

David's Spiritual Secret-- How NOT to serve the Lord or, How to waste your life— Like King Saul 1st Samuel 31

When I read a letter or card I usually start by looking at the end to see who it is from. When I read a book I often look at the end to see whether the hero makes it alive to the end.

When I start a biographical study of a person God chose to be included in His Word I always look at the END of their life first. Why is that? Because God said that the way we finish is what counts. It is not how we start the race, but how we finish the race that really matters. That's why Paul triumphantly said, "I have finished the course" (2nd Timothy 4:7)!

So as we look at the life of King Saul and especially at the theme of 'how not to serve the Lord' would you join me at the end of his life? Turn with me to how King Saul finished his life in 1st Samuel 31.

Stand, read 1st Samuel 31 and pray.

On this windswept hill, three thousand years ago the mightiest man of Israel fell wounded; King Saul with life agonizingly clinging within his tortured body -- called out to a passing man and had him end his earthly suffering. That man killed King Saul and took his crown. That man was an Amalekite.

After the fierce battle all day with the Philistines -- arrows from the enemies he had fought gravely wounded King Saul. His sons and heirs to the throne lay dead around him, night was falling, the enemies had retreated – and Saul was alone.

The mightiest man of Israel, head and shoulders taller than anyone else now dragged himself along trying to reach his sword fallen on the battlefield. When he had it at last he pushed himself upon it to end his dreadful pain.

As the night passed and morning dawned life still clung to Saul. The sound of the victorious Philistine warriors echoed up the hillsides, they came to abuse the wounded and strip the dead. Saul wanted to die. Handing there, impaled on his own sword, Saul looked around through the mists of death and he heard a man coming. In the gray light

of dawn he appeared scavenging what he could from the dead. Then Saul cried out to him and asked for him to kill him. The young man obliged, striking down the King of Israel. Then he took the crown off Saul's head. That man was an Amalekite. Next time we will examine why that little detail screams so loudly from God's Word. But for tonight—Saul what is it like at the end for one who fails the Lord? What does someone who fails to serve the Lord do to their life? What exactly does a wasted life amount to?

Saul had money, muscles, and charisma—but he didn't have integrity, humility, and a servant's heart. So Saul was a colossal failure.

The last hours of life were spent with a witch—his last supper with a demonic spiritist medium trying to communicate with the dead (1st Samuel 28: 3-8) and his death came as he was surrounded by his dead sons and his very triumphant enemies (1st Samuel 31:2).

What happened when Saul refused to serve God and instead served himself? It led to Saul's eternal disgrace:

- **Saul's death was a Personal disgrace:** While certain cultures view suicide in time of adversity as noble, God's people regard it as always dishonorable and wrong. When Saul decided to die by his own hand (1st Samuel 31:4), he chose the lowest way out.
- **Saul's death was a Family disgrace:** When Saul died, he took his whole house with him. The royal father and three sons, including the popular and noble Jonathan, were killed on the same battlefield (1st Samuel 31:6). While the death of the king was tragic, the simultaneous loss of his heirs was disastrous.
- **Saul's death was a National disgrace:** All his life Saul had defended Israel from enemy assault. Now he lay dead at the hands of his enemies (1st Samuel 31:7). His death now signaled a Philistine advance unequalled in history and unparalleled in scope.
- **Saul's death was an International disgrace:** When the Philistines pinned his headless corpse to the wall of Beth Shan (1st Samuel 31:10), they made a strategic choice. Situated at the junction of the Jezreel and Jordan Valleys, Beth Shan controlled the crossroads of major highways. With Galilee and Damascus to the north, the Mediterranean to the west and Jerusalem to the south, travelers from many nations passed through this prominent city. Here in this public place; Saul's fallen form was a silent witness to the triumph of the pagan powers. While thousands of residents whispered about it, tens of thousands of travelers trumpeted the news in every direction.
- **Saul's death was a Spiritual disgrace:** The greatest shame in Saul's death was that it was God's judgment. The end of his life was exploited as an opportunity for praise of pagan gods. The Scriptures tell us that his head was hung in Dagon's temple as a trophy of victory (I Chronicles 10:10), and his armor was placed as a votive offering in the temple of the Ashtoreths. These five degrees of disgrace were the solemn epitaph of one who fulfilled the worst in his death because he

failed to live up to the best in his life.¹

Life really does come down to servanthood—who we present ourselves as servants to obey as Paul said (Romans 6:13). Or as Jesus so clearly warns us, ‘no one can serve two masters’ (Matthew 6:24).

Romans 6:12 Therefore do not let sin reign in your mortal body, that you should obey it in its lusts. 13 And do not present your members as instruments of unrighteousness to sin, but present yourselves to God as being alive from the dead, and your members as instruments of righteousness to God. 14 For sin shall not have dominion over you, for you are not under law but under grace. 15 What then? Shall we sin because we are not under law but under grace? Certainly not! 16 Do you not know that to whom you present yourselves slaves to obey, you are that one's slaves whom you obey, whether of sin leading to death, or of obedience leading to righteousness? 17 But God be thanked that though you were slaves of sin, yet you obeyed from the heart that form of doctrine to which you were delivered. 18 And having been set free from sin, you became slaves of righteousness. 19 I speak in human terms because of the weakness of your flesh. For just as you presented your members as slaves of uncleanness, and of lawlessness leading to more lawlessness, so now present your members as slaves of righteousness for holiness. NKJV

Matthew 6:20-24 but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. 21 For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also. 22 "The lamp of the body is the eye. If therefore your eye is good, your whole body will be full of light. 23 But if your eye is bad, your whole body will be full of darkness. If therefore the light that is in you is darkness, how great is that darkness! 24 "No one can serve two masters; for either he will hate the one and love the other, or else he will be loyal to the one and despise the other. You cannot serve God and mammon. 25 "Therefore I say to you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or what you will drink; nor about your body, what you will put on. Is not life more than food and the body more than clothing? NKJV

How did Saul fall so far? Back up to where we started. 1st Samuel 15 explains why Saul would have an ignominious death. Look at verse 9.

"But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them. But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed" (1 Samuel 15:9).

Saul used selective, self-serving obedience in place of total and God-honoring obedience.

¹ Linden D. Kirby, *Footprints in the Holy Land, A Devotional Discovery Guide*, Discovery House Publishers, Grand Rapids, MI, p.154.

Now go back with me through this chapter and note the glaring examples God records for us in ways to fail, waste your life. Here is how not to serve the Lord!

1. **Ignore clear and direct statements about what God wants you to do.** 1 Samuel 15: 1-7 Samuel also said to Saul, "The Lord sent me to anoint you king over His people, over Israel. Now therefore, heed the voice of the words of the Lord. 2 Thus says the Lord of hosts: 'I will punish Amalek for what he did to Israel, how he ambushed him on the way when he came up from Egypt. 3 Now go and attack Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them. But kill both man and woman, infant and nursing child, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.' " 4 So Saul gathered the people together and numbered them in Telaim, two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand men of Judah. 5 And Saul came to a city of Amalek, and lay in wait in the valley. 6 Then Saul said to the Kenites, "Go, depart, get down from among the Amalekites, lest I destroy you with them. For you showed kindness to all the children of Israel when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites departed from among the Amalekites. 7 And Saul attacked the Amalekites, from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is east of Egypt. NKJV

What are some real clear and direct statements from God about what He wants us to do?

- *Mark 16: 15 And He said to them, "Go into all the world and preach the gospel to every creature. NKJV*
- *John 15: 12 This is My commandment, that you love one another as I have loved you. NKJV*
- *Romans 12: 1-2 I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that you present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God, which is your reasonable service. 2 And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is that good and acceptable and perfect will of God. NKJV*

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just ignore clear and direct statements about what God wants you to do.**

2. **Pick and choose from what God clearly tells you to do so that you offer God selective and partial obedience.** 1 Samuel 15:8 He also took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and utterly destroyed all the people with the edge of the sword. NKJV

Remember that the clearest way to declare that you love the Lord is by obedience.

- *John 14:21 He who has My commandments **and keeps them**, it is he who loves Me. And he who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him." NKJV*

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just pick and choose from what God clearly tells you to do so that you offer God selective and partial obedience.**

3. **Hold on to the best and nicest parts of what God hates and has asked for you to destroy, and keep them for your own use.** 1 Samuel 15:9a But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs, and all that was good, and were unwilling to utterly destroy them...NKJV

Jesus told us what He thinks of loving what He hates—

James 4:4 Adulterers and adulteresses! Do you not know that friendship with the world is enmity with God? Whoever therefore wants to be a friend of the world makes himself an enemy of God. NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just Hold on to the best and nicest parts of what God hates and has asked for you to destroy, and keep them for your own use.**

4. **Only give God what you don't want anyway and is worthless to you.** 1 Samuel 15:9b ... But everything despised and worthless, that they utterly destroyed. NKJV

Jesus told us how to live for eternal gain—

Matthew 16:24-27 Then Jesus said to His disciples, "If anyone desires to come after Me, let him deny himself, and take up his cross, and follow Me. 25 For whoever desires to save his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life for My sake will find it. 26 For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul? 27 For the Son of Man will come in the glory of His Father with His angels, and then He will reward each according to his works. NKJV

God deserves the first, the best, the costliest of our time, treasures, and talents. If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just give God what you don't want anyway and is worthless to you.**

5. **Honor yourself before others and remind people of your accomplishments instead of honoring the Lord.** 1 Samuel 15:12 So when Samuel rose early in the morning to meet Saul, it was told Samuel, saying, "Saul went to Carmel, and indeed, he set up a monument for himself; and he has gone on around, passed by, and gone down to Gilgal." NKJV

Jesus' harshest criticisms were for the proud religious leaders.

Matthew 23:1-12 Then Jesus spoke to the multitudes and to His disciples, 2 saying: "The scribes and the Pharisees sit in Moses' seat. 3 Therefore whatever they tell you to observe, that observe and do, but do not do according to their works; for they say, and do not do. 4 For they bind heavy burdens, hard to bear, and lay them on men's shoulders; but they themselves will not move them with one of their fingers. 5 But all their works they do to be seen by men. They make their phylacteries broad and

enlarge the borders of their garments. 6 They love the best places at feasts, the best seats in the synagogues, 7 greetings in the marketplaces, and to be called by men, 'Rabbi, Rabbi.' 8 But you, do not be called 'Rabbi'; for One is your Teacher, the Christ, and you are all brethren. 9 Do not call anyone on earth your father; for One is your Father, He who is in heaven. 10 And do not be called teachers; for One is your Teacher, the Christ. 11 But he who is greatest among you shall be your servant. 12 And whoever exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted. NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just Honor yourself before others and remind people of your accomplishments instead of honoring the Lord.**

6. **Be deceptive about the true condition of your spiritual life by making false claims about your dedication to God.** 1 Samuel 15:13 Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, "Blessed are you of the Lord! I have performed the commandment of the Lord." NKJV

Jesus honored honesty and condemned hypocrisy.

Luke 18: 9-14 Also He spoke this parable to some who trusted in themselves that they were righteous, and despised others: 10 "Two men went up to the temple to pray, one a Pharisee and the other a tax collector. 11 The Pharisee stood and prayed thus with himself, 'God, I thank You that I am not like other men—extortioners, unjust, adulterers, or even as this tax collector. 12 I fast twice a week; I give tithes of all that I possess.' 13 And the tax collector, standing afar off, would not so much as raise his eyes to heaven, but beat his breast, saying, 'God, be merciful to me a sinner!' 14 I tell you, this man went down to his house justified rather than the other; for everyone who exalts himself will be humbled, and he who humbles himself will be exalted." NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just be deceptive about the true condition of your spiritual life by making false claims about your dedication to God.**

7. **Blame others for your own personal failures.** 1 Samuel 15:15a And Saul said, "**They** have brought them from the Amalekites; **for the people spared** the best of the sheep and the oxen...NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just blame others for your own personal failures.**

8. **Experience God second hand, only through others, and not first hand and personally.** 1 Samuel 15:15b "to sacrifice to the Lord your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed." NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just**

Experience God second hand, only through others, and not first hand and personally.

9. **Cultivate an exaggerated view of your own importance.** 1 Samuel 15:17 So Samuel said, "When you were little in your own eyes, were you not head of the tribes of Israel? And did not the Lord anoint you king over Israel? NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just cultivate an exaggerated view of your own importance.**

10. **Do your own thing even when God's Word tells you explicitly not to.** 1 Samuel 15:18 Now the Lord sent you on a mission, and said, 'Go, and utterly destroy the sinners, the Amalekites, and fight against them until they are consumed.' NKJV

If you want to fail what God made you to do and be and waste your life—**just Do your own thing even when God's Word tells you explicitly not to.**

The ominous warning of Saul's life is that he had everything going for him possible. He was big, strong, blessed, gifted, chosen, empowered, and given every opportunity to serve God. But he didn't. Saul failed because there were severe deficiencies in his character.

- God doesn't need brains—He wants character.
- God doesn't need brawn (huge strong muscles)—He wants integrity.
- God doesn't need anyone's wisdom, power, or wealth—He wants obedience.
- God doesn't need ambitious confidence—He wants humble dependence.

Saul used selective, self-serving obedience in place of total and God-honoring obedience.

Life really does come down to servanthood—who we present ourselves as servants to obey as Paul said (Romans 6:13). Or as Jesus so clearly warns us 'no one can serve two masters' (Matthew 6:24).