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than to escape into the land of the Philistines. Saul then will despair of searching for me anymore in all the territory of Israel, and I will escape from his hand." 1 Sam 27:1 My wife bought me a book that gave the accounts of every living Medal of Honor winner around 2000. As I read these stories of bravery, there was a common theme throughout their stories: they never thought they'd die. Every soldier has thoughts about the worst-case scenario in combat, but when these moments came up, these men never gave a thought to that scenario. I read multiple stories of men who single-handedly charged machine gun posts, and should have been cut down, but instead

they defeated their enemy because they moved forward believing they would be successful. I'm not trying to stress the power of positive thinking, but it's certainly better than worrying all the time. The quickest problem that will keep a soldier from fighting effectively is not losing his rifle, or sustaining a wound, but fear. When fear takes control, your effectiveness goes right out the window.

David had been anointed as king over Israel. Yet, he is just sure that Saul is going to kill him before he ever gets the chance. God didn't say through Samuel that hopefully David would be king, but that he absolutely would be king. But David runs, not just to anyone, but to the enemies of Israel. They knew who David was, the man that defeated their great warrior Goliath. And yet for over a year, fear kept David as a servant of his enemies instead of God's people. **Does fear sometimes stop you from being effective for the kingdom of God? Do you find fear keeping you from sharing the gospel with people? Do you find fear keeping you from stepping out on faith to do something God has led you to? Can you find a time that giving into fear has helped you? Remember, there is not a single moment in the life of a Christian that God is absent. He is there to help us and guide us so that we remain in His will. Chose to be a servant of the Lord, and not a servant of fear. Fear doesn't spread the gospel.**

Read 1 Samuel 28

Then Saul disguised himself by putting on other clothes, and went, he and two men with him, and they came to the woman by night; and he said, "Conjure up for me, please, and bring up for me whom I shall name to you." 1 Sam 28:8 I was watching Criss Angel on TV. He's an amazing illusionist, and he had a show on how to avoid being a sucker. He set up a tarot card booth and had people come in one at a time. He gave 5 people in a row the exact same reading, and each one of them was amazed at how he had nailed so many important things in their life. Criss said that people who come into a tarot card reader usually want to believe the things being said, so to deceive a person is easy (the people were shocked to know they had been duped by a generic reading). I've also watched John Edwards, the guy who claims to speak to people who are dead. If you've ever watched you can see him throwing out names, and sometimes they don't stick with the person. But, he just keeps insisting and finally the person will say "Oh yeah, that's my mailman's nephew's best-friend!" It becomes ridiculous and hard to believe anyone would trust these mediums.

I believe the situation is the same here. This woman is asked to conjure up Samuel, who was well known to everyone. She simply says she sees an old man in a robe. Saul wants to believe it's Samuel, so he does. The account says she saw him coming out of the ground. The soul does not reside in the earth whether saved or unsaved (Luke 16:22-26). She also says that Samuel claims Saul would die the next day (which he doesn't, but does eventually). That's not a word from the Lord (Deuteronomy 18:22), since the Bible says a prophet is known by saying things that come true. I could say that I was talking to JFK and make it sound believable because of what I know about him, which I think is the same thing this woman did with the well known Samuel. **How does this apply to us today? We live in a world of technology, and yet a world where people will believe**

mediums and tarot card readers, or even horoscopes. Do not put your trust in these things, because when you do you are denying your trust in God. If you have friends, Christian or not, who participate in these activities, help them to see the fallacy that underlies these attempts. Ask your friend why they believe these sources will give them answers. When they begin to talk about spiritual or supernatural things, you have a perfect opportunity to share the gospel and show them the supernatural love and salvation of Jesus Christ.

Read 1 Samuel 29

David said to Achish, "But what have I done? And what have you found in your servant from the day when I came before you to this day, that I may not go and fight against the enemies of my lord the king?" 1 Sam 29:8 Imagine that you're a soldier fighting on the front lines of a major battle. You can see the enemy force on the other side of a large field. Your commander gives the order to fire and suddenly you and the rest of your army are firing away at the enemy across the field. In the midst of the fighting you can hear the commander of the other army giving the same command. But, as the enemy commander gives his order, you suddenly obey it. You turn and begin firing on your own fellow soldiers for several moments wounding and killing several. This is one of the greatest examples I can come up with regarding what sin is like. When a Christian sins, it's as if we started listening to the wrong commander and start shooting up our own friends and family out of our selfish desires. Then after a while, we decide we'll start fighting the devil again and act as if nothing happened. Becoming a Christian is not a wishy-washy commitment that rises and falls with the moment.

In this situation you see David calling the king of the Philistines his lord. In fact, David is going to go fight against the people of Israel, and I'm sure that he's going to do it with all his might. He had so firmly fought for the other side that the king of the Philistines was impressed and trusted David completely. That's not a glowing recommendation for a future king of Israel. **Would you admit you find yourself fighting for the wrong side too often? Jesus did this awesome thing for you on the cross, and yet because of selfish desires for sin, you turn against the very Kingdom of God that brought you salvation and forgiveness. Remember that the salvation of Jesus is even strong enough to forgive someone for that atrocity. But, we must be willing to serve God completely. Stop going AWOL and missing your opportunities to serve the Kingdom. Fully commit to the causes of the Lord, and stop choosing sin. A Christian may find himself or herself in a sinful choice, but it shouldn't be from a deliberate attempt of their own will. To avoid sin, you must seek to avoid it.**

Read 1 Samuel 30

But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God. 1 Sam 30:6 I recently have been praying for a family that was dealing with the loss of their father. It's tough to talk to these teenage children about why their father died, and what God's role is in this situation. I told the wife that when she starts to ask "why" to instead ask "what". I cannot presume to tell someone why God does something. His ways are higher than our ways, so

we cannot be expected to always understand. But, a person who asks “why” never moves forward, because they are seeking an explanation that may be impossible to understand. A person who asks “what” seeks out the lesson or new season of life that God has for that person. Either we choose to move forward or just sit still.

David made a choice to do the what in his difficult situation. Imagine coming home and finding your house burned down and your family missing. That’s the situation David had. Some people were getting angry and trying to place the blame. David instead of asking “why” began asking “what”. God sends David to lead these people against the raiders and to save their families and possessions. If they had simply asked why without trying to move forward, they probably never would have seen their families again. **Is there a situation in your life that you are not moving forward in? Are you distressed over a sin in your past? Perhaps you’re asking yourself why you did such a stupid thing? Has there been a tragedy in your life that you blame God for? Do you “blame” God also for the good things in your life? Live a life of thankfulness and choose to move forward with the Lord. At this point in our journey through the Bible, you’ve seen plenty of people with tragic circumstances that chose the what instead of the why (Moses, Joseph, Jacob). Perhaps it’s time for you to change your perspective with Jesus.**

Read 1 Samuel 31

Then Saul said to his armor bearer, "Draw your sword and pierce me through with it, otherwise these uncircumcised will come and pierce me through and make sport of me." But his armor bearer would not, for he was greatly afraid. So Saul took his sword and fell on it. 1 Sam 31:4 In the military you often times have “battle buddies”. In basic training your partner is assigned to you, but later on soldiers develop friendships within their assigned units. When a unit goes into combat, there is a common pact made between friends, “If the enemy is about to capture me, take my life.” Many friends think it is a noble gesture to agree to take the life of a friend. While I’ve heard of this conversation, I’ve never heard of someone doing it. I’m sure it’s happened at some point, but I’m sure the act isn’t as common as the conversation.

This is the conversation between Saul and his armor bearer. Saul is confident that he will be tortured and humiliated by the Philistines, so Saul asks his servant to kill him. When the man refuses, Saul commits suicide. People have asked me if this is a biblical justification for suicide. **Remember, just because something is in the Bible doesn’t make it “biblical” (a word often used to denote things that are right). Should I commit adultery and murder the husband since David did it in the Bible? Ultimately it comes down to who you trust? In a tremendously difficult circumstance, do you trust the Lord or are you prepared to do whatever you have to in order to fix things your way? Remember Jacob and Esau? Jacob was just sure that Esau would come to kill him and his family. Maybe he had justification to commit suicide? But, Esau came and forgave his brother and entered into a new relationship with him. Suicide is never justified, because it is an act of taking control in your life. Control of the Christian belongs to Jesus alone.**