



5 | 1 SAMUEL 4:1-7:4

APPROACHING GOD

Living in the fear of God is the safest and happiest way to live.

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Call to Worship

O God, you are my God; earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you; my flesh faints for you, as in a dry and weary land where there is no water.
² So I have looked upon you in the sanctuary, beholding your power and glory.
³ Because your steadfast love is better than life, my lips will praise you.
—*Psalm 63:1-3*

Songs

10000 Reasons
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Behold Our God

Introduction

We are in a series in the book of 1 Samuel called “Exalting God’s King.” We are learning how to exalt Jesus Christ as King in our lives. Our title this morning is: “Approaching God.”

The chapter before us is very instructive. It is often the case that we are surrounded by the power of God, the preaching of God, the people of God, and yet we have no personal power or connection with God that is tangible. People try to approach God in all sorts of ways. God loves sinners, of course. He gave his Son to redeem us. But God must not and cannot be approached in a cavalier, careless way. God is to be feared. His glory and the beauty of his holiness demand that we approach with complete seriousness and childlike humility.

Israel had become awfully comfortable in the promised land. They assumed that God was with them and for them no matter how they acted or how they treated him. They had God’s oracles, the law of Moses. They had the ark of the covenant. Surely, they were undefeatable.

What we find both in Old Testament Israel and for us today, is that God does not bless those who don’t know him and who do not seek him with their whole heart. There are those who assume they know God because they have an outward form of religion. Many of you attended a church for some time before you were actually born again. There is a **danger of religion without reality**. It is possible to be under the power of the word week after week, but in your heart to still be in slavery to Satan and to the world.

A person can be faithful to an outward form of religion without knowing God or walking with him. Being busy for God is not the same as knowing God. How sweet it is to know and to walk with Jesus. How sweet it is to abide with him and to know his presence. If you have Jesus, you know his joy and peace. You have power for righteousness. You can’t live comfortably in sin as a Christian. Sin is like a rock in the Christian’s shoe. Before we knew Christ, we didn’t notice the rocks in our shoes. We had feet of steel and hearts of stone. But once we came to know Christ, he gave us tender hearts and tender feet. We can’t walk the way we used to walk in the stony pathways of sin. We are new creations.

Many people know about God, but they don’t know God. Many people pray at God, but they don’t talk with God, and Jesus Christ is not a bright living reality. All they have is religion. All they have is a form of godliness, but they have denied the power thereof. (2 Tim 3:5).

But there is a whole group of people today who are like the people in Samuel’s time. They thought going to the tabernacle made them a true believer. And the soldiers thought, if we carry the ark to battle, we will win. They were just using God.

Key Thought: Living in the fear of God is the safest and happiest way to live.

1. GOD WILL NOT BE USED (4:1-22)

As we begin our story in the book of 1 Samuel chapter 4, we remember that Samuel had given a grim prophecy: that Eli’s two rebellious sons, Hophni and Phinehas would be put to death. We don’t know how at first, but in this chapter it all becomes clear. They are the priests of Israel,

but they don't know God. **They are faking it.** And they are now hearing the word of the Lord in a crystal-clear way. Samuel has been installed as a prophet.

THE WORD IS DECLARED

1 Samuel 4:1a | And the word of Samuel came to all Israel.

There was Samuel, now established in the office of prophet (4:1a). This meant that **Samuel, like an expert doctor, would begin to uncover the lies and the lasciviousness and the self-centered living** in Israel. It was going to take some time, and some tragic chastening, but God would awaken Israel. And that's what we want as his people. We have to begin with an attitude that says: whatever it takes God, I want to know you. Give me the truth of your word in its fullness.

Let me give you a powerful encouragement. Wherever God's word is preached and obeyed, there is blessing. The fact that God raises up prophets, shows his heart of love, and his desire to bless anyone who has a surrendered heart of repentance. God wants us to approach him, but we must approach him in the right way.

THE ARMY IS DEFEATED

Now we read of how Israel goes out to battle and is soundly defeated. This is the beginning of their humiliation. When God's word is preached, sometimes difficult things happen because God wants to open up the sewers and drain the sewage from our lives. Sometimes it's like a cancer that God has to remove, and he cannot remove it superficially. He brings something stunning just to humble you.

The army of Israel must be humbled in order to come to understand God and his word that is being preached through Samuel.

1 Samuel 4:1b-3a | Now Israel went out to battle against the Philistines. They encamped at Ebenezer, and the Philistines encamped at Aphek. ²The Philistines drew up in line against Israel, and when the battle spread, Israel was defeated before the Philistines, who killed about **four thousand men** on the field of battle. ³And when the people came to the camp, the elders of Israel said, "Why has the Lord defeated us today before the Philistines?"

Now we read of how Israel goes out to battle and is soundly defeated. This is the beginning of their humiliation. **They have 4000 casualties.** These are the fathers and brothers of Israel. They are doing as they should: fighting the enemy. But they do not have God's power. They realize this.

They must be humbled in order to come to understand how they need the power of God. God is lifting up his word through Samuel. God indeed wants to bless Israel, but he's going to strip them of their superficial religion first.

THE ARK IS DEPLOYED

There comes a very bad idea from people with fake hearts, who didn't really know the glorious God of the Bible. They think because they are surrounded by the power of God that God will be on their side and work for them. The men of Israel decided to bring the ark of the covenant into battle. This was normally against the Law of Moses. The Ark of the Covenant was the representation of the throne of God in Israel. Kept in the most holy place of the tabernacle, the

people never saw it. Only the high priest entered and saw the ark, and only once a year. The elders wanted to take this representation of the throne of God out of the holy of holies and use it as if it were a weapon.

1 Samuel 4:3b-4a | Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the Lord here from Shiloh, that it may come among us and save us from the power of our enemies." ⁴ So the people sent to Shiloh and brought from there the ark of the covenant of the Lord of hosts, who is enthroned on the cherubim.

Who is Guarding the Ark?

So the ark is sent to battle, and look who's in charge of the ark: two reprobate priests. They are fornicators in Israel. They care nothing for the living God, but they are happy to use him to gain a victory for themselves.

1 Samuel 4:4b | The two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

It's shocking to consider that it was **Hophni and Phinehas** that were **guarding the ark**. They are **in possession of the power** and presence of God, but they have no access to it. These were some of the most fleshly men in Israel who cared nothing to glorify God. They despised God. They looked at God as their tool. Yet they had the power and glory of God there in the ark.

Do you know what the "ark of the covenant" was? When we're talking about the ark, we're not talking about the boat that Noah sailed on; we're talking about a piece of furniture, a treasure chest of blessing that was called an ark. It's a two and a half foot by four-foot golden treasure chest. Inside are the ten commandments, Aaron's rod that budded, and a bowl of manna. On top were two cherubim facing each other, and in the middle of the cover was the mercy seat. Now all of those represent the Lord Jesus Christ. A rod stands for authority, and that rod that budded speaks of the rule of the risen Christ. And then that manna speaks of the resources of the risen Christ. And the Ten Commandments speak of the righteousness of the risen Christ. All that is inside that treasure chest.

False Praise for the Ark

These are **two men who know nothing about the power and presence of God**, and yet they are in charge of the very symbol of his presence, the place where God would manifest himself. All they know is how to be fake. To them, God was a good luck charm. They are about to find out that God cannot be used that way. They will fall.

It's interesting that there was a deep emotional reaction from the people of Israel when the ark arrives. There was a shout of praise to God that was so loud, all the earth resounded. This was powerful. It was so loud the Philistines heard it.

1 Samuel 4:5-6 | As soon as the ark of the covenant of the Lord came into the camp, all Israel gave a mighty shout, so that the earth resounded. ⁶ And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shouting, they said, "What does this great shouting in the camp of the Hebrews mean?" And when they learned that the ark of the Lord had come to the camp.

The people were praising the Lord for the wrong reasons. They wanted their own victory and comfort in life. They didn't love God. God will not be used. Do you know what these people were doing? They weren't honoring the Lord. They were trying to use the Lord. They said, "Hey, we're in a mess. We're losing the battle. Run, go get the ark." God was not their first thought; God was their last resort.

God will not be used. We think if we obey God, that he is bound to make our lives better. God never promised to give us an easy or better life. He wants us to be holy, conformed to the image of Christ. Christlikeness is the definition for success for the Christian.

30,000 Lost Because of the Ark

1 Samuel 4:7-11 | The Philistines were afraid, for they said, "A god has come into the camp." And they said, "Woe to us! For nothing like this has happened before. ⁸Woe to us! Who can deliver us from the power of these mighty gods? These are the gods who struck the Egyptians with every sort of plague in the wilderness. ⁹Take courage, and be men, O Philistines, lest you become slaves to the Hebrews as they have been to you; be men and fight." ¹⁰So the Philistines fought, and Israel was defeated, and they fled, every man to his home. And there was a very great slaughter, for **thirty thousand foot soldiers** of Israel fell. ¹¹And the ark of God was captured, and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, died.

So **they fetched the ark after they had lost 4,000 men**, but what happened after they got the ark and put it in front of them? With God's presence with them, things got worse, not better. **They lost 30,000 men. Hophni and Phinehas are dead.** What's going on here?

You can be in the **midst of the power and presence of God** and have no access to him, because **God will not be used**. Do you know what these people were doing? They weren't honoring the Lord. They were trying to use the Lord. They said, "Hey, we're in a mess. We're losing the battle. Run, go get the ark." For them it was **a good luck charm**. God was not their first thought; **God was their last resort**. this is the way these people felt about God. They thought, "God promises to deliver his people; if we can use God, then we'll have the victory."

People who know God only superficially think they can have God's power without holiness. They know God's presence, but they don't yield to it. They don't surrender. They think God is an excusing God. He just excuses sin. He doesn't expect holiness. My life of sin is fine. I'm ignoring my sins, and he must be ignoring them too.

God was teaching these people so long ago that he's not going to be used. God's not going to surrender to you. You have to surrender to him. You're not going to go get God and bring him into your battles and let him fight your battles for you without honoring him and without glorifying him and without totally surrendering your life to him. You say, "Well, why did God let his people fail?" Here it is: God will not cover up the sins of the saints to protect his glory.

So God is going to humble you. You've had your 4,000-casualty experience, and you go to God, and you think because you've surrendered a little bit, he's going to be there for you. But you know, and God knows there is a ton more to surrender.

But here's another warning, if you don't turn to him and respond to the mercy he's extending, he may bring you down. That's what happened to Hophni and Phinehas. They died that day.

Samuel's prophecy was fulfilled. God will not be played. God will not be used. We've seen so many celebrity pastors lately be exposed as frauds. You say, "Why is God doing this?" It's a mercy. God will not have his name be defrauded. God will not be used. But here comes a second truth. God cannot be captured.

ELI IS DEAD

What's the cost of approaching God with a fake heart? Eli kept saying he knew God. He had a good act. But his approach to God was superficial at best. And he pays the price. So the army is defeated. After deploying the ark, Hophni and Phinehas pay for their hypocrisy. They were guarding the ark, and now they are dead. Now we see that Eli gets the news that his sons have died and the ark has departed to the Philistines, and Eli, the high priest of Israel, dies.

1 Samuel 4:17-18 | He who brought the news answered and said, "Israel has fled before the Philistines, and there has also been a great defeat among the people. Your two sons also, Hophni and Phinehas, are dead, and the ark of God has been captured." ¹⁸As soon as he mentioned the ark of God, Eli fell over backward from his seat by the side of the gate, and his neck was broken and he died, for the man was old and heavy. He had judged Israel forty years.

God is cleaning house. Eli, who led Israel to believe that it was ok to know God only superficially is taken out. His wicked sons have been taken out of the way. The ark of God is taken away from Israel. God is stripping Israel completely. And it's only right. The apostle Peter says that God must correct his people.

1 Peter 4:17 | For it is time for judgment to begin at the household of God.

THE GLORY HAS DEPARTED

And now the conclusion of the matter is prophesied by the wife of Phinehas. She has a baby, and she names him after the events of the day. Ichabod means, "The glory has departed."

1 Samuel 4:19, 21-22 | Now his daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, was pregnant, about to give birth. And when she heard the news that the ark of God was captured, and that her father-in-law and her husband were dead, she bowed and gave birth, for her pains came upon her.... ²¹And she named the child Ichabod, saying, "The glory has departed from Israel!" because the ark of God had been captured and because of her father-in-law and her husband. ²²And she said, "The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured."

The leaders of Israel departed in death. The ark of God had departed. The child's name is a tattoo of these events: God's glory had departed from Israel.

God stands against utilitarian religion. God is not here to give you your "best life now." He's not here to bless your bank account. Oh, we are rich, but our treasure is in heaven. To use God is to blaspheme his majesty because we are here to be used by him, and not the other way around.

God is not our genie. He's not our wish-granter. He's the majestic Creator of the universe. He made the sun to rise upon you today. He sustains gravity. He maintains Saturn and Jupiter in

their orbits. And he does this without losing strength or energy because his power has no beginning and no end. Worship him. Don't use him. Bow down to him and love him.

God may need to remove the glory from your life. He may humble you for a while. He may need to take out the Eli's and especially the Hophnis and Phinehases. But respond to him. Don't do what the children of Israel did next. They made a huge mistake.

2. GOD WILL NOT BE CAPTURED (5:1-12)

Sometimes we talk about drawing near to God, and we assume it is a good thing. The enemies of God thought they could **capture God**. God cannot be captured. Now the Philistines took the ark of the covenant. That was a tremendous mistake.

GOD WON'T BE CAPTURED—HE IS SOVEREIGN

1 Samuel 5:1-5 | When the Philistines captured the ark of God, they brought it from Ebenezer to Ashdod.² Then the Philistines took the ark of God and brought it into the house of Dagon and set it up beside Dagon.³ And when the people of Ashdod rose early the next day, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord. So they took Dagon and put him back in his place.⁴ But when they rose early on the next morning, behold, Dagon had fallen face downward on the ground before the ark of the Lord, and the head of Dagon and both his hands were lying cut off on the threshold. Only the trunk of Dagon was left to him.⁵ This is why the priests of Dagon and all who enter the house of Dagon do not tread on the threshold of Dagon in Ashdod to this day.

What status the Philistines had! They had Dagon and Yahweh. They looked at the capture of this ark as a huge plus. If one god is good then two gods are even better. They set up the ark of God next to Dagon. And in the morning Dagon was prostrate before the ark, with head and hands cut off. Their fatal flaw was trying to capture God and domesticate him. God will not be domesticated.

The Philistines captured the ark of God. They took the treasure chest of blessing and they said, "Now we've got their god on our side." What a terrible choice. When they took that ark of the covenant into their camp, it caused them calamity upon calamity. They had a hot potato on their hands, and they wanted to get rid of it.

GOD WON'T BE CAPTURED—HE IS EXCLUSIVE

God will not share his glory with another. He is exclusively the only God. Remember what Jesus said.

John 14:6 | I am the way, the truth, and the life, no man comes to the Father except through me.

It is true now and it was true then. It was just more dramatically displayed.

The Philistines were at first delighted to have the ark of the covenant. They could franchise Yahweh along with Dagon. Dagon was a prosperity God of grain. He is basically a **merman**. He's a man with a fish's tail. And in Philistine mythology, he is **the father of Baal** and the leader of the Philistine pantheon (Jdg 16:23).¹ His **wife** is the prosperity goddess **Asherah**.

"Well, if we just have the ark of blessing, we will be blessed. People are doing that today. They look at God as another piece of their business plan. They are franchising the Holy Spirit.

What happened to the Philistines? They were not blessed. They were cursed with tumors on their bodies and mice in their homes and crops. It seems likely that God afflicted the Philistines with bubonic plague, the term *tumors* speaking generally about swellings and growths. This was a disease that frequented coastal regions, spread by mice and rats that came in on ships.

1 Samuel 5:6-7 | The hand of the Lord was heavy against the people of Ashdod, and he terrified and afflicted them with tumors, both Ashdod and its territory.⁷ And when the men of Ashdod saw how things were, they said, "The ark of the God of Israel must not remain with us, for his hand is hard against us and against Dagon our god."

There is "a connection between rats and pestilence." It seems the Lord's hand went hard against the people by having swarms of infected rodents overrun their habitations.² The Philistines just added the living God into the pantheon of their other gods and idols. That's a dangerous thing. God plagued them as a result.

If you try to franchise God for your own success, you will secure your failure. God cannot be captured and franchised; he cannot be borrowed to add with all your other superstitions to give you success. There's **no such thing as secondhand revival**. You can't capture God from a program or a song. You've got to experience God personally. God will not be marketed. He interacts when sinners genuinely seek him.

You'd be amazed how many people think that they can capture God and **borrow someone else's formula for success**. We see a church that has a particular program. We say, "We've got to get that program." This church is growing through a music program or this formulaic evangelism program. If we do thus and so, we will grow, but we've got to follow that program.

There is a particular music program, and we say, "We're going to get their music." Or there is a particular organizational structure, and we say, if we just do that, we'll have the blessing of God. No, you have to encounter the living God personally and humbly. All has to be given up.

God alone will be worshipped, or you will feel the pain of slavery to other idols and to your sin. The Philistines worshipped the fish god, but they should have given their full allegiance to the one true and living God.

GOD WON'T BE CAPTURED—HE IS JUDGE

1 Samuel 5:11-12 | They sent therefore and gathered together all the lords of the Philistines and said, "Send away the ark of the God of Israel, and let it return to its own place, that it may not kill us and our people." For there was a

¹ John MacArthur Jr., ed., *The MacArthur Study Bible*, electronic ed. (Nashville, TN: Word Pub., 1997), 384.

² Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 101–102.

deathly panic throughout the whole city. The hand of God was very heavy there. ¹²The men who did not die were struck with tumors, and the cry of the city went up to heaven.

The Philistines realized that if Yahweh wasn't exclusive in their lives, he would be their judge, so they wanted to send the ark back to Israel. Now God's greatness was beginning to dawn on them.

In our public squares, our public figures try to capture and domesticate God. They think they can live however they want and still make the claim of status: "I'm following the Lord." Many of these politicians hate God. They love and support the murder mills. They fornicate and philander. They desecrate marriage, and they bring confusion to our children and support the gender blender clinics. And at the appropriate times they quote a Bible verse. They pray. They invoke the name of the God who stands against their lives. God will not have it.

One day many politicians and preachers and regular people who played at church will appear before God, and assured that they know him, will get a rude awakening. Consider Jesus' warning.

Matthew 7:21-23 | 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. ²²On that day many will say to me, 'Lord, Lord, did we not prophesy in your name, and cast out demons in your name, and do many mighty works in your name?' ²³And then will I declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from me, you workers of lawlessness.'

God will not be captured. He cannot be added on to your array of idols. God will be worshipped as God alone.

Isaiah 42:8 | I am the Lord; that is my name; my glory I give to no other, nor my praise to carved idols.

3. GOD WILL NOT BE A CURIOSITY (6:1-21)

We find out in chapter 6 that the ark stayed in Philistine territory for 7 months (6:1). The Philistines put the ark on a cart headed to Beth-shemesh, and they are told some very strange things to demonstrate their wrongdoing. They are to give a guilt offering of five golden tumors and five golden mice to memorialize forever the calamity that comes when we try to add God to our collection of idols.

1 Samuel 6:13-15 | Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it. ¹⁴The cart came into the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there. A great stone was there. And they split up the wood of the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the Lord. ¹⁵And **the Levites took down the ark of the Lord and the box that was beside it**, in which were the golden figures, and set them upon the great stone. And the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and sacrificed sacrifices on that day to the Lord.

So far, so good. They made a great sacrifice to the Lord. They also saw the **strange offerings of gold**. But now something awful is going to happen. The people of Israel still have not learned their lesson. But what we see is the **Levites of Beth-shemesh look upon the ark as a curiosity**. There was a proper way to handle the ark, and it seems they just picked it up and looked inside it. Seventy men are struck down there in Beth-shemesh.

1 Samuel 6:19 | And he struck some of the men of Beth-shemesh, because they looked upon the ark of the Lord. He struck **seventy men of them**, and the people mourned because the Lord had struck the people with a great blow.

Now, some of the Hebrew manuscripts have a variant. It says in some of them that God took 70 people's lives in the little town of Beth-shemesh, and then he took 50,000 more lives throughout the rest of Israel among some of the people.

The point is, we cannot look at God as **some kind of curiosity**. There are many who sit under the preaching of God's word as if they have an option to take it or leave it. If the Lord of the universe gives you a gift and you reject it, it would be better for you never to have heard of the gift in the first place. You see this is serious business. As you hear the word of God, you have to take it seriously and receive God's gift, his Son. Receive him into your life. Walk with him. If you reject him there are dire consequences. **For Israel, there were over 50,000 deaths** throughout there land (6:19, NASB, HCSB).

Many people believe God is there to entertain them. He's there to make them feel better or to have a better life. That's not true. God is here to be worshipped. We are here to carry out his will for this earth, which is to evangelize every creature and make disciples.

Don't trifle with God. If you died without him, the punishment of the lake of fire awaits you. It's much worse than what the Philistines received and what Israel received. The destiny of anyone without Christ is eternal, conscious torment in the lake of fire. Jesus said, it is a place where "the worm never dies and the fire is not quenched" (Mk 9:48).

Anything less than a personal relationship with God is **dangerous**. God is not to be trifled with. God is not our good luck charm. He's not someone that is to be marketed. He's not for sale. Instead, he is to be worshipped. He is our Master and Lord.

4. GOD WILL BE FEARED (7:1-4)

The men of this little town of Beth-shemesh, are completely awakened to the fierce holiness of the Lord. They realize they can't handle his presence among them. So they ask the people of Kiriath-jearim to take the ark. They realize God cannot be trifled with.

Oswald Chambers said, "The remarkable thing about God is that when you fear of God, you fear nothing else, whereas if you do not fear God, you fear everything else."³

Listen to Solomon.

³ Oswald Chambers in *The Wiersbe Bible Commentary: Old Testament* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook), 767.

Proverbs 9:10 | The fear of the Lord is the beginning of wisdom, and the knowledge of the Holy One is insight.

It was the fear of God that led the men of Israel to **properly approach God**. The fear of the Lord is to see God in his reality, the omnipotent, omnipresent, awesome, and holy God that he is. He is not distant, but very near. The devils believe and tremble before him. Shouldn't we who know his grace tremble even more? I believe the **men of Israel in Beth-shemesh began to understand the fear of the Lord**.

1 Samuel 6:20-21 | Then the men of Beth-shemesh said, "**Who is able to stand before the Lord, this holy God?** And to whom shall he go up away from us?" ²¹So they sent messengers to the inhabitants of Kiriath-jearim, saying, "The Philistines have returned the ark of the Lord. Come down and take it up to you."

So God's holy ark returned to Israel after seven months in Philistine hands. The Philistines had wanted only to escape God's wrath and discern enough of God's will to think themselves free from his judgment. Now, as the ark returned to Israel, we ask, "How can his people abide in the presence of so holy a God?"⁴

WHEN GOD IS FEARED, HIS PEOPLE REJOICE

The first answer is that God's people are to receive God's presence *with joy*. We see such joy modeled by the people of Beth-shemesh.

1 Samuel 6:13 | Now the people of Beth-shemesh were reaping their wheat harvest in the valley. And when they lifted up their eyes and saw the ark, they rejoiced to see it.

The Philistines may have wanted only to be rid of so holy a God, but the Lord's people knew of his mighty grace. Nehemiah said that "the joy of the Lord is your strength" (Neh 8:10). Christians are strongest when we are rejoicing in the Lord, and God is never more fully praised by us than when we most rejoice in him.

WHEN GOD IS FEARED, HIS PEOPLE REST

1 Samuel 7:1 | And the men of Kiriath-jearim came and took up the ark of the Lord and brought it to the house of Abinadab on the hill. And they consecrated his son Eleazar to have charge of the ark of the Lord.

Others may have said, "God has brought nothing but disaster, we want nothing to do with him." Instead these men of Kiriath-jearim were men of faith who understood the grace of God when we approach him in childlike faith and in obedience.⁵

⁴ Richard D. Phillips, *1 Samuel*, ed. Philip Graham Ryken and Richard D. Phillips, Duguid Iain M., 1st ed., Reformed Expository Commentary (Phillipsburg, NJ: P&R Publishing, 2012), 114.

⁵ William G. Blaikie, *Expository Lectures on the Book of First Samuel* (1887; repr., Birmingham, AL: Solid Ground, 2005), 85.

WHEN GOD IS FEARED, HIS PEOPLE LAMENT

1 Samuel 7:2 | From the day that the ark was lodged at Kiriath-jearim, a long time passed, some twenty years, and all the house of Israel lamented after the Lord.

Look at how the people of Kiriath-jearim received the ark. They lamented. They took their sin seriously. No true believer can live comfortably in sin. Sin is a misery, and we are called to lament and grieve and mourn for our sin.

Proverbs 9:10 | The fear of the Lord is hatred of evil.

Hating evil begins with our own repentance and lament of sin. How can we lament? **There are 42 lament Psalms in our Bible.** That's almost one-third of all the Psalms. Of all the things we hate the most in this world, it ought to be our own sin. One way to know if you have felt the full weight of your sin is to see how you forgive others. If you are slow to forgive, then you don't understand how much you yourself have been forgiven.

Lament! Grieve! Be brought low over your sin and idols. You've broken God's heart. Your angry words are not ok. Your curse words are not ok. Your drunkenness is not ok. Are you listening? You may think God doesn't see you, but he does.

WHEN GOD IS FEARED, HIS PEOPLE LOVE GOD

1 Samuel 7:3a | And Samuel said to all the house of Israel, "If you are returning to the Lord with all your heart, then put away the foreign gods."

When we return to the Lord, our heart is filled with love and joy, so there is no room for idols and law, but only God's love.

Jeremiah 29:14 | You will seek me and find me, when you seek me with all your heart.

We seek him first and with all we have. That certainly occurs in our salvation, when we first trust in Christ, but it is a moment by moment surrender for the Christian as well.

WHEN GOD IS FEARED, HIS PEOPLE LEAVE IDOLS

Samuel then called on the people to live in the reality of God's presence. They had to put away all idols. Calvin said, "The heart is an idol making factory." Nothing can take the place of God in our lives.

1 Samuel 7:3b-4 | Put away the foreign gods and the Ashtaroth from among you and direct your heart to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines." ⁴So the people of Israel put away the Baals and the Ashtaroth. They served the Lord only.

Samuel understood that repentance involves far more than feeling sorry about our sin. Most people are sorry only that they got caught sinning or for the misery they have experienced as a result. But true repentance begins by being sorry over the sin itself and then goes on to forsake sin so completely as to turn to God in new obedience.

This command involved far more than throwing a few statues into a ditch. Idolatry, then as now, involved a whole way of life. Idolatry involves the heart. Baal and Asherah were prosperity gods. **Instead of living for their own prosperity and comfort, they (and we) are called to live for the glory of God.** There're just two choices on the shelf: serving God or serving self. We were made to serve the Lord with all our heart and soul.

Conclusion

Yahweh is the king God's people need, and out of his goodness he will provide for himself a leader that leads them in the fear of God.⁶ When we follow Christ in the fear of the Lord, good things happen. It doesn't mean life is perfect, but we have the Lord near, and he shepherds us. When we forsake the Lord or don't walk in the fear of the Lord, we can expect disaster.

Knowing God in a personal way is the only way to live! Jesus said, "Seek first the kingdom of God and his righteousness, and all these things will be added to you" (Mt 6:33).

To live life pretending to know God is really deception. Have you ever studied the pictures of the food at McDonald's or another restaurant? It's never the way it looks in the picture. Who has ever had a bun so perfect and lettuce so crispy? Most of the time the bun is lukewarm, and the lettuce is wilted. It's sleight of hand. Some professing Christians are living a lie. They see God as a good luck charm, or a curiosity, or they add him as one of their idols. But God will be worshipped as God alone. He is worthy. Behold him. Worship him alone.

⁶ J. D. Greear and Heath A. Thomas, *Exalting Jesus in 1 & 2 Samuel* (Nashville, TN: Holman Reference, 2016), 1 Sa 4–7.