

1 Samuel

1105 B.C. +
SAMUEL BORN

WHAT'S THIS BOOK ABOUT? Power—how to use it, how *not* to use it.

WHAT'S THE POINT OF
1 Samuel?
+++
God blesses
the man who
serves him
100 percent.

1080 +
SAUL BORN

WHO WROTE IT? We don't know for sure, but it was probably a court official or someone who had access to official historical records. (Could the author have been Samuel? Probably not. For one thing, he dies in chapter 25.)

WHEN DID IT HAPPEN? Between 1100 and 1000 B.C.

WHERE DOES THIS BOOK FIT? First Samuel begins late in the period of the judges and continues through the beginning of Israel's monarchy to the end of Saul's reign.

THE BREAKDOWN
 Chapters 1–3: Samuel is born and called to be a prophet
 Chapters 4–7: The Ark of the Covenant is captured and then brought back to Israel
 Chapters 8–11: Israel asks for a king and gets one
 Chapters 12–15: Saul's failure
 Chapter 16: David is anointed king
 Chapters 17–20: David's popularity and Saul's jealousy grow
 Chapters 21–30: David on the run from Saul
 Chapter 31: Saul's last battle

KEY CONCEPTS
 • King
 • Repentance
 • Obedience

SCORECARD
 • **Samuel:** God's prophet, who anointed God's choice to be king
 • **Saul:** Israel's first king
 • **Jonathan:** David's best friend and heir to Saul's throne
 • **David:** The one Samuel anointed to succeed Saul as king

WORTH MEMORIZING

- **12:23-24** "As for me, I will certainly not sin against the LORD by ending my prayers for you. And I will continue to teach you what is good and right. But be sure to fear the LORD and faithfully serve him."
- **15:22-23** But Samuel replied, "What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams. Rebellion is as sinful as witchcraft, and stubbornness as bad as worshiping idols."
- **16:7** But the LORD said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

THE MASCULINE PERSPECTIVE

ROLE MODELS. Some were positive, some were negative. Samuel faithfully delivered God's Word, even when it was unpopular. Saul started out well, but arrogance led to his downfall. David's dependence on God made him an honorable warrior and a great king.

1 Samuel

3:1,19-21.....	16:18.....
3:19.....	17:33-34.....
3:21.....	17:47.....
7:15-17.....	18:10.....
8:1-5.....	18:17.....
8:4-20.....	19:18.....
8:7.....	19:18-24.....
9:16.....	19:20.....
9:17.....	
9:20.....	
9:21.....	
10:1.....	<i>Scripture</i>
10:2-6.....	19:20,23.....
10:5.....	19:24.....
10:5,10.....	24:5.....
10:6.....	24:6.....
10:6-10.....	25:28.....
10:9.....	25:30.....
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13:14.....	
15:1-3,22-23...	
15:17.....	
15:22.....	
15:26,28.....	
15:29.....	
16:3,13.....	
16:13.....	
16:14.....	
16:16-22.....	

1050 +
SAUL BECOMES KING

1040 +
DAVID BORN

1025 +
DAVID ANOINTED; GOLIATH SLAIN

1010 +
DAVID BECOMES KING OF JUDAH

1003 +
DAVID BECOMES KING OF ISRAEL

970 +
SOLOMON BECOMES KING

930 +
THE KINGDOM IS DIVIDED





Thomas Carlyle famously said: "The history of the world is but the biography of great men." Many people dislike history, considering it nothing but cold facts, impersonal dates, and lists of events. But the lives of those who shaped history give us some of the richest stories in the world.

God used the biographical method in giving us the story of Old Testament history, and 1 Samuel is a prime example. It tells Israel's story through the lives of three leaders: Samuel, Saul, and David. Each life is a lesson for the rest of us, and the themes of 1 Samuel are for Christians in every station of life.

The first part of the book is devoted to the story of Samuel, the boy who said, "Speak for Your servant hears," (1 Samuel 3:10), and the man who became the last of the judges of Israel. The middle part of the book is about Saul, Israel's first king, who started with great promise and ended with tragic sorrow. The

last part of the book centers on David, the youngest son in a shepherding family who became a man after God's own heart.

As we read this book, it's helpful to remember we're all biographers. Each of us is writing the record of our own lives, and one day soon the story will be complete. Popularity and image will fade away; but those after God's own heart will leave a legacy of leadership that will endure until the Lord returns.

KEY THOUGHT:

The stories of Samuel, Saul, and David remind us that popularity and image will fade away; but those after God's own heart will leave a legacy of leadership.

KEY VERSE:

"Has the LORD *as great* delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, *and* to heed than the fat of rams."

1 Samuel 15:22

KEY ACTION:

Don't judge by first impressions, for God doesn't look at people as we do; we look at the external appearance, but God looks at the heart (see 1 Samuel 16:7).

KEY PRAYER:

Lord, as I face giants in my life, remind me that You do not save by sword and spear, but by Your own power; for the battle is Yours.

Hear Her Tears

1 Samuel 1:1-20

TALK ABOUT BEING INSENSITIVE! Elkanah may take the prize for the least caring husband in the Bible. His wife Hannah had been childless for many years and often wept about her predicament. Elkanah's reaction was to get logical: "Why are you crying, Hannah?" Elkanah would ask. "Why aren't you eating? Why be down-hearted just because you have no children? You have me—isn't that better than having ten sons?" (1 Samuel 1:8).

The official name for that kind of comment is "clueless."

One day Hannah went to the Tabernacle and cried out to the Lord in silent anguish, her lips mouthing her words of prayer. That's when the second clumsy male showed up in her life. Eli, the priest, watched her for a while and decided she must be intoxicated. "Must you come here drunk?" he demanded. "Throw away your wine!" (1:14).

In Israel during Hannah's time, a barren woman suffered public humiliation and disgrace. Being childless today doesn't carry the same stigma, but the pain and anguish are still real, and they often go unrecognized by the men in a woman's life. Women agonize over childlessness while their men basically "don't get it."

The same holds true for stresses other than infertility.

Men won't always understand why a woman is upset, but they certainly need to understand that she is upset. Ignoring the pain of another person just deepens the pain and opens the floodgates for more tears.

It is far better for a husband to engage a hurting spouse in a tender way. Ask questions. Listen. Respond with words that convey interest in her feelings. And don't try to come up with solutions to dry up her tears. She doesn't need "Mr. Fix-It." She needs a loving partner who truly cares.

1 Samuel 25 | page 404

+++ Men, Women, & God

Listen to the Woman

1 Samuel 25

NABAL WAS A ROUGH, cranky businessman. The Bible describes him as "crude and mean" (1 Samuel 25:3). He had been treated well by David, but when David's representatives paid a visit and asked for a favor, Nabal insulted them so badly that David planned an attack.

Seeing the pending disaster, Nabal's wife, Abigail, hurried to intercept David and show proper appreciation. She was gracious and hospitable, even bringing food. She complimented David and smoothed his ruffled feathers.

Her actions saved the day—though, as it turned out, Nabal didn't benefit from them for long. When he heard from his wife how close he had come to death by David's hand, Nabal suffered a sudden stroke. Ten days later he was dead, and Abigail went on to become David's wife.

Sometimes it seems manly to be firm and resolute. But a spiritual leader can turn into a dictator if he routinely ignores his wife's insights. Women often do seem to have intuition about what lies beneath the surface of a person's actions.

Abigail worked overtime to heal the breach between Nabal and David. She believed she could halt the ominous events headed toward Nabal and his community. She met with David and appealed to his reason—and his stomach.

Her words about her husband were honest. He was "wicked," "ill-tempered," and "a fool" (25:25). Her honesty actually protected Nabal from David's wrath. David, in turn, took a moment to think about his actions and agreed that what she said had merit. "Thank God for your good sense!" he said (25:33).

It takes a lot of maturity and humility for a man to accept advice and change his mind, especially if advised to do so by a woman. But women often seem to be able to smooth over the problems caused by male anger and pride.

KNOW YOUR BIBLE

49

BASIC SURVEY

1 SAMUEL

AUTHOR: Not stated. Samuel himself was likely involved, though some of the history of 1 Samuel occurs after the prophet's death.

DATE: Approximately 1100-1000 BC.

TEN WORDS OR LESS

Israel's twelve tribes unite under a king.

DETAILS, PLEASE

The prophet Samuel is the last of Israel's judges; then the people demand a king to rule over them like all other nations. So God tells Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel's first king. Saul starts his reign well but then makes a series of colossally bad choices, so Samuel tells Saul that he will be replaced. Saul's successor will be a shepherd named David. The jealous king seeks to kill David, who runs for his life. David rejects opportunities to kill Saul himself, saying, "The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed" (26:11 KJV). At the end of 1 Samuel, Saul dies battling the Philistines, making way for David to become king.

QUOTABLE

> "To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams" (15:22 NIV).

UNIQUE AND UNUSUAL

The future King Saul is a donkey herder (9:5) who tries to hide from his own coronation (10:21-22). As king, Saul breaks his own law by asking a medium to call up the spirit of the dead Samuel (chapter 28).

SO WHAT?

Selfish choices—such as the Israelites' request for a king and Saul's decision to offer a sacrifice he had no business making—can have heavy, even tragic, consequences.

READ 1 SAMUEL 8 AND 13.

- One-Month Course: your next reading is on page 54. →
- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 50. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 50. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

THE PROPHET SAMUEL



Hannah dedicated her son, Samuel, to the Lord, which is depicted in *Hannah Giving Her Son Samuel to the Priest* by Jan Victors (1619–1676).

The prophet Samuel was the last of Israel's judges. A barren woman, Hannah, begged God for a son, promising to dedicate him to the Lord. So after Samuel was born, she took him to the temple when he was still a child to be with the aging priest Eli and serve in the temple. When Samuel was still a youth, he heard the Lord call his name three times in the middle of the night (1 Samuel 3). After that, God continued speaking to him, and "all Israel. . .

knew that Samuel had been established as a prophet of the LORD" (1 Samuel 3:20 NKJV).

When Samuel was a young man, Eli's sinful sons died in battle, and Eli, hearing the news, collapsed and died. After this, Samuel became judge of Israel. He also was a military leader, helping subdue the nation's fearsome enemies, the Philistines (1 Samuel 7:3–14). Samuel was counted the greatest, most righteous man of God since Moses (Jeremiah 15:1).

Samuel's sons, however, didn't follow in his footsteps, and as he aged, Israel's tribal leaders rejected them as judges and asked for a king. So God directed Samuel to anoint Saul as Israel's first regent. However, years later, after Saul had continually disobeyed the Lord, God sent Samuel to Bethlehem to secretly anoint David as king instead. Samuel died at a good old age and was mourned by all Israel (1 Samuel 28:3). Sometime after his death, Samuel's spirit appeared to warn Saul of his doom (1 Samuel 28:4–19).

READ 1 SAMUEL 3 AND 7.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 51. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 51. →

HEART OF THE BOOK

SAUL—A TRAGIC STORY

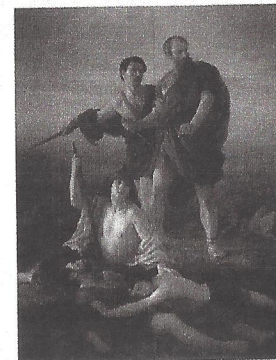
One day the Israelites demanded that Samuel give them a king. Samuel warned that a king would tax the people and force them into his service, but the people still insisted, so God told Samuel to anoint tall, good-looking Saul as ruler. Saul started very well. When the city of Jabesh Gilead was under attack, the Spirit of God came upon Saul in great power and he led the Israelites to a dramatic victory over the enemy. He later "fought against all his enemies on every side," and God gave him victory "wherever he turned" (1 Samuel 14:47 NKJV).

But fear, a lust for power, and man-pleasing began causing him to make repeated poor choices—and when he disobediently offered a sacrifice to God, Samuel told Saul that he would be replaced. Saul went on to further disobey God's specific commands concerning the Amalekites. Then "the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him" (1 Samuel 16:14 NIV).

At first, Saul loved David, and the music David played brought peace to the troubled king, but after a while fits of jealous rage seized Saul and he sought to kill David, who ran for his life. But Saul was still king, so David rejected two opportunities to kill him, saying, "The LORD forbid that I should stretch forth mine hand against the LORD's anointed" (1 Samuel 26:11 KJV). At the end of 1 Samuel, Saul died in battle against the Philistines. After that, David became king.

READ 1 SAMUEL 11 AND 15.

- Three-Month Course: your next reading is on page 54. →
- Six-Month Course: your next reading is on page 54. →



King Saul eventually turned from the Lord and was killed in a battle with the Philistines. Elie Marcuse (1817–1902) painted this tragic ending in *Death of King Saul*.

HIDDEN TREASURE

PRINCE JONATHAN

Jonathan was King Saul's son and was very courageous. Once when Saul and his army feared to face the Philistines, just Jonathan and his armor bearer attacked a garrison. Jonathan stated, "Perhaps the LORD will help us, for. . . he can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!" (1 Samuel 14:6 NLT). And he gained a tremendous victory. Later, after David killed Goliath, "the soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as himself" (1 Samuel 18:1 NASB). Jonathan was very generous. He gave up his claim to the throne and vowed to support David as king (1 Samuel 23:16–18). When Jonathan died in battle, David greatly mourned him (2 Samuel 1:17–27).

READ 1 SAMUEL 14:1–23 AND 20.

HIDDEN TREASURE

DAVID AND GOLIATH

One day the Philistines were arrayed in battle against the Israelites, and a giant named Goliath shouted out a challenge. He dared any Israelite soldier to face him in single combat. Whichever champion lost, his people would become slaves. For forty days, Goliath repeated his words, but no Israelite dared fight him. Then David stepped up and accepted the challenge. As he rushed forward, he cried, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the LORD Almighty" (1 Samuel 17:45 NIV). David swung his sling, sent a stone slamming into the giant's forehead, and Goliath dropped. The Philistine army fled, and God gave the Israelites a great victory. David became Israel's hero.

READ 1 SAMUEL 17 AND PSALM 35.



David's victory over Goliath that led the Israelites to defeat the Philistines is shown in *David and Goliath* by Michelangelo (1475–1564).

HIDDEN TREASURE

DAVID'S DEEP DISCOURAGEMENT

Saul became jealous of David and twice tried to kill him. David fled, and Saul repeatedly led his army out, obsessed with trying to kill him (1 Samuel 23:7–8, 14). After years of barely escaping Saul, David began to doubt that God would protect him, let alone fulfill His promises to make him king. "David kept thinking to himself, 'Someday Saul is going to get me. The best thing I can do is escape to the Philistines. Then. . . I will finally be safe'" (1 Samuel 27:1 NLT). There's no indication that David prayed about this decision, but the next thing we hear, he and his six hundred men and their families had gone to Gath (1 Samuel 27:2–3). This ended up causing him great trouble.

READ PSALMS 7 AND 94.

HIDDEN TREASURE

TRIUMPH OVER DISASTER

David's men were away from Ziklag for a few days, and when they returned, they found their town burned and all their wives and children gone. David and his men "wept until there was no strength in them to weep" (1 Samuel 30:4 NASB). He was in deep despair, but instead of giving up, "David encouraged himself in the LORD his God" (1 Samuel 30:6 KJV). He then asked God if they could possibly find or overtake the raiders at this late date. God answered that they would not only overtake them, but recover everyone. Sure enough, after several days, they found the enemy camp, attacked it, fought furiously, and rescued everyone. When David was at his wit's end, he looked to God.

READ 1 SAMUEL 30 AND PSALM 37.



When David was troubled or sad, he turned to God and played music for comfort. This is depicted in *King David Playing the Harp* by Gerard van Honthorst (1592–1656).

The Green-Eyed Monster

1 Samuel 18

JEALOUSY IS A green-eyed monster that can devour everything in its path. One of its primary victims is relationships. Love and trust are easily destroyed when jealousy rears its ugly head.

An example of the monster's impact can be seen in the relationship between David and Saul. Over time, their complex but strong bond of affection became poisoned by jealousy. The resulting fallout produced insanity and attempted murders.

Things had started out well. Early in Saul's reign as Israel's first king, he seemed a wise and stable ruler. One of his best moves was to make David a commander of his army. David succeeded in this position of power and prominence.

For a while, Saul and David enjoyed each other's success. But in time, David's achievements became more celebrated than those of his master. A major turning point came when women from the local towns began to sing:

*"Saul has killed his thousands,
and David his ten thousands!"*

(1 Samuel 18:7)

That did it for Saul. From that time on, the green-eyed monster began to growl. The very next day, Saul experienced one of his many mood swings (influenced, we are told in 18:10, by a "tormenting spirit"). David tried to calm him with music, but Saul responded by whipping a spear at his chest. Fortunately, David jumped aside in time to avoid a painful death.

Jealousy eventually turned to paranoia. But not even with a campaign of animosity and another murder attempt could Saul slow David's ascent to power as the future king of Israel. Poor Saul was unable to enjoy his successor's happiness. Instead, he went to his grave—by his own hand—an angry, haunted man.

Witchy Ways

1 Samuel 28

SOMETIMES PEOPLE WANT to know what God is up to, but they can't seem to wait for him to reveal it. Instead of letting God work out his plans on his own timetable, they consult other sources. They're desperate to unravel the mysteries of life.

And there are always people—called "mediums"—who are willing to help them, usually in exchange for a fee. Starting in the 1970s, television became a popular way for mediums to advertise and demonstrate their "skills." Today, TV ads for psychics are rampant, even during prime time.

Using TV to spread psychic messages may be new, but the practice of occultic (or "hidden") techniques is ancient. In his law, God forbade his followers to consult sorcerers or mediums (Deuteronomy 18:10); instead, they were to rely and wait on him.

In obedience to God's command, King Saul had outlawed mediums in Israel. But curiosity and desperation eventually got the better of him. He felt his kingdom slipping from his grasp, and he wanted someone to calm his fears.

So he sought out a medium and asked her to call on the spirit of the deceased Samuel. When she did, the message wasn't quite what Saul had in mind. Saul learned that his army would suffer a humiliating defeat the next day—and that he and his sons would die.

Most mediums are fakes, using elaborate tricks to get people to believe they have special powers. But some really do communicate with the spiritual world. In any case, God's prohibition on consulting mediums remains in effect. We are called to believe and trust God—and let it go at that—rather than messing around with astrology charts, tea leaves, Ouija boards, or the words of witches.

Personal Gold

from DR. GARY ROSBERG

IS IT ENOUGH TO SAY, "I WAS WRONG"?

How often have you sought forgiveness and said "I was wrong," thinking that would take care of the problem? Perhaps the offended person appeared confused, leading you to think, *Well, I said I was wrong. Shouldn't that be enough?*

Just admitting our wrong behavior, however, doesn't cut it. We need to express our sorrow. The combination of these two elements leads people to sense the sincerity in our hearts. By expressing our sorrow, we can develop empathy for the other person. It builds bridges and helps to restore relationships.

Paul understood the expression of sorrow as he wrote:

I now rejoice, not that you were made sorrowful, but that you were made sorrowful to the point of repentance; for you were made sorrowful according to the will of God, in order that you might not suffer loss in anything through us. For the sorrow that is according to the will of God produces a repentance without regret, leading to salvation; but the sorrow of the world produces death. (2 Corinthians 7:9-10, NASB)

As Paul said, if we're made sorrowful to the point of repentance, it's a healthy expression of our emotions that leads to healing in our relationships with the other person and with God. It also leads to empathy and a true sense of restoration.

Seeking to communicate with empathy allows the other person to feel heard. *Empathy* means "seeing the issue from the other person's perspective." It's like the old admonition to "walk a mile in the other person's shoes." Empathy diminishes the resistance between two hurt people, allowing communication to open up and self-protection to be quieted.

*Empathy
cuts down
the resistance
between two
hurt people.*

Someone you
should know.

Saul

What Went Wrong?

THE MAN HAD so much going for him that we wonder just what could have gone so badly wrong. Consider a few of his remarkable early advantages:

- Born into a wealthy and influential family (1 Samuel 9:1)
- Tall and handsome (9:2)
- Chosen by God (9:16; 10:21, 24)
- Had a heart changed by God (10:9)
- Prophesied by God's Spirit (10:10)
- Had many close, godly companions (10:26)
- The Spirit of God came powerfully upon him (11:6)
- Acted mercifully in victory (11:13)

With all these physical and spiritual advantages, what turned the name of Saul into a synonym for "bad king"? How did he plunge from such a promising start to such a dreadful end (31:1-6)?

In many ways, Saul's fall from glory can be traced to a single problem that bedevils many men even today: fear of what others think. Two incidents in particular show how Saul allowed his fear of others (whether of his enemies or of his friends) to overpower his trust in God and to sabotage a promising reign.

Saul allowed his fear of others to overpower his trust in God and to sabotage a promising reign.

First, Saul let his fear of a dangerous enemy lead him to disobey a clear instruction from God, making an inappropriate sacrifice before a major battle (13:8-10). The king then made matters worse by blaming his followers for his poor decision (13:11-12). His disobedience prompted the prophet Samuel to declare that God would soon raise someone else to Israel's throne, a man after God's own heart.

Second, Saul allowed fear of his own people's disapproval to nudge him to disobey yet another clear instruction from God, sparing the life of a man God had commanded him to kill (15:9). When Samuel confronted him about this second

regious instance of rebellion, Saul again blamed his men (15:21) and admitted that he acted out of fear (15:24). That same fearful nature prompted him to set up a monument to himself (15:12) and to beg Samuel, "Please, at least honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel by coming back with me so that I may worship the LORD your God" (15:30).

Fear of others led directly to Saul's ruin and to this sad Old Testament judgment: "Now the Spirit of the LORD had left Saul" (16:14). How much grief we could avoid by heeding the wise words of Scripture: "Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the LORD means safety" (Proverbs 29:25).

THE POINT: A healthy fear of God triumphs over all other fears.

Someone you
should know.

David

Two Qualities of a Spiritual Standout

YOU PROBABLY ALREADY know David as the greatest king of ancient Israel. You know that he was the author of dozens of psalms. You might know he was a talented singer and musician. He was all these things. But he was something else, too: The Bible tells us that David was a man after God's own heart (1 Samuel 13:14).

What did David do that made him so special to God? Was he perfect, able to keep a total check on his baser urges? Hardly. David had an explosive temper and could act rashly (25:1-35). He became a fierce warrior who never flinched at eliminating his enemies (2 Samuel 8:1-2).

And David also had quite an eye for the ladies. While most Bible readers know of his adultery with Bathsheba (2 Samuel 11), fewer recall that his first six sons were born to six different wives (2 Samuel 3:2-5).

What, then, made David a man after God's own heart? How did he become the apple of God's eye (see Psalm 17:8)? Two things seem to stand out.

When confronted with sin, David confessed his fault, turned from his offense, and sought forgiveness.

First, David loved the Lord with all his heart and always tried to put God first. Twice during the agonizing years when King Saul tried repeatedly to kill him, David had a golden opportunity to eliminate his tormentor. But he refused. Why? He explained: "The LORD forbid that I should do this to my lord the king. I shouldn't attack the LORD's anointed one, for the LORD himself has chosen him" (1 Samuel 24:6-12; also 26:11). David honored God above all, including himself.

Second, when confronted with sin, David habitually confessed his fault, turned from his offense, and sought forgiveness (1 Samuel 25:32-35; 2 Samuel 11:27-12:23; 24:10-14). Unlike his predecessor, Saul—who typically denied his guilt and then blamed others for it when backed into a corner—David humbled himself and could say to

God, "Against you, and you alone, have I sinned; I have done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4).

What made David a special man of God was a humble heart that freely admitted its faults and continually sought after God. Do you want to be a man after God's own heart? Then seek these two qualities in your life.

THE POINT: A heart for God wins God's own heart.

Someone you
should know.

Samuel

No Timid Soul

NO MAN WANTS to slither through life, constantly retreating from danger and slinking away at the first sign of a threat. We want to live with boldness and passion, facing down our fears and acting with courage and conviction.

The question is, how do you achieve such boldness? How do you build the kind of steel in your soul that permits you to stand tall in the storm?

Here's one suggestion: Take a clue from Samuel the prophet. This man faced down kings, cowed foreign armies, and inspired courage in the wavering hearts of his people throughout his long life. And how did he do it? His mother named the central reason even before her son could walk: "He will belong to the LORD his whole life" (1 Samuel 1:28).

The name *Samuel* sounds like the Hebrew for "heard by God"—as his mother, Hannah, was. Hannah, who was barren, told God that if he would give her a son, she would give the boy back to him, dedicating her son to God for life (1:11). The Lord gave her Samuel in response. In turn, Samuel's parents placed Samuel into the custody of Eli the priest, in whose service "the boy served the LORD" and "grew up in the presence of the LORD" (2:11, 21). As he matured, Samuel "grew in favor with the LORD and with the people" (2:26). So seriously did Samuel take his relationship with God that the Lord himself called him a "faithful priest" who would do what he wanted him to do (2:35).

The secret to Samuel's boldness lay in his unconditional obedience to God.

Right there we find the secret to Samuel's boldness: unconditional obedience to God. Samuel developed amazing courage and strength because he tried to hear God's words and obey them.

Is it any wonder, therefore, that Samuel could judge Israel for a whole lifetime (7:15)? Is it any wonder that Samuel could

boldly condemn King Saul for the Hebrew monarch's repeated failure to obey God's clear instructions (13:8-10, 13-14; 15:9-26)? And is it any wonder that he could stand up to the rulers of Israel's enemies, even slaying one himself as God commanded (15:32-33)?

Yet Samuel was hardly perfect. For one thing, it appears that he failed as a father. When he grew old and appointed his two eldest sons as judges to replace him, the people were upset, for Samuel's sons "were not like their father, for they were greedy for money. They accepted bribes and perverted justice" (8:3).

You might think Samuel would have learned a hard lesson from his mentor, the old priest Eli, whose own two wicked sons had died years earlier in an act of divine judgment (2:12-17, 22-25; 4:11). Yet somehow, this great man of God missed the lesson and made similar parenting errors with his own boys.

In spite of Samuel's imperfections, God used him mightily as a leader of his people. Today, God wants to use you. Remember: We find great boldness and courage not through strong family genes but through committing ourselves to obey God in whatever He says.

Do that, and you'll never have to worry about becoming a timid soul.

THE POINT: Following God wholeheartedly provides the antidote to timidity.

Someone you
should know.

Jonathan

Bedrock of a Strong Friendship

WHENEVER SOMEONE TALKS about great friendships in the Bible, the names of Jonathan and David always come up. No surprise there—Scripture tells us these two young men enjoyed "an immediate bond between them" (1 Samuel 18:1).

While the fact of their deep friendship gets a lot of ink, however, the basis for it receives too little attention. In fact, these two men did not become fast friends due to similar temperaments or compatible interests or because they were close in age. No, their friendship blossomed and grew because of something far deeper, stronger, and more solid. They built their remarkable relationship on a shared delight in God.

We see evidence of this common gladness in the Lord long before David and Jonathan meet one another. Jonathan was the son of King Saul. Once when the brutal Philistines gathered an enormous army to crush the Israelites, the people of God fled in fear—all except for Jonathan and his young armor bearer, who decided to mount an attack of their own against an enemy outpost. Listen to the way Jonathan justified his great risk: "Perhaps the LORD will help us, for nothing can hinder the LORD. He can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!" (14:6). The Lord honored Jonathan's bold faith and helped him start a major rout of Israel's enemies.

Some months or years later, another Philistine force gathered to threaten Israel. A giant named Goliath challenged any Hebrew warrior to hand-to-hand combat—and no one in Saul's army dared to accept the challenge. During this time, young David's father sent him to the battle lines to get news from his older brothers and to deliver supplies. When David heard Goliath's taunts, he reacted indignantly with words eerily similar to those of Jonathan. David approached the giant armed only with a shepherd's sling, told

The Lord can win a battle whether he has many warriors or only a few!

him that he would die for his insolent threats, and boldly declared, "Everyone assembled here will know that the LORD rescues his people, but not with sword and spear. This is the LORD's battle, and he will give you to us!" (17:47). And that is exactly what happened.

David and Jonathan met for the first time moments after Goliath's defeat. On the spot Jonathan "made a solemn pact with David, because he loved him as he loved himself" (18:3). Their friendship grew through both good times and

bad, but always their unique bond rested on the solid bedrock of their mutual delight in God. So the Bible tells us that, during one especially dark hour, "Jonathan went to find David and encouraged him to stay strong in his faith in God" (23:16).

That's what the best friendships should always look like. Real friends do not merely enjoy shared hobbies or pursue similar interests. Each friend looks for ways to help the other "stay strong in his faith in God."

THE POINT: The best of friends help each other find strength in God.

A Battle He Couldn't Win

THE "UNBREAKABLE" *TITANIC* sank. . . . The "unbeatable" Baltimore Colts lost Super Bowl III. . . . The "unbreakable" Nazi code was broken. . . . And the "unstoppable" Philistine champion, Goliath, was stopped dead in his tracks—literally.

These famous incidents not only prove the old saying "The bigger they are, the harder they fall." They also demonstrate the stupidity of human arrogance.

We will forever link Goliath's name to David, the Hebrew boy who against all expectations defeated his massive opponent. The Bible tells us that Goliath stood over nine feet tall, wore a helmet and armor that weighed about 125 pounds, and toted a spear with a shaft "as heavy and thick as a weaver's beam," tipped with a 15-pound iron head (1 Samuel 17:4-7). When Goliath's assistant bore a huge shield in front of him, the man must have looked invincible. Goliath thought so, and so did the Israelite army.

For 40 days, each morning and evening, Goliath taunted the Israelites and challenged any of them to come out and fight him, man to man. No one answered a word—until David.

While none of the seasoned Hebrew soldiers dared to fight Goliath, this teenage shepherd, armed only with a staff and a sling used for throwing rocks, accepted the challenge—and won. By rocketing a single stone toward the giant's forehead, David toppled his arrogant enemy. And ever since then "a David-and-Goliath story" has meant the triumph of the little guy over the behemoth.

On one level, that's as it should be. On that day the puny did overcome the gargantuan. But on a higher, more important level, such an interpretation gets the story all wrong. In truth, the battle never was about David versus Goliath. Rather, it featured the omnipotent God of Israel versus the impotent little deities of the Philistines. There could be no upset; the God who created the universe with a single word could never be threatened by deaf and dumb idols made of cold, lifeless stone and wood.

So go ahead, Goliath. Boast all you want. Feel as confident as you please in all your strength and armor and training.

Curse David as profanely as you know how, and taunt Israel

as viciously as you can. But David knows the truth. The battle was never between him and you. You foolishly engaged in a contest against the living God—and such a contest is really no contest at all.

We must not ever forget that the battle is the Lord's (17:47). God delights in choosing "things that are powerless to shame those who are powerful" and to use "things despised by the world . . . to bring to nothing what the world considers important." Why? So that "no one can ever boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29).

Unsinkable? Nah. Unbeatable? No way. Unbreakable? Hardly. Unstoppable? Don't let the ground break your face, Goliath.

The God who created the universe with a single word of command could never be threatened by deaf and dumb idols.

THE POINT: God always wins.