

# Principles for God's Faithfulness

*Faithfulness of God*

By Dr. Jeff Meyers

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**Crossroads Ministries**  
301 S. 8th Street  
Opelika, Alabama 36801

**Website:** [www.fbcopelika.com](http://www.fbcopelika.com)  
**Online Sermons:** [www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers](http://www.sermonaudio.com/jeffmeyers)

So I do want to invite you to open your Bibles to the book of 1 Samuel 4 in the Old Testament. For those of you that are guests or visitors with us, we've been walking through the book of 1 Samuel, really kind of looking at this main idea is that what does it look like when a society of people, when a group of people move from the sacred to the secular? What does it look like when we trade God's ways for man's ways? And today in chapter 4, we have one of my favorite stories in all of the Bible, but before we read 1 Samuel 4, I've got to address something.

Pastor Paul, why are you still up here?

Paul. Well, you told me to earlier today. Well, because we're going to look at 1 Samuel 4 when, parents, when you get there if you just read these verses it can be a little complicated.

It's a daunting story, is it not?

Paul. Here's the thing, when you act it out, or used the word, it's a very big word of dramatization. Today you like to do that around me.

That's five syllables.

Paul. Big words. Big words, okay. When we act, 1, it out, a lot of times the kids retain it so in kids' church a lot of times we act it out or just see how the story goes. So we're going to banter this back and forth not necessarily act it out.

Oh no, no, we're not acting it out.

Paul. Nobody's going to fall and break your neck. But the thing about this story is there's fighting.

There is.

Paul. Well, what else is in it?

Well, there's rebellion, bloodshed, a lot of death.

Paul. Is there running?

There's a lot of running. Yes Sir.

Paul. Is there...

Shouting.

Paul. Sir?

Shouting.

Paul. Yeah, is there disobedience.

A ton of disobedience. Let's just kind of walk through it from a minute.

Paul. Okay, let's do it.

Who do you think the Israelites are going to be fighting? They have this one nemesis they always fight.

Paul. The Philistines.

The Philistines, that's right. They're fighting the Philistines. They go out to battle. How'd the battle go?

Paul. Well, the battle didn't go very good the first time, you see, it sounds like they're hardheaded and they tried it. So the first time 4,000 people died.

4,000 men.

Paul. Men.

That means we have widows and children. That's a lot of guys in one day.

Paul. Yeah, this is bad.

So the Israelites have got to go back to camp and kind of regroup.

Paul. Okay, so I'm going to go back to camp. See, this is where I would walk across the stage, okay?

Oh, am I supposed to go to that side?

Paul. No, you can stay right there because you're the narrator, okay?

I'm there, so they go back to camp.

Paul. They have something, they have this ark, the ark of the covenant. They're like, "You know what? Let's take this." And so let's just assume this is the...

Brother, you do know there are cords and microphones over there?

Paul. Todd, that's alright. I got it. So if this is the ark...

[crosstalk]

When Paul says I got it, it just makes me nervous.

Paul. Got it. So we walked the ark.

[crosstalk]

The covenant back-to-back.

Paul. We're going to go try and fight again because we have this ark, like this is going to do it.

I mean, this sounds like a really good idea, right? I mean, after all, the ark of God, that's the presence of God, the power of God. We lost 4,000, guys so now we're assured victory, right, Pastor Paul?

Paul. I mean, in their minds, but no.

What happens?

Paul. 30,000 men.

Time out, So we've gone from 4,000 to 30,000?

Paul. 30,000 men. They're there.

Even with the ark of the covenant?

Paul. That's right, even with the ark of the covenant.

So even though it looked like a good idea, somehow it wasn't a good idea?

Paul. 100%.

Then what happened?

Paul. Then there was running. So a guy runs back, this is where I'd run across the stage. That's as fast as I run.

All right, so they run back.

Paul. And he's out of breath.

And he goes back, and he talks to Eli, the priest.

Paul. That's right. And Eli, the priest is sitting down, so at some point, maybe I'd, I'd sit down like this and I'd be sitting, but I don't think he was sitting on a chair.

Well, the Bible is kind of vague at that point. It just says he was sitting. There's a lot of things you can be doing while you're sitting. We're going to leave that for kids' church. Okay, nonetheless, Eli is sitting and a guy runs back and he tells him some horrible news. He begins by saying that his sons Hophni and Phineas have died.

Paul. Yeah, and the thing about it is, is he's not, like, overly upset about that.

But he's not happy.

Paul. He's definitely not happy.

But then he drops the news that the ark of the covenant was taken, and then what happens?

Paul. I'm not going to fall because I might actually, but he falls and he breaks his neck.

He falls over and breaks his neck.

Paul. That's right.

And then the story is not over because he has a daughter-in-law, Phineas' wife who's about to give birth.

Paul. She's pregnant, right?

Well, if you're about to give birth, you're already pregnant.

Paul. That's when I'd stand like this and I do something like this. I'd show pregnant.

Yes, Sir. She's about to give birth. She goes into labor. She has a child. Now remember her husband is deceased. Her father-in-law is deceased. There's 30. Yes, Sir, Pastor Paul?

Paul. This is where it gets really fun because sometimes in the Bible the names are crazy and like she names her child Icky-body.

No, I don't think that's how you say the word.

Paul. Really?

It's Ichabod.

Paul. Yeah, but now they're going to remember Icky-body forever.

But they're gonna remember the wrong word.

Paul. But it's this, our heart. E for effort.

K for kids' church. Okay, here we go. So his name is... Why would she name her child Ichabod? Why would she do that?

Paul. Well, because she wanted to remember. Names are symbolic and they want people to...

Yeah, but it has a specific meaning. Do you know what the name means?

Paul. You're the Doctor.

The name means and this is where the story that's very dramatized, very graphic, very dire, comes to a wretched conclusion. His name means "the glory of God has departed." It's a sad story with a whole lot of action, and I appreciate you, Pastor Paul, for helping me out here in first grade Bible presentation. You going to stay for the rest of the message?

Paul. Well, I am but there's one more thing. Here's another cool thing that we teach kids. Like if a story ends right there, we always are able to roll in, "but there's good news."

Oh, there's good news, we're going to get to that in about 20 minutes. Can you wait around?

Paul. You want me to sit?

No, no, no, we're good. Just go right back down there. We can only handle so much, my brother.

[applause]

I'll let you all guess how much time we scripted that out before we did it. That being said, I do encourage you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 4. We are not going to read the entirety of the story. Hopefully you have an understanding of the story, but there are certain verses that I do want to select and highlight for this morning because there are certain principles that we see in this story that are necessary for us to grasp, and as Pastor Paul said, it's going to be nothing but bad news today until we get to the very end and then we're going to see that there is a glimmer of hope not only in Israel's life but in ours as well.

As you know, the story begins with the Israelites facing dire destruction, 4,000 men dying in one battle and then we get to verse 3 and 4. If you don't mind turning with me to verse 3 and 4. It says,

3 And when the people were come into the camp, the elders of Israel said, Wherefore hath the LORD smitten us to day before the Philistines? Let us fetch the ark of the covenant of the LORD out of Shiloh unto us, that, when it cometh among us, it may save us out of the hand of our enemies. 4 So the people sent to Shiloh, that they might bring from thence the ark of the covenant of the LORD of hosts, which dwelleth between the cherubims: and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God.

As we said earlier, it sounds like a really good idea. I mean, after all, this ark of the covenant was not a large item. It was about the size of an average dining room table or a living room table. It was small in nature, but it was very ornate. It was covered in gold all around it and there were these interesting looking angelic beings that were carved on the top. But it wasn't about the size, it wasn't even about the materials, what made the ark of the covenant of God so important is that between those angelic figures there on the mercy seat dwelt the presence and the power of God. And that is why, as many of you are familiar, we have this saga of stories and movies known as "Raiders of the Lost Ark." There's all these people that want to know, "Can we have, can we harness, can we maneuver the power and the presence of God in our lives?" Now at first glance, it seems like a really good idea. If you've gone into battle and you've lost 4,000 men, you need the presence and you need the power of God, but here's the thing I want to address: they had an erroneous perspective of not only who God was, but his power and his presence.

I want you to notice what it says in verse 3 toward the end, they went to go get under Shiloh that when it comes to us, it may save us. Now I'm going to ask a very simple but rhetorical question: was the power of God in the construction of this box, or was it in his presence that dwelt therein? It's his presence, but when you refer to it as an "it," they believe that somehow, someway that this box was a token of good luck, that this box somehow, if we have it in front of us rather than behind us, things will go well for us, and this is the perspective that humanity gets in when we elevate ourselves, our abilities, our giftedness above the power and the presence of God in our lives. They basically said, "We can do what we want, how we want. Well, as long as we got the box with us, then everything will work out."

It reminds me back in the book of Exodus, remember the story of the Israelites. They come out of Egypt after 400 years of servitude and bondage. There's this miraculous crossing of the Red Sea. They end up in what we know as the wilderness for a time period. And there in the wilderness Moses separates himself. He says, "I'm going to go up on the Mount Sinai." By the way, he was there for 40 days and 40 nights. He dwelt with the Lord, he communed with the Lord, he heard from the Lord. He was in the presence and in the power of God. What happened to those who were not in the presence and the power of God? Those were those that were at the bottom of the hill, and they began to rebel, they began to rebel, and Aaron, his own earthly brother, took their jewelry, took their valuables, and he began to craft and to mold that famous golden calf. In other words, the perspective here in 1 Samuel 4 is really no different than in the book of Exodus. They thought that somehow if we have an object, if we have an item in our presence, that is what will gain us a victory, and that is what will take us where we desire to go. They could not have been more wrong. It is not the object that possessed the presence and the power, it was God himself. And so their perspective was that God somehow, and can I go a little bit West of the Mississippi River for a moment, that God can ride second saddle and you'll still win the race.

Then we get to verse 5 and 6. You see, when we have an erroneous perspective of who God is and how he operates, then we have a very carnal, natural propensity. Look what happens in verse 5 and 6. It says,

5 And when the ark of the covenant of the LORD came into the camp, all Israel shouted with a great shout, so that the earth rang again. 6 And when the Philistines heard the noise of the shout, they said, What meaneth the noise of this great shout in the camp of the Hebrews? And they understood that the ark of the LORD was come into the camp.

Now again, it seems like a good idea, the only problem is they're using it as a token of fortune and luck, not the power and the presence of God himself. They bring it in the camp and if you'll allow me to kind of Southernize this, they lose their mind. I mean, they start shouting, they start screaming, they start raising their voices so much so that the Philistines believe there is no way they can win the battle. There's no way. And so they give themselves a little pep talk and say, "We've got to quit like men." In other words, "We've got to go ahead and write our names on our tombstones. It's as if we're dead because we can't fight that."

Let me give you a picture of what that scene would have looked like and why it is so critical to understanding these principles. I think every one of us, particularly in this context, has been in a, shall we say, a very voluminous, largely attended athletic event. Typically this time of year we tend to think about football and we've been there, tens of thousands, sometimes over 100,000 people gathered in one place to cheer on their team. Pretty similar analogy if you think about they had the box known as the ark, and we have this thing called a football that goes back and forth through the field. So let me continue the analogy. When you're in that stadium, when is it in the game that people shout and

scream the loudest? Two times, either when your team has the opportunity to do something they haven't done well yet, or when you want your team to stop the other team from doing something that you don't want done. In either case, have you noticed that the only time we lose our mind at a football game is when it's not going well? Think about that. It's not what we desire so we want to encourage, we want to cheer, we want to change the direction. You see, that is humanity's propensity. When things are not going the way we desire them, when things are not as they should be, we have this tendency, I want you to hear this statement, we have a tendency, particularly when it comes to our relationship with God to replace our faith in the presence of God with the fervor of our own abilities or voices. That's exactly what happened. They thought that this passion and this energy and this volume would somehow fix the problem.

You know, it reminds me of another story in the book of 1 Kings. There's this famous story of Elijah the prophet. Again, very similar to this story and many others in the Bible. There's this community that's gone wayward. They've gone secular. They've moved away from God, yet he stands alone. The Bible says there in 1 Kings 17, there's over 400 of these prophets of Baal and it hasn't rained for 3 1/2 years and they're beginning to get worried. The crops are dying, the cattle are dying, the people are beginning to be parched. They need rain, so they decided to have a contest. They decide that we're going to see who is the real God, who's the true God.

So the Baal worshipers, they create their sacrifice there, and they've got the animal ready, they've got everything together, and then there's Elijah. He does the same thing. Identical sacrifices, one contest. Well, I guess they flipped a coin. The Baal worshipers went first and they began to wait. And they waited. And they waited. It didn't go the way they hoped it would, pretty similar to this story as well, isn't it? Things weren't going the right direction because they had the wrong perspective. They were worshiping the wrong god. They were seeing things erroneously. So what was their first response? Start shouting. "Let's get loud. Let's start cheering. Let's start raising our voices. Maybe, if we show enough energy and passion our gods will show up."

It didn't work. In fact, if you read that story, if you question the spiritual gift of sarcasm, Elijah the prophet had it. He said, "Well, where is your god? Is he taking a nap? Is he running an errand?" In fact, there is one translation of the Bible that questions, "Is he sitting down," if you know what I mean per the previous illustration. So you know what they do next? They start cutting themselves. They actually draw their own blood thinking that, "If I go to this extreme measure, then somehow the gods will hear me." Do you remember how Elijah won this famous battle? He said, "You know what? I know we're low on water, but that's about to change. Take all the water we've got left. Drench the sacrifice. Go ahead and pour a moat around it." And a very simple calling out to the Lord, he said, "All right, God, I need you to show everybody who you are." And he showed up and he consumed the entirety of that sacrifice.

You see, the Israelites and you and I, we fall in the same trap. When we have God as second place in our life, or in some of our cases, he's in last place of our life, we think the way to fix things is just to do whatever we're doing faster and louder and with more



energy and somehow if we just do more, or we shout more, or we get more excited, somehow that's going to fix things. But it didn't. In fact, as you heard earlier, the exact opposite occurred and they go into battle, in their words, "it," the ark of the covenant went before them, 4,000 men didn't die this day, 30,000 men. Now I want you to think about that. That's 34,000 total people who not only lost their lives, that's 34,000 widows. That's 34,000+ children whose dad will not return from battle because they had the wrong perspective and they fell into the natural propensity that man does time and time again.

So what happened? In verse 10 and 11 it says,

10 And the Philistines fought, and Israel was smitten, and they fled every man into his tent: and there was a very great slaughter; for there fell of Israel thirty thousand footmen. 11 And the ark of God was taken; and the two sons of Eli, Hophni and Phinehas, were slain.

You see, here's the problem: when you and I have an erroneous perspective of who God is and how he operates, we naturally have this propensity to just turn up the volume on whatever we're doing the wrong direction, and the problem is that eventually, over time, we experience the same thing as they did in verse 10 and 11. The Bible calls it death, and in fact, God warned us of this back in the book of Genesis, chapter 2. He told Adam and Eve, he said, "You can eat of every tree of the garden except this one. In the day you do, you shall, surely die." Let me give you kind of a phrase that I think resonates so well with verse 10 and 11. You and I have the privilege, we have the opportunity, we have the ability to choose our sin, we don't get the choice to choose our consequences, do we? Have you ever asked a first grader what they want their punishment to be? Oh no, let me rephrase it, have you ever asked an adult? An adult who's been in sin and rebellion not just for days, weeks and years, and finally it comes to light, somehow, someway, we have this belief system that surely our consequences should be in our control as well but they're not. And here's the ironic thing is that a couple of chapters earlier Hophni and Phineas and, by the way, if you were not with us that week, these guys, you talk about a sideways priest. I mean, they were feasting on their carnality with the people of the church. They were robbing the people of Israel. And do you know what God told them? "There's coming a day where you two are going to die." He told Eli because we know in Romans 6, the wages of sin is death. But they didn't die in chapter 2. Kind of like Adam and Eve didn't die in Genesis 3, immediately after they ate of that forbidden fruit. Do you know what the saddest part about the consequences of their sin was? It didn't just take the two of them out. It took 34,000 other people out because Eli, Phineas and Hophni should have all known that you never go into battle the way that they did. Do you know what the problem is? The problem is that we don't believe that God will ever hold us accountable for our sin. We believe, "Well, we got away with it last week, we'll get away with it next week. I've been getting away with it for years, why not add another one to the equation?" And that's what happens when we make God an "it." That's what happens when we have God as a box that we can put in the storage shed for years of our life and just do what we merry well please saying, "Well, there's no way he's going to hold me accountable for this." But he does.

And then the news is transferred to Eli. He hears of his sons' death. But it's not just his sons' death that is so dramatic, it is the removal, it is the absence, it is the taking away of this famous ark of the covenant of God. I want to pick up the story in verse 18. The messenger has returned from the field. His sons are deceased. His daughter-in-law is about to go into labor. It says,

18 And it came to pass, when he made mention of the ark of God, that he fell from off the seat backward by the side of the gate, and his neck brake, and he died: for he was an old man, and heavy. And he had judged Israel forty years. 19 And his daughter in law, Phinehas' wife, was with child, near to be delivered: and when she heard the tidings that the ark of God was taken, and that her father in law and her husband were dead, she bowed herself and travailed; for her pains came upon her. 20 And about the time of her death the women that stood by her said unto her, Fear not; for thou hast born a son. But she answered not, neither did she regard it. 21 And she named the child Ichabod, saying, The glory is departed from Israel: because the ark of God was taken, and because of her father in law and her husband. 22 And she said, The glory is departed from Israel: for the ark of God is taken.

Four times in those ending verses the reason, the product of this problem is that the power and the presence of God was removed. It was taken. In fact, we're going to come back next week and we're going to see what happens when the power and the presence of God is "in the enemy's hands," what happens when his holiness intersects our heathenness. But right now there's a void and there is an absence.

You know, years ago there was a pretty well-known evangelist that was speaking to this issue to a multitude of congregations, really more like a group of churches and their representatives, and he made a very interesting statement that's just kind of, you know, sometimes you hear something that just resonates with you and it just kind of bounces around between your ears for years. Here was the statement that he made: if the Holy Spirit left most churches, they wouldn't know it for 10 years. You say, "Well, what does that mean?" Because, you see, the Israelites fell into the same trap that we do as well. We put God in the wrong place. We think the answer is just to get louder and more passionate. We end up experiencing death and carnage all around us, and yet we still show up and we still keep doing what got us in the mess and we never change and we never turn from our ways. Can I share with you the one thing that is not present in chapter 4 of 1 Samuel? At no point and in no place do you see anybody call out to God and say, "We have sinned." All they want to do, and I love this old statement, is just perfume the pig. They just want to take a bad situation and somehow pretend it's not that bad.

But at the very end, the glory of God has departed. Now I'm going to be very honest and transparent this morning. I was a child at one point, my wife and I have raised children together, and so this illustration should resonate with each and every one of us. There's not a one of us here who enjoys discipline in our life. There's not a one of us here who,

like somebody who's in authority telling us what we should or should not do. That's just our rebellious, depraved, sinful nature. That's who we are. And yet in Hebrews 12, do you know what it tells us? It says that when God corrects us, and by the way, you've probably been there if not sometime before, maybe today, maybe you've been sitting in church, maybe you've been sitting at home, maybe you've been driving in your car, it doesn't matter, when all of a sudden the Holy Spirit gets ahold of you and shows you that thing in your life that has no business being in your life. When God shows you that aspect of your life that needs to be removed, needs to be added, whatever it may be, and it bothers you because you want to keep doing it. You want to keep experiencing that. You want it to continue to be a part of your life, and so what does the Lord do? Sometimes he brings the repercussions of not being able to sleep at night, or maybe an upset stomach, or whatever it may be, but he corrects us. And one of the things I like to say about Hebrews 12 is he keeps us between the ditches. And one of the things that our culture cannot grasp today is it is discipline that keeps us from dying. We don't want to hear that, but it is true, and we die and we say, "Well, what happened," because we refused discipline our whole lives. But that's how. God works and God disciplines us, and most of us don't like God's hand on us. We don't like God saying no. We don't like God saying not there. We don't like God saying not them. You know what's worse than God telling you no? Is him not saying anything at all. When he just says, "Fine. I'll just remove myself from the equation." That's what happened in 1 Samuel 4. That's what's happening in our communities and our culture today, and God forbid if it should ever happen to you and I as individuals.

So the story ends. It's pretty dire. The glory of God has departed. The ark of the covenant is gone. There are 34,000+ men dead on the battlefield. I know what you're thinking, "Where's the glimmer of hope? Where's the shining light at the end of the tunnel?" Well, remember that nobody has done the one thing that God requires of us and that is to call out our sin and to repent of it. And so I want to conclude the message, if you have time you may want to turn over to the book of Judges 16. Remember the Israelites have gone from being under the judges to desiring a king. They've gone from being under God's direction to saying, "We want to look like the rest of the world." And in Judges 16 we have the death of one of the most famous judges in all of the Bible, his name is Samson. He's a man that according to the scriptures had great strength that somehow was located in his hair that had never been cut. If you're not familiar with chapter 16, he meets a woman by the name of Delilah and they have a relationship and she continues it because she's a spy for the Philistines. She says, "You know, what's the secret to your strength?" He continues to tell her all these type of "illustration"s that are not true, wakes up every day, whips the Philistines. New day, new problem. And finally now, guys, I'm just telling with the Bible says, it says she nagged him to the point of death. I'll let y'all discuss that one at lunch today, but nonetheless do you know what he did? He said, "Fine. Tonight, when I'm asleep, if you'll cut off all my hair it'll be over." She cuts off his hair and he wakes up the next day, it's one of the most sad stories in the Bible, it says when he woke up he did not know that the presence of God had left him. He just got up to fight like he always fought. Do you know what happened though? Didn't have any hair, didn't have any power, and the Philistines strung him up in the towers of their false god. They beat him. They mocked him. They made fun of him.

It's kind of like we're seeing the same story, second verse, right? But I want to call your attention to verse 28 of Judges 16. This is the key to 1 Samuel 4. It's the key to each and every one of our lives today. Now remember, they've cut off his hair, they have cut out his eyes, and he is tied to a building and he cannot move and they're beating him senseless. Verse 28, "And Samson," listen to this, "called unto the LORD, and said, O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray thee, and strengthen me, I pray thee, only this once, O God, that I may be at once avenged of the Philistines for my two eyes." I'm sure you know the famous rest of the story. He grabbed those pillars and the Bible says he did more in his death than he ever did in his life. What's the key? He was willing to acknowledge his false perspective. He was willing to acknowledge his propensity just to get louder and more boisterous when things were headed the wrong way. He was willing to acknowledge that death is what he deserved and he knew that because of what he had done and said, God's power and presence was removed. So what did he do? He said, "O God, please this once, for your sake and your honor will you visit me again?" It's the one thing we don't see in 1 Samuel 4 and it's the one thing that we need to see in our own lives as well.

Let's pray with their heads bowed and our eyes closed. Maybe today you're gathered here in person, maybe you're watching online, and maybe today is one of those days where the Spirit of God took the word of God and whether dramatized onstage or read alongside, it pierced your heart and you realize your erroneous perspective, you realize that you're headed the wrong direction, and you've picked up speed and you've picked up the volume, but you're just going to get to an unfortunate destination with a louder bang. And maybe today you realize that you need to do what the Israelites would not do, you need to do what Samson was willing to do, and you need to do what Romans 10 tells us we need to do. It says whoever calls on the name of the Lord will be saved. Maybe today you need to call on the name of the Lord. Maybe you feel like Samson, maybe you're bound up and you're blinded and you feel like there is no hope. He called out to God and maybe today you need to call out to God as well. The beautiful thing is, it's not about taking a course or passing a test or doing some type of religious ritual. The Bible just says if we call he will save us. He will forgive us. Maybe today is the day that you call on the name of the Lord. It doesn't have to be a certain phrase or an order of words that's repeated after myself or somebody else. This is your heart's cry today, and maybe your heart's cry will go something like this. "God, today I recognize I'm in the same place of the Israelites in 1 Samuel 4. God, I've been places I should have never been. God, I've done things I should have never done. I've said things I should have never said. And God, your word says that that is sin and that the result of the wages of my sin is death. But God, your word also says but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord. So today I believe, God, I believe I've got a sin problem that I deserve death from but Jesus Christ came so that I might have forgiveness in life. God, today I believe. I believe that Jesus Christ loved me so much that he was willing to come on my behalf. God, I believe he was willing to live a sinless life on my behalf. God, I believe he died a sacrificial death, those were my sins that were nailing him to his cross. And God, I believe that when he rose from the grave three days later, he made it possible, he made it feasible for my sins to be forgiven and my soul to be saved. God, today I don't have all the answers to the issues

and the problems and the struggles of this life but there's one thing I know, that the only one who can address and solve and fix my sin problem is Jesus Christ. So the best way, I'm asking you to forgive me and save me and I just want to turn my life over to you."

With their heads still bowed and our eyes still closed. Maybe you're that person today who for the very first time, no matter what your age or stage of life, you called on the Lord. In a moment, I'm going to pray for us, we're going to stand and sing together. We just want to invite you to step out and step forward. We have a team set aside. We'd love to hear your story, to pray with you, to pray for you. We just want to give you the time that you rightfully deserve. Or maybe today you're already saved. Maybe today you need to follow in believers' baptism. Or maybe today you say, "You know, it's time to become a part of this incredible body of believers." Or maybe you just say, "I need to be prayed with and prayed for." We'd love to be a part of it.

*Heavenly Father, as we come to this time of decision, thank you. Thank you that in this place and in this hour, God, we have the lessons from 1 Samuel 4. We don't have to end up the way they ended up. We don't have to go the path that they went. And God, I pray that much like Samson did, we would call unto you, we would cry out to you and we would seek you not just as the author, but the finisher of our faith. It is in the name of Jesus Christ we pray. Amen.*