

SOUTHLAND CHURCH

THE BOOK OF
1 SAMUEL

20 Day Devotional



foundations
daily devotional

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DAY 1**READ:** 1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

1 Samuel is a history book with a focus on heroes. It zones in on the lives of three key biblical characters: Samuel, Saul and David. By observing the day-to-day happenings of their lives, we learn much about leadership, relationships and the sovereignty of God.

1 Samuel is also a shifting of times, bridging the time of the judges and the time of the kings. Samuel is the last of the judges and the one called to anoint Israel's first kings. The book contrasts leadership – good and godly versus wicked and worldly. Ultimately we see God as the great King and Leader over all.

The book opens with the story surrounding Samuel's birth. Samuel is one of Scripture's most righteous characters, and in this opening, we see the godly lineage before him. Samuel is the offspring of parents who love and fear the Lord. Hannah is a godly woman – one whose heart has been purified through years of suffering. As a woman without children, Hannah was among those scorned in society, unable to assume the true role of an Israelite woman. Some must have looked at her and assumed some hidden sin had closed her womb. But we know from Scripture that it was God Himself who allowed these years of trial in her life. He had purpose in this. And by the time we meet Hannah, we see a woman who has had selfishness and bitterness cleansed from her heart. She desires a child – not for her reputation, but for the Lord's service. She wants a *son* – not to carry on her husband's name, but to dedicate to the Lord's service in the temple. This desire is not spiritual manipulation; she truly desires a son to serve the Lord. And after she has given birth to him, she joyfully leaves him in the hands of the temple priest. She has named him Samuel – “heard of God” – because the Lord heard her prayer. Her thanksgiving prayer in chapter two reflects what she has learned of God's character through her years of struggle: God is faithful and sovereign. Evil will never reign victorious over Him because He has the final word. As one of His people, Hannah (and you!) can take great comfort and joy from this truth.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. We all have a sinful nature, and as perfect as we may try to be, there are times when we fall short. Ask God to point out any way that you have responded to disappointment in an ungodly way. Take a few moments to confess your failure to Him.
2. What do you think might have enabled Hannah to live with such integrity despite her struggles? Think about your own current struggles and how God wants to enable you to live with integrity. Thank Him for His strategy and ask Him to help you to be led by the Holy Spirit.
3. What are some truths about God that you find within Hannah's prayer? Thank Him for these things. Thank Him that He reigns as King over everything that is going on in your life.

DAY 2 **READ:** 1 Samuel 2:12 – 3:21

One of the major themes found in 1 and 2 Samuel is that of leadership. We are shown what both good and bad leadership look like, and the comparisons begin here in chapters 2 and 3. We are introduced to an example of bad leadership by way of Eli's sons, Hophni and Phinehas. Unlike the other tribes of Israel, the Levites did not have an allotment of land for their tribe. The Levites were the priestly line, chosen to serve God in the temple. And God's law outlined how the Levitical priests and temple servants were to be provided for: they received a portion of the offerings that the people would sacrifice before the Lord. Eli's sons, however, abused their power. They took more than their allotted amount of food and took it at an improper time (before the fat was burned). By ignoring God's holy law they *"treated the offering of the Lord with contempt."* Imagine the scene: a repentant Israelite comes to the temple to offer a sacrifice for the forgiveness of his sin and is disrupted by the sinful act of Hophni and Phinehas. Then, to top it all off, these men fall into sexual sin. They make God's house like that of pagan gods, turning the Lord's servant girls into temple prostitutes. We see in Eli's sons pride and arrogance and a serious lack of the fear of the Lord. And then the word of the Lord comes to the house of Eli by way of a prophet: judgement is coming for the sin of Eli's sons *and for Eli*, who apparently honoured his sons above God. A sorrowful prognosis is given for all descendants of Eli.

In contrast to the sons of Eli, we meet our title character. Samuel is a young man under the instruction of Eli. We are told that the personal and prophetic word of the Lord was rare in those days (remember, the books of Moses – mainly the law – was the only scripture of the time), but that was all about to change on this night. God had said to Eli through the prophet: "I will raise up for Myself a faithful priest, who shall do according to what is in My heart and My mind." And this is exactly what we see Him doing in chapter 3 as God calls out to Samuel. Samuel had known *about* the Lord, but on this night he met the Lord and began a relationship with Him. As God's chosen prophet, Samuel is given a hard task of testing right from the get-go – he must relay a message of judgement to his own mentor. The obedience he shows sets the ground for the rest of his life. We are told that as he grew, *"the Lord was with him and let none of his words fall to the ground."* Because he listened and obeyed, Samuel was a faithful and true mouthpiece of the Lord for his entire life. What an example of righteousness, and what a contrast to the sons of Eli!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What differences do you notice between Hophni/Phinehas and Samuel? Examine your own life: what are some differences you see when you compare your life to the way that the world lives?
2. Read 3:19 again and think about what the Lord could do through Samuel because of his obedience. What might God be able to do through you if you choose obedience, or because you *have already* chosen obedience? How can you walk in obedience to God today?
3. What attributes/characteristics of God do you see displayed in today's scripture reading? Think about some of the evils in our world and the hope that we have because these things are true about God. Thank God that He is who He says He is and that His plans and purposes will reign victorious.

DAY 3 **READ:** 1 Samuel 4

This chapter along with the next two tell a story about the Ark of the Covenant. The Ark of the Covenant had been constructed along with the Tabernacle under the leadership of Moses. On Mount Sinai God had revealed His plans regarding the Israelites' lifestyle of worship. Within the Tabernacle was an inner room called the Most Holy Place and the Ark of the Covenant was the only piece of furniture in that room. Inside it were three things: the stone tablets upon which were written the Ten Commandments, a golden urn holding a portion of manna, and Aaron's staff which God had caused to bud and flower in order to show Aaron and his family as the priestly line. The Ark itself was overlaid with gold and was covered with a golden slab called the mercy seat. On it were two cherubim with wings out-stretched and faces looking downward in awe. It was here between the cherubim that God would speak to Moses. The Ark became the visible sign of the presence and power of the Lord in Israel. And it was an important aspect of battle, generally showing that the Lord was *with Israel* in their fight.

While the Ark of the Covenant was God's choice of meeting place, the Ark itself held no power. In this story we see that the Israelites are without a fear of the Lord. After their defeat by the Philistines, they do not seek the Lord's wisdom; rather they bring the Ark into their camp presuming that it will bring victory. Treating it like a charm, they assume that its presence will automatically bring Yahweh's support. But God cannot be mocked. He is not a man, and He is most definitely not an *object* to be trifled with. He is Creator and Lord of the Universe, almighty and sovereign in all He does!

This sovereignty of God is the theme we see throughout the story of 1 Samuel 4-6. First, though Samuel is not present (he is probably growing up during this time), the story begins with one line about him: *"And the word of Samuel came to all Israel."* (4:1) The prophecy God had given Samuel on the night of his calling is about to come true in this story. The first truth of God's sovereignty proclaimed in this story is this: His word always accomplishes something. God said that Hophni, Phinehas and Eli would die and they did, according to His Word.

The end of the chapter describes the effect of the day's events. With her final breaths, the wife of Phinehas mourns the loss of the Ark of the Covenant, even naming her child for the ominous occasion. The loss of the Ark is much more than a stolen trinket; that God would allow the mercy seat – His chosen place of communion – to be taken by the enemy shows that something is not right in Israel. Though God is not bound to a box, He is to be revered and His way is to be honoured. Israel's lack of reverence results in the deportation of the Lord's glory. In their haste the Israelites have sold themselves short; in opting for a quick fix they have lost both the Ark and the sign of God's presence and power in their midst.

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask God to reveal a way that you lack reverence for Him – a way that you are treating Him as less than holy. Confess this to Him and ask Him to give you the correct perspective. How will this perspective change your view of God?
2. We often put our hope in things, people and ourselves when we need to put our hope and trust in God alone. We depend on *something* to change a bad habit that we have.

We depend on *someone* to change their attitude before we can change ours. We depend on *ourselves* and our own strength to minister in the way God called us to. Etc., etc., etc.! God must be our FIRST and FOREMOST go-to! He wants us to lay our hearts out before Him. He wants us to ask Him for strategy when we don't know what to do. He wants us to ask for His Spirit's filling to do the tasks He has called us to!

- a. In what way have you been depending on something/someone/yourself instead of God? Confess this to Him.
- b. Take some time to bring this thing before God. He is so pleased when you do this! Lay it out before Him, ask Him for His strategic wisdom, and pray for the Holy Spirit to fill you so that you can depend on HIS strength today.

3. Who are some people that you know who have walked away from the Lord and in doing so have deported God's glory from their lives? Spend some time interceding for them. Ask God how you can pray for restoration in their lives and pray as He leads you.

DAY 4

 **READ:** 1 Samuel 5:1 – 7:1

Chapters 5 and 6 finish the story of the Ark of the Covenant. The Philistines had only a partial knowledge of Yahweh. They had heard of the plagues the Egyptians had experienced, but they didn't understand the nature of the God of Israel. When the Israelites bring the Ark of the Covenant into their camp in chapter 4, the Philistines tremble; they believe the Ark is a god – presumably one of many gods in Israel.

In revealing Himself to Israel, and to the world *through* the nation of Israel, God made it explicitly clear that He was the *one true God*, the *only* God. This was vastly different from what all other nations believed. The nations of the earth were polytheistic – many gods. The Egyptians, for example, worshipped a long list of deities. Ra was god of the sun; Isis: goddess of marriage, magic and healing; Osiris was god of the underworld and afterlife; and so on. A worshiper would attempt to gain favour of his or her preferred god or goddess through gifts and acts of worship. The gods themselves were thought to interact – they fought and manipulated each other, engaged in sexual activity, and bore child-gods. Worship then, was essentially a massive game; the gods were the players and the people were the pawns. However; the polytheistic religions of the world, both ancient and present, are nothing more than a veneer. They are a mask, behind which is one spirit, one prince of darkness.

The nature of God – the truth that He is *one*, and that He is the *only God* – was a vital truth to the Jews and later to Christians. This was a key revelation to Abraham and later to Moses. God spoke *personally* to Abraham, not because Abraham had gifted him into a generous mood, but because He was *choosing* someone through whom He could bless the earth through the revelation of Himself. Through Moses God declared His uniqueness to His people – that He alone was their Deliverer. *“I am the Lord and there is no other!”* He declared through the prophet Isaiah. (Isaiah 45:18)

Yahweh was not the sun or moon to be worshipped. He was not a statue of stone made to represent a force of nature or an aspect of healing. He was not a fickle spirit to be flattered and lured into a good mood. No! Rather the sun, moon and stars *declared His glory and proclaimed His creativity!* (Psalm 19:1-4) In fact, when we look closely at Israel's

deliverance out of bondage, we see that with each plague, Yahweh was *purposefully* attacking specific Egyptian gods. The plague of water to blood showed that it was not Hapi, god of the Nile, who controlled the waters, but Yahweh, Creator and Sustainer of the universe. When God brought death to the livestock of Egypt, He was showing that it was not Hathor, the cow-headed goddess of love and protection, or Apis, the bull cult god, that held power and showed love and protection – it was Yahweh, the Owner of the cattle on a thousand hills and the One who *is* Love. The plague of darkness defeated the sun god, Ra, placing the power of Yahweh infinitely above the strongest god in Egypt.

THIS is the God that Israel could call their own! What a blessing! Though Israel had acted foolishly and irreverently, Yahweh would not allow Israel's enemies to believe that the God of Israel was without power. God is glorious and He *will* receive the glory due His name. Immediately God shows Himself incomparable to the Philistine god, Dagon. It was commonly believed that a god was conquered when it fell into enemy hands. But not with Yahweh. Isaiah 44:6-11 says *“This is what the LORD says – Israel's King and Redeemer, the LORD Almighty: I am the first and I am the last; apart from Me there is no God. Who then is like Me? Let him proclaim it... All who make idols are nothing, and the things they treasure are worthless. Those who would speak up for them are blind; they are ignorant to their own shame. Who shapes a god and casts an idol, which can profit him nothing? He and his kind will be put to shame...”* Though these words were not yet spoken, they are eternally true. And God proves His power before the Philistines. Dagon has no power to protect his people... a lesson that is soon learned by the people of Ashdod when they are afflicted with tumors. The Philistines have encountered Yahweh, the undefeated, unconquerable God of Israel.

This is the God who is on *our* side – *your* side. As Paul wrote, *“If God is for us, who can be against us?”* (Romans 8:31) Of course, we can set ourselves against God, and if that is the case, He will not force His way into our hearts or to the top of our priority lists. When we are not submitting to God – when we are not giving Him the place of rule and reign in our lives, when we are not seeking Him and listening to Him – we are putting our idols before Him. Sometimes *self* is the biggest idol of all. Let us seek to *lay down our idols before God*. This act of humility will be a much easier course than waiting for our idols to be struck down by the Lord and only then humbling our hearts before Him. And let us remember that a life in submission to the Lord is joy and peace and *freedom*.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Our God is a MIGHTY God – the *Almighty*! What are some ways that you have seen God display His might in your life? Worship God for His power in your life. Thank Him that He is the same God today as He was thousands of years ago when this story took place.
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to convict you on any idols that you are placing above God. If you are willing to submit this to Him, confess it and lay it down before Him. And here is how you might lay it down:
 - a. *God, how do I remove this as an idol in my life? What steps do I take to realign myself to You?*
 - b. *God, I want to submit myself to Your authority on this issue. Is there anything that You want to say to me regarding this idol I have had?*

- c. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit and to give you joy in your obedience.
- d. Thank God for His word to you. Thank Him for the joy and peace and freedom that is found in following Him.

DAY 5

 **READ:** 1 Samuel 7:2 – 8:22

Twenty years has passed since the story involving the Ark of the Covenant. Samuel has grown and is known as a judge in Israel. True to Israel's pattern as seen in the book of Judges, the nation has brought foreign gods and pagan worship into their land and as a result, God has allowed them to be oppressed by the Philistines. Samuel comes to the people, urging them to repent – to put away their idols, direct their hearts to the Lord and serve Him *alone*. Again, we see the author of 1 Samuel making it clear that Yahweh will not accept second place in Israel.

For most of Samuel's life he has acted as the priest and last judge of Israel. Chapter 7 gives us a glimpse into his position as a judge. Travelling in a circuit from Ramah to Bethel to Gilgal and to Mizpah, he would stand as a judge for the people, mediating disputes and whatever else came up. But he is also the main leader of all Israel. He is the one the people cry out to when they need governance and guidance, be it militarily or spiritually. Chapter 7 is the only story we have of Samuel between childhood and old age, and from it we can learn a few things about Samuel's godly leadership, even as a young leader: 1) He had a fear of the Lord. He knew that a righteous and godly life was one that worshiped Yahweh only. 2) He understood God's heart towards the repentant. He knew God to be a merciful and loving God towards those who repent of their rebellion, and so he could wholeheartedly encourage the people to turn from their sin and call out to God. 3) He was an intercessor. With a heart of compassion, he willingly cried out to God on behalf of the people of Israel. 4) He knew God to be a God of salvation. While the Philistines are drawing near to attack Israel, Samuel is burning a sacrifice and waiting upon the Lord. And what happens? God wins the battle for Israel that day – "But the LORD thundered with a mighty sound that day against the Philistines and threw them into confusion, and they were routed before Israel." The battle was the Lord's! 5) Like the great leaders before him, Samuel attempted to teach the people to remember the works of the Lord. Like the forefathers of Israel and the leaders Moses and Joshua, Samuel knew that to remember the works of the Lord was a vital step in keeping His commands.

And so, given these qualities of Samuel, there is a surprising turn of events in chapter 8. The people make demands for a king. They say it is because Samuel's sons do not walk in the ways of the Lord, but that is merely an excuse for their selfish desires. The Judgeship was never a thing of hereditary succession – God raised up judges for Israel on His own accord. The people want a king so that they can be like the other nations. This is in direct disregard to their very beginnings. They were founded as God's very Own people. Raised up from a promise (God's covenant with Abraham), they multiplied under God's providence, were delivered by God's power, sustained by His provision and brought into Canaan under His precedence. Yet in their pride, they want to dismiss this awesome privilege and be just like everyone else. God tells Samuel the truth about what the people are saying: *"The have rejected Me from being King over them."*

Their faux pas seems stupid to us, yet how often have our requests and complaints and actions shown us disgruntled and wanting out of where God has put us? No, we are not that much different than our ancient brothers and sisters. Today, we are not a nation under God, but as followers of Christ, we are members of His body; together we make up a corporate body. As a Christian, your body is His temple and you have been given His Holy Spirit to dwell in you. You belong to Christ and He is your King – your *functional Lord*. As Israel was clearly different from surrounding nations, our Spirit-filled lives should be clearly different from the lives of surrounding non-believers and lukewarm Christians. Christ is our King, and as His people we should rejoice in this wonderful privilege!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Who is someone that you lead? What is something you can personally learn from Samuel's leadership?
2. Ask Jesus to show you one way that your life is different from the lukewarm and non-Christian people around you. Ask Him how this pleases Him.
3. Ask the Holy Spirit to show you anything in your heart that resents His Kingship in your life. If you see areas of resentment or rebellion, confess these to Him and recommit yourself to His Lordship. Ask Him to fill you with His Spirit so that you can walk in His ways today.

DAY 6

 **READ:** 1 Samuel 9 & 10

Here we see Samuel as a prophet. He speaks the word of the Lord and the word comes to pass just as the Lord said it would. We see that Samuel hears God clearly and obeys Him faithfully. He is a faithful leader, and in these chapters we see this leader call up another leader, the young man, Saul.

Saul seems to be a prime candidate for kingship. He is tall and handsome – the "hunk" of Israel. If you know anything about the story of Saul, you know that a prideful downfall is coming, yet we don't see any of that pride here. The young man we meet is good-natured and obedient; we find him searching out his father's lost donkeys without hint of annoyance or a rebellious heart, and then we see him sincerely shocked to hear that God has chosen him to be king. When Samuel is seeking to anoint him king before the tribes, Saul is hiding behind some luggage! If anything, he seems meek and innocent! Saul truly was God's choice for Israel's king. God was not waiting for him to fail; He was with Saul, calling him specifically and empowering Him for the job. It was a rare thing for the Spirit of the Lord to rush upon anyone (10:10) – this happened to some of the Judges, to Saul here and later to David – but it was not normal. And when Saul is anointed king, God specifically sets up friends for him – noble and courageous men who stand in support of him when some others despise him.

Let's take a step back for a moment: what was God doing here? He had raised up His people – the Israelites – from birth with the purpose of blessing the entire earth through them. But these people are imperfect sinners, continually falling and getting back up again. In rejection of their God, they have made pleas to be like the other nations and have a king. God, in His sovereign, Fatherly wisdom is granting their request. And though their

request came from unsubmissive hearts, He is still with them, working His plan of blessing. And so He seeks to give them a good king who will lead them in His ways. This was His plan with Saul. And if Saul would choose to be obedient, God would use him to lead the nation that would be a blessing to the earth! What a privilege!

Our God is for us. He desires to use us in His plan to bring blessing to others. He *chooses* us for His good purposes – He looks at us and has dreams to place us within His plans. He knows our imperfections and our lack, yet He still loves us. He knows how we will stumble and fall, but if we get up again and turn our feet towards Him, He will joyfully continue his good work in us. He has blessings for us: like Saul, many of us have been given godly friends who have stood in support of us; He wants to equip us – give us what we lack – so that we can do the things He has set for us to do. God is on a trajectory towards His coming Kingdom. He wants us to enjoy the pleasure of His presence in that Kingdom. So let us say “Yes!” to Him today. Like Saul (at least at this point in his life), let’s allow God to use us, even if we think we are too small, too weak, and too unknown for His business. He has made His business our business – what an exciting opportunity!



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God if there is any area of your heart that is against Him and ask Him to forgive you for this hard-heartedness. Ask Him to speak to you about His heart for you – to show you how He is *for* you. Thank Him for this.
2. What is something God has called you to? If you don’t know, ask Him to show you something He is calling you to for today. Will you say yes to Him? Tell Him so, and ask Him to use you for His glory. Pray for specific people you will encounter today and ask God to shine through you so that you may be a light to them.
3. Make a list of some of the things God has chosen for our church to do. Ask the Holy Spirit how you can pray for the church and spend some time doing that.

DAY 7



READ: 1 Samuel 11 & 12

An event happens in chapter 11 that solidifies Saul’s leadership and authority in Israel. The northern Israelites living in Jabesh-Gilead are being dimly threatened by the Ammonites. They send for help across the nation and the people’s response is one of tears; apparently they assume they are unable to help their brothers – until Saul hears about it. We see here another example of God equipping Saul for his kingly duties. The Spirit of the Lord again rushes upon him, as in the time of the judges, kindling his anger and moving him to action. Suddenly, meek boy turns mighty warrior! Saul steps up to respond and calls together the Israelites, who jump at his command. The Lord gives victory and coronation takes place as the people wholly embrace Saul as their king.

Chapter 12 brings us to a speech given by Samuel. Through it the Lord convicts the people of their sin in asking for a king. The people are truly sorry, and again we see the merciful and abundantly faithful heart of God. Though they have sinned, He will not abandon them, and He is still pleased to call them His people. Samuel, also, will not cease praying for them, but will continue to intercede on their behalf. What a relief, that despite our failings, God does not fail us!

People are hungry for leadership. Proverbs 29:18 says, “*Where there is no vision, people perish.*” We were created to belong. Adam and Eve were placed in Eden, the Garden of the Lord. It was a place where they could speak openly to their Creator, a place where the sound of “*God walking in the garden in the cool of the day*” (Gen. 3:8) could be heard. It was a place where all needs were met and contentment was in the palm of their hands. They were being led by their Creator; the pots were being used for the purpose that the Potter had crafted them for. But in their pride and with unguarded hearts, they clung to deception and broke the sweet communion that had been theirs. In judgement and mercy they were cast from the presence of God, shut out from the place where their need for relationship and leadership were fully met. And since then, man has been seeking to find safety and security under the leadership of others – longing for someone to fill the void that became a reality when Eden became a thing of the past. However, the wonderful life found in Eden is the *true* life that is still in the future of those who become children of God. People need leaders who will lead them towards this life – towards the hope and the future that is found in Jesus, that *is* Jesus.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What is the life that Jesus offers? What does it include? How have you experienced this life?
2. Ask God to speak to you about how you are a leader. How can you lead others to the life He offers today?
3. Have you spoken about your leaders (work, church, family, government, etc.) in a negative way? Read Romans 13 and ask God to speak to you through it. Confess as the Lord convicts you, and ask God to fill your heart with love for those who lead you. Then pray for them as the Holy Spirit directs you.

DAY 8



READ: 1 Samuel 13 & 14

In these chapters we begin to see the downfall of Saul. Though he started out well, he begins to take matters into his own hands. In chapter 12, Samuel gave a warning to the people: If you and your king fear the Lord and obey Him, all will be well, but if you or your king rebel against the Lord’s commands, the Lord will be against you. The latter option is what we see starting to happen in these next few chapters. Two acts of disobedience sandwich a great victory over the Philistines.

In chapter 13, an important event is recorded: instead of waiting for Samuel to meet him at Gilgal and perform a specific sacrifice, Saul does it himself. At first glance, this may seem like a rather harmless blunder, but certainly God saw a wicked heart behind the action because the result is severe: Saul’s kingship will end. When confronted with his rash action, Saul offers a defense without showing any sign of repentance. He brushed his act of disobedience off as good sense and personal piety. One commentator said of this: “*Men destitute of inward piety often lay great stress on the outward performances of religion.*” In other words, religious people whose hearts are not truly devoted to God often feel the need to make a big deal about their religious actions. This is what the Pharisees of Jesus’ day were guilty of as well – making themselves appear holy when their hearts were actually hard. This is the kind of heart that God saw when He looked at the man whom he

had chosen as Israel's king. God had been so willing to use him, but Saul would not walk the way that God was walking.

Chapter 14 tells the story of a great victory over the Philistines under the leadership of Saul's son, Jonathan. While Saul is beginning his decline (further revealed in this story), his son Jonathan is exalted as a strong and godly leader. This story truly is an incredible one. Jonathan is a man of faith. Putting full trust in the Lord's ability to win a battle with many or with few, Jonathan and his armour-bearer instigate an attack, killing 20 Philistines on their own! The Lord Almighty joined the battle, throwing the Philistines into confusion so that they turned against one another! *"So the LORD saved Israel that day"* (14:23)!

Meanwhile, Saul had made a rash vow earlier that day, cursing anyone who ate anything all day. It was a stupid vow, since he hadn't sought the Lord in it and it appeared to have no value. The men were fighting hard and food could have helped them in battle. What is more, because they were so hungry at day's end, they slaughtered oxen and ate meat along with the blood, which was unlawful according to God's law. When Saul learns that Jonathan ate during the time he had called a curse, he readies himself to kill his son! Jonathan is only spared because the people intervene.

Saul appears to only be getting worse, and acting more according to his own will and less according to God's. Jonathan, on the other hand, is very different from his father. Willing to seize opportunities and follow the Lord boldly, he is a picture of redemption in the midst of Saul's downfall.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What differences do you see between Saul and Jonathan? What encourages you from what you read in your Bible today?
2. Saul was more concerned about his outward appearance than his heart. Is this true about you in any way? Ask God to search your heart and to cleanse you of any unrighteousness so that you can walk in full confidence with Him today.
3. What opportunities are standing before you today? Like Jonathan, will you put your faith in the Lord's mighty power and seize your opportunities today? Spend some time thankfully declaring who God is. Then ask Him how you can walk out in faith and boldness today.

DAY 9

 **READ:** 1 Samuel 15

In chapter 15, Saul's demise is set in stone. Saul is now walking his own trajectory. First, though he was explicitly commanded to destroy *everyone* and *everything* in the defeat of the Amalekites, he kept King Agag and the best of the livestock alive. When confronted, Saul is very casual about it all, claiming that he wants to sacrifice the best to God. But, Samuel rebukes him, God did not ask for sacrifice; He commanded total destruction. Saul's pride has hardened him to what God desires. In arrogance, he has attempted to appear godly while his heart remains unsubmitted. And when he finally confesses, he is still more concerned about his own image than sorrow over his sin. And so, by the authority of God, Samuel declares that God has rejected Saul as king over Israel. In chapter 13, God declared that Saul's kingship would not continue, meaning his family line would not carry on leadership.

Here, it is declared that God is rejecting Saul *personally* as king.

God is merciful, but He is also working out a plan. Saul failed in his task, and missed his opportunity. However, we know God to be forgiving. Moses was not allowed entrance into the Promised Land because of his sin, yet he still ended his life well. Saul is not dying; this is not the end of his life. Though this news is painful and the realization of failure overwhelming, Saul still has years of choices before him. He may glean from the wisdom of the patriarchs before him and end well as a king who learned from his mistakes and rendered his heart to the Lord, or he can continue down his self-focused path which will lead him to a lonely death.

We have been blessed with the opportunity and ability to choose. Even when our circumstances are terrible and uncontrollable; even when we realize we have failed miserably; even when our sin is made prominently aware to us – at these times we have choices laid out before us. Our God is for us. Christ died for us *while we were still sinners* – our failings will never come as a shock to Him who found Adam and Eve hiding shamefully in the Garden. So how will we respond in the face of the unexpected and unfortunate? Often it is a question of humility: Will we lay down our pride and come before our Father (and perhaps others) in humble repentance? Will we ask for His help in the areas we cannot control? Will we accept the wonderful gift that *"while we were sinners, Christ died for us"* (Romans 5:8), or will we trample on that beautiful truth by doing things our own way and trusting in our own power?

Saul is not a character to emulate, but he is someone to learn from. This chapter speaks of God's regret. Twice it says that He regretted making Saul king and once it says that it is impossible for God to lie or feel regret. Which is it then? Does He regret or doesn't He? God is a Sovereign King. There is nothing that catches Him off guard. Every plan He makes is perfect and will ultimately result in His glory. Even Saul's failure will ultimately glorify God: everything God says through Samuel will come true, proving His word faithful; Saul's son will stand as a wonderful friend to the next king, bringing glory to God; and the next king will be the greatest king who will receive an incredible promise – something that could have happened to Saul, but will nonetheless happen without him. God does not regret the course of His plans. What He does regret (feel sorrow over) are the choices that Saul makes and will continue to make. It is sorrowful for God – a Father – to watch His child walk away from the relationship He offers. Let us learn from this sad story that our God is with us even in our hard and painful falls. He is offering us a hand of help; He is *"the Lord your God who takes hold of your right hand and says to you, Do not fear; I will help you."* (Isaiah 41:13)

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Take some time to meditate on the two verses mentioned here: Isaiah 41:13 & Romans 5:8. What does God want to remind you of? How can you align yourself to these truths today?
2. Perhaps you have had some unfortunate or difficult circumstances cross your path recently. Perhaps not. Whatever the case, ask God to reveal to you the choices that are before you today. Take time to think about what is the best choice to make.
3. In prayer, ask God to be glorified through your life today. Pray this also for your family/spouse/kids, that they would seek to glorify God in all they do – that they would focus on this today instead of on other things, people or opinions.

DAY 10 **READ:** 1 Samuel 16

In 1 Samuel 13:14, after Saul had unlawfully offered the sacrifice, God said through the prophet, *“now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought out a man after His own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over His people”*. In chapter 16 we meet this man after God’s own heart.

Samuel is a faithful follower of Yahweh and we see this again so clearly in this chapter. What he sets out to do is a bold thing – a thing that would be considered treason if the king were to hear of it. But it is the Lord God of Israel directing him, and he knows the Lord to be a sovereign and faithful God whose word always accomplishes that for which it was meant. The command to go to Jesse and anoint one of his sons as king is a scary assignment, but rather than saying no or running away, Samuel presents his concerns to God. He has long resolved to follow the path that Yahweh puts him on, even if each step must be taken in faith. And so Samuel takes God’s strategy – to go to Bethlehem under the purpose of offering a sacrifice – and runs with it.

Samuel is one who hears the voice of the Lord clearly. He is able to set his own perceptions aside and listen for the still, small voice that speaks truth. He obediently passes by each of Jesse’s sons at the word of the Lord’s dismissal. And when what appears to be the last of Jesse’s sons has been rejected, Samuel doesn’t fret about how he might have heard wrong and grapple to go back and choose who *he* thinks would be a good pick. Standing securely in what God has told him to do, he naturally assumes that Jesse must have another son. And when he sees David, he knows that this is the man after God’s own heart that has been chosen to take up the kingship after Saul. And so Samuel anoints this handsome, young man as the future king of Israel.

Immediately the Spirit of the Lord rushes upon David, empowering him for the tasks that lie ahead. Samuel’s anointing of David was not an official declaring of David’s immediate leadership in Israel; rather it was a spiritual anointing – God was now readying David for the certain position he would one day have as the king of Israel. And in verses 14-23 we see God starting to set up the scene, arranging the puzzle pieces. The anointing must have come as quite a shock to David and his family, who had no relation to King Saul. Saul was a Benjaminite while David’s family was of the line of Judah. Yet in His sovereignty, God is now bringing David into Saul’s life, giving him a seemingly “random” place of influence as the royal musician/comforter. It is neat that God takes one of David’s talents – musicianship and entertainment – and uses it for an even greater purpose. Our God is practical and wise!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

- 1 Samuel 16:7 is a rather famous verse: *“Do not look on his appearance or the height of his stature... For the LORD sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart.”*
 - How does God want to encourage you through this verse?
 - How does God want to convict you through this verse?
- What do you admire about Samuel and the way that he heard God? Take some time to thank God for being a God who speaks. Thank Him for specific times that He has

spoken something meaningful to you. If there is something specific you have been seeking Him about, take some more time to pray about that now.

- Is there something in your life that has happened that seems random or pointless? Commit that thing to God. Thank God that He has purpose in *all* things. Ask Him if He might reveal to you part of His purpose for doing/allowing this thing in your life.

DAY 11 **READ:** 1 Samuel 17

This is one of the most famous and exciting stories of the Old Testament. Many children have acted out this great battle in the Valley of Elah, and many adults have found great encouragement through this epic story. The shepherd/musician, David, whom we met in chapter 16 is now elevated as a young man of incredible faith, courage and leadership. David is sent to the battlefield to check up on his brothers and ends up rising victoriously above the Philistine’s champion fighter. One must not take this to be chance; God was behind this event. He brought David to the battle lines with purpose. He knew David’s heart and knew that David would courageously rise up to defend His name, and God chose to use this moment of history to elevate David as a godly leader in Israel.

David’s faith is incredible. He truly is a man who has sought God’s heart, and in his seeking, he has grown to love God. This is clear because he takes godly offense when Goliath speaks defiantly of the God of Israel. David is not daunted by Goliath’s size or skill (which the writer of 1 Samuel records in great detail); rather he is put off by Goliath’s irreverence towards the Lord. And he is not just all talk, as some might be. David is ready to put his words to action – to stand against this giant in the name of the Lord and defend His holy name. David shows no fear of man in these moments, nor does he fear for his own life. He knows God to be a Defender – his own experience as a shepherd has taught him this. During his time in the hills when there were no battles to fight and no name to defend, David learned that God loved him – that even when there was no one around but David and the sheep, and no job to be done besides watching the flock, that even then, God loved David and could stand as his Defender. And so in this moment when there is actually a cause to fight for, David has no doubt that God will win the battle for him. He is so confident, that he does not even take the armor given him. He will take only what he has used before – a staff and some stones – and leave the matter in God’s hand. This is great faith.

David moves to a new level through this event. Up until now, he has been a part-time shepherd and part-time royal entertainer. Again, God is working to raise David up in the palace and in the hearts of the people. This event puts David on the radar of everyone in the nation. This was a time when Saul, as king, should have risen up as leader and warrior. It was his job to stand up against the Philistines who were mocking the Lord. Instead, he was cowering in fear and discouragement, and his army followed. This, then, is the first story that, to the reader, pits David against Saul. One is bold; the other acts in cowardice. One is full of faith, eyes open to the God that is by his side; the other sees only the giant standing in front of him. One, as a servant of God, is stepping up to a duty that is not his own; the other is shirking his role as both king and spiritual leader. From this point onward, David will continue to rise in the hearts and minds of all Israel as Saul continues to falter. 1 Samuel is a book of leadership. There is a clear line between those who lead out of their own ability and pride, and those who lead boldly as humble servants of the Lord Almighty.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. What do you love about this story? How is your faith built and encouraged? What step of action, or prayer point, is God stirring up in you through today's reading?
2. Faith is so foundational to the Christian life. Without it, it is impossible to please God, and without faith, it is impossible to draw near to Him (Hebrews 11:6). Jesus said that all we needed to see movement in the kingdom was a mustard seed of faith; however, He also spoke of people not having enough faith and needing more. Our faith may start small, but it must grow. As God builds our faith through various circumstances, our faith will increase and we will have greater boldness to step out in new ways. Ask God to speak to you about your faith. Here are some things you could ask:
 - a. *Is there a situation where I am lacking faith? Where is my doubt coming from?*
 - b. *What are some things you have done in my life that have built my faith?*
 - c. *God, increase my faith!*
 - d. *Is there something I can do to grow in faith?*
3. Spend some time praying for your church leaders. Pray that they would be leaders like David – men and women who pursue the heart of God and who naturally stand up for the name of the Lord. Use the strengths you see in David in this chapter to pray specific things for your leaders.

DAY 12**READ:** 1 Samuel 18

The contrast between good and godly leadership that the writer of 1 Samuel intends to display becomes even clearer in this chapter and in the ones to follow. Saul continues to harden his heart and work against the Lord and His anointed. Everyone seems to be aligning themselves with David – even Saul's own son becomes David's dearest friend. Saul cannot handle this growing allegiance. When he first met David, he was captivated by him; he was soothed by David's skillful playing and intrigued by David's courage and confidence. After David defeated Goliath, Saul wanted him moved full-time into the palace and from then on David served the king as both musician and military leader. But at the centre of Saul's heart was not love, but hatred.

The end of Saul's kingship was already prophesied, yet we see him making choices now that are setting him up for eternal destruction. At the centre of Saul's heart are some very common sins that he chooses to go unchecked, and therefore they develop into something very dangerous. We see roots of jealousy and envy – Saul cannot handle the success of others; he cannot handle that David is being uplifted by the people. He envies David's popularity, success and Godly favour. We see a root of anger – it angers Saul that David would get credit as a leader and warrior while *Saul* is the king of Israel. Unchecked, this spirit of anger grows into a murderous spirit and Saul makes two blatant attempts to take David's life. Saul's jealousy also is combined with manipulation, warping his mind; he becomes fixated on David's demise, even using his own daughter as a pawn, in hopes of seeing David die at the hands of the Philistines.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

Think back to the Saul we met in chapters 9 and 10 – the young man who respected his father, who was shocked to be anointed king, who cowered behind the baggage at his coronation, and who was filled with the Spirit of the Lord and empowered for service. If you had told that young man about the man that is coming out in chapter 18, he would have been shocked – and this is only the beginning of Saul's murderous deeds! Saul was not a murderer when we met him! Neither was he randomly possessed by a murderous spirit. This developed in his heart; it grew from the "simple" seeds of jealousy and anger. And this is a true picture of what happens to those who live in unrepentant sin. Repentance – confessing our sin to the Lord and to others and then turning away from that sin, asking the Holy Spirit to fill and transform us – is so necessary to keeping a soft heart. God *loves* when we hate the sin in our hearts. He loves to hear our humble confessions because it means to Him that we desire His heart. Remember, when rejecting Saul, Samuel said that God was looking for a man after His own heart, and He chose David. This was not because David was a perfect fellow, but because David desired God's heart, and when he stumbled in sin, He sought to realign himself with the Lord. Saul, on the other hand, resented the Lord for rejecting him as king. And to set oneself up against the Lord is to set oneself up for destruction. For the Lord is a righteous and victorious God, the sovereign King of the universe who WILL reign in power and glory for ever and ever and ever!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Spend some time interceding for the Canadian church. The character of Saul shows us how unrepentant sin can open the door to the enemy, enabling him to set up strongholds. And if we leave these strongholds, they become fortresses of the enemy and we can end up moving from the kingdom of light to the kingdom of darkness. Pray for the Canadian church, for believers in Canada to see the strongholds of sin in their hearts and to be delivered by the power of the Holy Spirit. Pray for a spirit of repentance to move across our land.
2. Ask Jesus to reveal to you any strongholds of sin that the enemy has erected in your heart. Confess this sin to the Lord and in the name of Jesus, bind up these spirits and cast them away. Declare to them that you are covered in the blood of Jesus, and that they have no hold over you anymore.
3. Take time to pray for a filling of the Spirit. Ask the Holy Spirit to fill and transform you – to fill the space where the enemy had a stronghold. Ask Him to empower you to do God's work today. Ask Him to develop more of the fruit of the Spirit in your life today (see Galatians 5:22-23)!

DAY 13**READ:** 1 Samuel 19 & 20

Saul only continues in his murderous rage in these chapters. Again he seeks to kill David, either by his own hand or the hand of his servants. Yet God is sovereignly protecting David. Saul has become a son of the devil – like the enemy of God he sets himself against God's plans. Though the act is futile, he has chosen the enemy's side and cannot help but fight against the Lord's anointed.

DAY 14 **READ:** 1 Samuel 21 & Psalm 34

1 Samuel 21 begins with an event that will have terrible repercussions in the next chapter. David and his small band of followers end up in Nob where they come, hungry, before the priest, Ahimelech. They ask for food, but there is none except for the bread of the Presence – holy bread meant only for priests and to be eaten in a holy place. But seeing David’s need, Ahimelech gives him and his men the bread of the Presence. Jesus commended this action in the book of Mark. Mark 2:23-28: *One Sabbath Jesus was going through the grainfields, and as His disciples walked along, they began to pick some heads of grain. The Pharisees said to Him, “Look, why are they doing what is unlawful on the Sabbath?” He answered, “Have you never read what David did when he and his companions were hungry and in need? In the days of Abiathar the high priest, he entered the house of God and ate the consecrated bread, which is lawful only for priests to eat. And he also gave some to his companions.” Then He said to them, “The Sabbath was made for man, not man for the Sabbath. So the Son of Man is Lord even of the Sabbath.”* Jesus was essentially saying that one must always look at the law through the lens of love. Following God’s commands are so important, but they must be followed with a heart of love. Jesus commended the priest for putting the *spirit* of the law – mercy and compassion – before the *letter* of the law – the duty itself. While God’s moral law is not optional for us as believers, we must seek to follow it out of our love for the Lord, and we must seek to extend the love and compassion of Christ to those around us.

David continues on his flight from Saul and ends up in Gath – the home of the Philistine, Goliath, whom David conquered. Thinking no one will recognize him, he aims to lay low for a while, but soon finds that the servants of the king know him by name, and know him to be a mighty warrior in Israel. In fear, David pretends that he is insane in order to discourage himself as a threat to the Philistines.

David was a worshiper at heart. Perhaps he loved to worship since he was a boy, but certainly his time with the flock gave him opportunity to meditate on God’s character. As a shepherd himself, he had begun a journey of allowing God to shepherd his heart. It is clear to see, when we read the Psalms, just why God called David a man after His own heart. David sought to know the heart of God. He sought to love what God loved and hate what God hated. He sought to get close into the presence of God. He revered the Lord as God Almighty and trusted in the salvation of Yahweh.

Psalm 34 is David’s song of thanksgiving, glorifying God for the protection he experienced when he encountered King Achish of Gath in 1 Samuel 21. He credits God as his Deliverer and encourages all who look to the Lord in this way. He speaks of God’s deliverance from fear; he declares the angelic protection given to those who fear the Lord; he proclaims God’s goodness for all who take refuge in Him; and he exalts the provision of the Lord. He urges the listener to fear the Lord, to refrain from evil and deception, to repent of sin and choose to do good, and to seek peace and pursue it. It is a wonderful Psalm, expressing thanksgiving to God, our Protector. David was a true worshiper because he exalted the Lord in plenty and in want, in victory and in defeat, in joy and in discouragement. This Psalm followed on the heels of a very close call. We can feel David’s joy and exultation as we read it. Let us seek to praise the Lord in all things like David, that we may also be called people who seek after the heart of God.

Next to Saul, we see the wonderful character of his son, Jonathan. Jonathan is a man of deep humility and submission to the Lord. The people of Israel had pleaded for a king, that they might be like the other nations. The general pattern of kingship was one of succession; when a king died, his son would inherit the throne. Jonathan would have been the assumed king to succeed his father. Scripture doesn’t tell us when exactly Jonathan learned that David, and not he, would be the succeeding king of Israel, but Scripture shows us a heart submitted to this truth. Saul’s son was so extremely different than him. It seems that God showed incredible mercy to Jonathan, protecting him from the inheritance of the generational sins of his father. While Saul is angry, bitter, jealous and manipulative of David’s rise to power and popularity, Jonathan is joyful, content, cheerful and unassuming. Jonathan is wise, choosing not to set himself up against the plans of God. It would seem that Jonathan, also, is a man after God’s own heart. He must be, in order to live out such grace and humility. Because, not only does he accept God’s plan for David, but he truly loves David. Saul is David’s adversary; Jonathan is his advocate. Saul is David’s pursuer; Jonathan is his protector. Saul is David’s challenger; Jonathan is his cheerleader. Saul is David’s foe; Jonathan is his friend.

This is extreme friendship-love and it is a rarity. The friendship that Jonathan shows to David requires humility and resolute trust in God. To accept David as the next king would be one thing, but to offer real friendship to David is a completely different level. It shows that at the core of his heart, Jonathan was soft towards God. He wanted to be aligned to God’s plans, even if it meant that he would not receive what the world would say he deserved. He was willing to walk in the shadow so that God’s plans could be carried out without his own standing in the way.

There is so much for us to learn from this young man. If some of our family members have been Sauls, we can know with confidence that we do not have to walk in that same bondage. And if we shudder at the Saul-tendencies we see in ourselves (be it his specific sins or others), we may be encouraged to know that God wants to root those out of us as we rely on Him. Not only can God make Jonathans come out of the family line of Sauls, but He can make Sauls *into* Jonathans! We can know this with full confidence because of the story of *another* Saul who would come onto the scene a thousand years later. *That* Saul encountered Jesus and was transformed into one of the greatest apostles of Christian history. And let us remember – the men and women of the Bible were people *just like us*. And the God who transformed lives throughout the Bible is the same God we serve today!

 **JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. How are you encouraged or challenged by what you have read today?
2. Ask the Holy Spirit to reveal to you a relationship in your life where you are being like Saul but desire to be like Jonathan. Perhaps someone has been exalted over you. Perhaps someone received credit for your work. Perhaps someone who was a friend now feels like a threat to you. Whatever it is, share your heart with the Lord in reverence and humility. Ask Him to transform you into a Jonathan.
3. Who has been a Jonathan-like friend to you? Take some time to sincerely thank God for this person. How can you bless this person for their friendship?
4. Pray for the church – that this level of Christ-centred friendship would abound among believers. Pray for soft hearts and gracious love like Jonathan displayed to become the norm among Christian brothers and sisters.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. Ask God to speak to you about the letter of the law versus the spirit of the law. The heart behind God's law is love. Are there some things God has commanded of you that you feel a level of resentment towards? Ask God to reveal the law of love that is behind this command. Thank Him for it. Ask God to give you eyes of mercy and compassion today.
2. Ask God to fill you with His Spirit so that you can be a worshiper today. What can you do to keep your heart and mind focused on who *He* is, in spite of any circumstances?
3. Spend time in prayer for the church. Pray that Christians in our church and in our nation would become true worshipers. Pray that the Canadian church would be driven to her knees in prayer. This is what David was doing when he penned his psalms – prayer and worship! Pray for an increased urgency for prayer in our nation.

DAY 15**READ:** 1 Samuel 22:1-2 & Psalm 57, 1 Samuel 22:3-23 & Psalm 52

David's life had taken a discouraging turn from his days as a shepherd and giant-slayer. The nation's king was in hot pursuit of him. He had abandoned family and friends in order to escape the jealous king. Did he ever wish that God had not called him to be the future king? Did he ever long for his days as a shepherd? Were the memories of lions and bears a welcome relief from the fugitive life?

It is believed that while hiding out in the cave of Adullam, David composed Psalm 57. Dependents began to flock to the cave and a scraggly bunch started to collect. Perhaps this was both a relief and a burden to David. On one hand, he was not alone; on the other, he now had to lead others while still on the run from Saul. But God was teaching David greater dependency. Through all things, God was teaching David to seek after Him, to trust in His Word and to surrender Himself fully. Psalm 57 is David's intimate and personal plea to the Lord, but he does not wallow in the throes of self. He looks to God. He knows God to be a God of mercy and refuge. He knows God to be the *Most High* – that, though a powerful earthly figure is in pursuit of him, his life finds its beginning and end in God and His sovereign ways. There is none higher than the God of heaven! And though David feels he is in a dark time, his prayer moves from a place of supplication to a place of declaration. He begins to glorify God, to put his stake of praise into the ground. Nothing – no earthly or spiritual enemy – can steal his heart of worship from the One his soul loves!

Chapter 22 goes on to describe the horrific events that took place when Saul found out that the priest of Nob had helped David. The result is a bloodbath. 85 priests are killed and the entire city – women and children included – falls to the edge of the sword. Saul's irreverence and wickedness has reached new heights. Even his servants and officials think he is acting in haste and they will not step forward to murder these innocent people. Doeg the Edomite, however, had seen the whole thing and stepped forward to testify against David. When none of the officials would follow the order to strike down the priests, Doeg stepped up to the task. It is upon hearing of this event that David composed Psalm 52. In this Psalm, he declares the steadfast love and enduring faithfulness of God, despite the wicked actions of evildoers. It is a Psalm encouraging the faithful followers of Yahweh to hold confidently to His protection in times of trouble. David is such a model for us: in all kinds of circumstances,

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

He runs straight to the Lord. The Lord truly is his refuge and his strength. If the events of his life have put him over the moon with joy, he pours out his heart to the Lord, and if his circumstances have brought him into the pit of darkness, he falls before the Lord. Let us seek to do the same! Let us seek to know and be known by our Creator in this way! And like David, whatever may come, let us trust in the steadfast love of the Lord and thank Him forever because He is good!

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

1. David is going through a lot of trial – and there is more to come. Why do you think God allowed David so much trial? Why not just supernaturally strike Saul down and bring David into kingship? What benefit could come from this waiting period?
2. What is a trial you have been, or are going through? Given what you just thought about David, think about your own situation. Why might God have allowed this in your life? Through the prophet Isaiah, God reminded us that His ways and thoughts are *higher* than ours. Thank God for this truth in your life.
3. Write your own psalm to the Lord today. Come, just as you are, before Him. Whether you are filled with joy, excitement, peace, sadness, discouragement – whatever! Bring your emotions before the Lord. And then, like David, put your stake of praise in the ground and declare the truth about who God is.

DAY 16**READ:** 1 Samuel 23 & Psalm 54

God is definitely using David's wilderness "adventures" to stretch and strengthen him. His band of followers has grown to 600, and though David continues to live on the run, he does not wallow in self-pity. He is being raised up as the next leader of the nation. When he hears about the attack on Keilah, he is moved to action. He seeks the Lord and receives affirmation to go in and fight. He and his band of men defeat the Philistines and save the city. Yet the Lord reveals to David that the men of Keilah will turn him over to Saul if he stays any longer, and so David is on the run again.

The events of the chapter are discouraging, describing a very out-of-breath David as he runs from place to place. It is when the men of Ziph seek to reveal him to Saul that David writes Psalm 54, again throwing himself into the arms of the Living God. God is faithfully shepherding his lamb, David. We see God's mercy on him in the coming of Jonathan in verse 16. It is certain that Jonathan now knows that he will never inherit the kingdom, yet he declares faithfully his allegiance to David as friend and subject. What a joy this must have been for David! It was fully sufficient that God alone was on his side, but to have a friend in the flesh must have been such a blessing!

Meanwhile, Saul, in his warped frame of mind, is attaching God's name to his hunt for David. In verse 7, Saul says of David, "*God has given him into my hand.*" And in verse 21 when the Ziphites have revealed David's hiding place: "*May you be blessed by the LORD, for you have had compassion on me.*" We know from Saul's heart and actions that he does NOT have the authority to use the Lord's name, yet he claims it anyways. Not everyone who claims the name of the Lord has the Lord's favour. Jesus said, "*Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My*

Father who is in heaven.” This is also a word of warning to us. We cannot just claim the name of Jesus over everything we do and say. We cannot call a “blessing” what God has not blessed us with. Just because something seems to fall on our lap doesn’t mean that it is a “sign” or gift from the Lord. In fact it is foolish to call something a “sign from God” without having taken the time to seek His will, to pray, and to be saturated in His Word. We must be discerning. We must be grounded in the Word. We must take the time to seek the Lord on things and not make rash assumptions.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God to give you a name of a fellow believer who is currently on their own “wilderness adventure.” Ask the Lord how you can pray for them and take some time to do that.
2. Ask God to show you if you have, like Saul, been attaching God’s name to “blessings” or “signs” that aren’t really from Him. If He does reveal something to you, ask Him to give you correct thinking on the matter.
3. Seeking God and His Word is not an option for the committed Christian. We see this truth demonstrated by both Saul and David. Saul claims God’s blessing when he is actually acting outside of God’s will. David takes the time to seek God diligently more than once in this chapter, and his diligence is vital. Had he not sought the Lord, the city of Keilah would have been destroyed, and had he not sought the Lord a second time, he would have been taken by Saul.
 - a. Are you seeking the Lord diligently?
 - b. If you notice that some things have gotten in the way of diligent time with the Lord, confess this to Him and make a new plan that can help you put Him on back on the throne.
 - c. Spend some time seeking God now. Seek Him on a specific issue/question, or just seek to know Him better.

DAY 17



READ: 1 Samuel 24

What a story! This account shows David to be a man of high integrity. And, in fact, this story is a great contrast to the actions of Saul in the previous chapter. Saul was flippantly claiming God’s name over his sinful actions. Here in chapter 24 we see David doing the exact opposite – he is so careful *not* to claim just any opportunity as a “sign” from God.

What many would see as an opportunity from heaven, David saw as a test from His God. Even in the middle of great trial David could look beyond his circumstances at what He knew about God and righteous living. David did not seek to squeeze God’s will into his desires; rather he sought to conform his desires and his thinking to the will of God. Though many around him encouraged him to take Saul’s life, David was able to step out of the intensity of the moment and remember that God was his Defender, Protector, and Sovereign Lord.

David had such integrity, such reliance on the Lord and patience for His timing. Samuel had long anointed David the future king of Israel. It was even somewhat normal for kings

to be assassinated by their successors – at first glance this event in the cave might seem providential. But God desires that His people trust and depend on Him. David knew that to kill the man that God had appointed king of Israel would be sin; it would be an act of rebellion, taking his own future into his own hands. But David knew that his future kingship was going to be God’s doing – David had no familial claim to the throne, and he would not take the throne by force; we would remain blameless. This patience and dependence is so admirable. David shows a true relinquishing of his heart. He is OK to wait upon the Lord’s good timing. He knows he has been sorely mistreated by King Saul – that he has been shown terrible injustice – but he will not take matters into his own hands. He will leave vengeance to the Lord.

This is the kind of sacrifice that the Lord loves. He loves when His children lay down their “rights”, when they die to the desires of the self and let God lead. When we do this, God can take us to the deep and intimate places of His heart. He can trust that we will handle well what He entrusts to us. David is willing to keep short accounts, even swearing his protection over Saul’s family when he does one day enter into his kingship. Anyone not submitted to the Lord would refuse to make such a merciful promise. But David was not living for himself; his life as it was was barely liveable and God was all he had.

We might wonder why God took so long to establish David’s kingship. Why not just smite Saul down with a plague and usher David in? There is much to be learned in the time of waiting and the valley of testing. The hard soil of pride and self-reliance and bitterness and so much more is broken up and, for those who cling to the Lord in the waiting and testing, a rich, soft soil is cultivated. Let us be glad in the deserts and valleys, knowing that our God is with us and has rich, fertile plans for us.



JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. What does the Lord want to teach you personally from what you read today? Ask Him, and spend some time dialoguing with Him in prayer.
2. Think a little bit about your past. How has God used troublesome circumstances to shape you for His glory? Write down the things He shows you and thank Him for working through these situations to make you more like Him.
3. At the core of the Christian life is a process called dying to self. Like David, we need to lay down our “rights” and the desires of the sinful self in order to let God lead. How might God be asking you to take your next step in dying to self today? Ask Him to help you in this.

DAY 18



READ: 1 Samuel 25 & 26

Chapter 25 begins with a brief sentence informing us of the death of Samuel. A great man of God has passed from one life to the next. Samuel spoke the word of the Lord as God directed him; he listened and obeyed and now his earthly tasks were over. It is a good reminder for those of us who have battled the loss of a loved one: there is a time to die. And when death comes, God is no less in control than he was the day before. In fact, God knows at this very moment when you, and all those you love will pass away from this earth. And God is good.

We see a different side of David here. He has learned to wait for the Lord's timing in regards to Saul's death and his own kingship, but when denied provisions, he lashes out in anger. It seems that he forgets to seek the Lord in this moment. Upon being rudely denied sustenance, David calls his men to arms and sets out to destroy Nabal and his household. But Abigail intervenes. Abigail is an incredible woman – quite the opposite of her husband, whose name means “foolish”. In a culture and marriage where she was given rather low value, Abigail is resourceful and wise, acting confidently and stepping up as a leader. She is a true peacemaker. Knowing Nabal is being ridiculous, the servants easily report to Abigail, knowing she will know what to do and that she will act wisely. Abigail is very shrewd in dealing with David. She presents herself as a humble servant before him. Her words might flippantly be taken as flattery, but in fact, they are words of wisdom and prophecy. God is using Abigail to save David from an act of ungodly vengeance. God gives her incredible words to relay to David, reminding him that his life is protected by the Lord, and that God can be trusted to sling out David's enemies – David need not defend himself. David is so thankful for Abigail's words of wisdom, for through them, his eyes have been opened to the great sin he was about to commit. He is captivated by Abigail, and when God avenges David through Nabal's death, David takes Abigail as his wife.

Abigail was a peacemaker. She knew her husband to be a foolish man, and it seems that she was well-versed in handling his misdeeds. Jesus said in Matthew 5:9, “*Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God.*” Those who promote God's peace – unity and accord and well-being and wholeness – are reflective of God and are true representations of their heavenly Father.

Abigail also sought to make the best of her situation. As a woman in ancient Israel, and particularly as the wife of a fool, her circumstances were less than ideal. But we see her as a confident and contented woman. The misfortunes of her life have not paralyzed her with bitterness or resentment. Instead, she is a kind-hearted refuge for her servants; she fears the Lord; she speaks words of wisdom.

In chapter 26, we again see David tested with the opportunity to take Saul's life. Again, he resists, knowing that the Lord is in control. We see through these chapters that there is another theme in 1 Samuel besides that of leadership: our attitude in life is independent of our circumstances. As followers of God, we can display His character in any situation because *He* is our Source of joy and confidence!

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Ask God how you can be a peacemaker today. How can you reflect your Father as a peacemaker?
2. Is there someone you know who is involved in something foolish? Take some time to intercede for them. Ask God to move in their hearts and give them His wisdom. Be careful if you feel that you need to say something to them about the issue. Any confrontation must be bathed in prayer and the Holy Spirit's wisdom and must be completely free of bitterness and malicious intent.
3. How have you allowed your circumstances to define you? Do you believe that God is your Source, that He holds every detail of your life in the palm of His hand? Take time to meditate on God's power. Take time to ask Him what you mean to Him. In 1 Samuel 26:23, David says, “*The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his*

faithfulness...” Do you believe this to be true? Ask God to transform your attitude so that it is grounded in His character and His Word, and not in your circumstances.

DAY 19

 **READ:** 1 Samuel 27 & 28

Tired of fleeing Saul throughout Israel, David and his men take refuge with the Philistines. But David wasn't the type to sit around and twiddle his thumbs; he and his men would band together and attack enemies of Israel. However, he would report to King Achish that he had attacked his fellow Israelites. Thus, David gained trust and rapport with the Philistine king. After a year, the Philistines decide to attack Israel in order to gain control of the northern Jezreel Valley. David, as a trusted servant of the Philistines, is expected to join in the fight.

Meanwhile, Saul sees that an Israelite victory would be against all odds. Grasping at straws, he decides that the only thing he can do is find a witch and call up the spirit of Samuel, who he knew to be a speaker of truth. It is an interesting story, and is one that reminds us that parts of the Bible are *descriptive*, not *prescriptive*. To call upon a necromancer was forbidden by the Lord – Saul himself had, at one point, apparently put all mediums/witches/etc. out of Israel. This is why he went in disguise and why the witch was so cautious. The only word the prophet gives Saul is that his doom is quickly approaching. Saul has really lost his way. He has lost all reverence for God, seeking the voice of a dead prophet over that of Yahweh. God is merciful and good; if Saul would only turn to Him in humility and repentance, the Lord would forgive him and call him His own. But Saul continues to set himself against God, even in these last days of his life.

JOURNALING AND PRAYER

1. Saul is clearly not on a path towards ending well. Are you? How do you know? It seems that if we do not deal with our issues, they come back to haunt us later in life. Is there an issue God has been asking you to deal with? A matter of the heart, a character weakness, an area of unforgiveness, etc.? Make the effort to start working through this issue today. What does God want to say to you about it? What step towards restoration and wholeness can you take today?
2. Are there people in your life who are not ending well? Intercede for them. Pray that they would not be like King Saul, who refused to let God change his heart. Pray that they would be delivered from lifelong issues of the heart. Pray that God would show them mercy.
3. In this chapter we saw Saul go against a decree that, by knowledge of God's law, he had instituted earlier. He slipped in an area of sin that he knew was wrong, and that he had told others to keep away from. Spend some time in prayer for your church leaders. Pray that they would stand firm in righteousness and obedience. Pray that they would be able to lead with authority because they back up their words with their own actions.

DAY 20 **READ:** 1 Samuel 29-31

The Philistines are preparing for war and the majority of the men do not want David to accompany them into battle. They don't trust him, which is probably wiser than the king, who still thinks David has been spending his days attacking Israelite cities all this time. So David is sent out of the Philistine's protection. Chapter 30 follows David while chapter 31 tracks the actions of Saul and the Philistines.

David and his men move south, away from the battle that is beginning in northern Israel. When they reach Ziklag, they find the city plundered and in flames with no trace of the women and children. The Amalekites, seeing that the majority of Israel's armies had gone to battle against the Philistines, chose an opportune time to raid Ziklag. David and his men charge further south in search of the army of Amalek. By the time they reach the brook of Besor, 200 of the men are exhausted and unable to go any further. And so David leads the remainder onward, eventually rescuing the women and children, destroying the enemy and taking back the plunder. When the army returns to Besor, some of those who took part in the rescue proclaim that they don't want the 200 who stayed behind to share in the plunder. David immediately shuts this down and makes a decree that plunder will always be shared with those who could not join in the fight. David is a good ruler. He shows himself to be wise and compassionate, righteous and generous in his leadership. He has definitely learned from watching Saul what *not* to do as a leader of Israel, but it is his faithful walk with Yahweh that has prepared him for his upcoming role as king. It is hard to say how long David ran from Saul; somewhere between 5 and 20 years; whatever the case, it was a long chase – tiring and very discouraging at times. But 1 Samuel 29:6 is a perfect descriptor of David: *“But David strengthened himself in the Lord.”* He had come to know the truth that there is nowhere else where sustainable strength can be found. He knew himself to be weak – he had referred to himself as nothing but a dead dog and a flea (1 Samuel 24:14)! But with God, he could accomplish impossible feats. Later, based on all he had experienced, David would write: *“The Lord is my rock, my fortress and my deliverer; my God is my rock, in whom I take refuge, my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold... With Your help I can advance against a troop; with my God I can scale a wall.”* (Psalm 18:2, 29)

Meanwhile, the Philistines and the Israelites were battling on Mount Gilboa. It is a massacre. Many die, including Saul and his three sons. It is a sad day for Israel. The king they so desperately wanted lies headless in a field, his three natural successors lie dead alongside him. In 1 Samuel 12, the prophet charged the people to follow the Lord in obedience if they wanted things to go well for them, but he also put this responsibility on the king: *“... if both you and the king who reigns over you will follow the LORD your God, it will be well.”* Their king did *not* follow the Lord, and all is *not* well in Israel.

But God, in His love and sovereignty, has been preparing a new and wonderful king for His people. Though we are sad to see David's faithful friend Jonathan lying slain on the mountain, God is making the way for an easy transition for David's kingship; there is now no son to take over his father's throne. Though the book of 1 Samuel ends on a solemn note, we are left greatly anticipating the coronation of the great King David – the man after God's own heart.

**JOURNALING AND PRAYER**

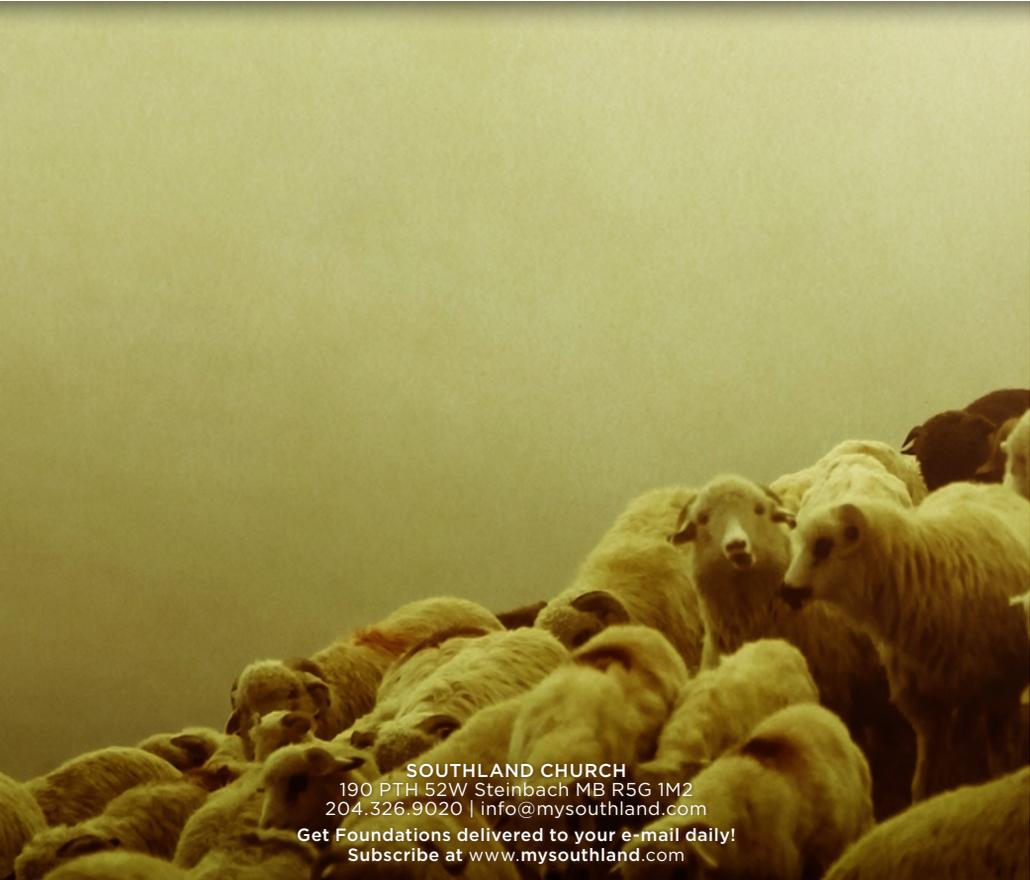
1. *“But David strengthened himself in the Lord.”* How is this good news to you today? In prayer, prepare yourself for what lies before you by strengthening yourself *in the Lord*.
2. Take some time to think through the leaders you have met through the book of 1 Samuel: Hophni, Phineas and Saul in comparison to Samuel and David.
 - a. What strengths and weaknesses did you observe?
 - b. What does the Lord want you to take away from what you have studied? What is something specific He wants to teach you about an area of leadership that you have?
3. Ask God to show you something in your character that pleases Him. Pray that God would continue to work in you, making you more and more into a man/woman after His heart.
4. What is a main theme you noticed in David's life? Pray that this truth would be developed in the hearts of believers in our church and country.

The Book of 1 Samuel

1 Samuel describes a shifting of times in Israel's history as she moves out from under the rule of the judges and into the time of the kings. It is a book about leadership, teaching us much about what godly - and ungodly - leadership looks like. One of history's greatest characters is introduced to us in the pages of this book and it is the events recorded here that prepared this "man after God's own heart" to rule God's people as Israel's greatest king.

1 Samuel 13:14 (NIV)

"But now your kingdom will not endure; the Lord has sought out a man after His own heart and appointed him ruler of His people, because you have not kept the Lord's command."



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