

# Grave Words

David the Fugitive Pt.12  
1 Samuel 28:11-25 5-31-2009

Summary: This chapter shows the horror of being abandoned by God. It drove Saul to necromancy (the most extreme desperation), he was miserable, hopeless, and without courage or strength to handle the suffering. But when God turns toward you it means just the opposite – strength and joy and, especially, communication. God speaks through opening your eyes to what His Word means and how it applies. Rejoice in the access you have to God!

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1 Samuel 28:3-25 Now Samuel was dead, and all Israel had mourned for him and buried him in his own town of Ramah. Saul had expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. 4 The Philistines assembled and came and set up camp at Shunem, while Saul gathered all the Israelites and set up camp at Gilboa. 5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. 6 He inquired of the LORD, but the LORD did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. 7 Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said. 8 So Saul disguised himself, putting on other clothes, and at night he and two men went to the woman. "Consult a spirit for me," he said, "and bring up for me the one I name." 9 But the woman said to him, "Surely you know what Saul has done. He has cut off the mediums and spiritists from the land. Why have you set a trap for my life to bring about my death?" 10 Saul swore to her by the LORD, "As surely as the LORD lives, you will not be punished for this." 11 Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said. 12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!" 13 The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a god coming up out of the ground." 14 "What does he look like?" he asked. "An old man wearing a robe is coming up," she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel, and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground. 15 Samuel said to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do." 16 Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the LORD has turned away from you and become your enemy?"

**17 The LORD has done what he predicted through me. The LORD has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors--to David. 18 Because you did not obey the LORD or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the LORD has done this to you today. 19 The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines." 20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and night. 21 When the woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken, she said, "Look, your maidservant has obeyed you. I took my life in my hands and did what you told me to do. 22 Now please listen to your servant and let me give you some food so you may eat and have the strength to go on your way." 23 He refused and said, "I will not eat." But his men joined the woman in urging him, and he listened to them. He got up from the ground and sat on the couch. 24 The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked bread without yeast. 25 Then she set it before Saul and his men, and they ate. That same night they got up and left.**

## **Introduction**

In chapter 28 the writer breaks into the middle of his account about David in Philistia and jumps ahead in time to show us Saul on the night before the war. He will get back to David in chapter 29, but the Lord wanted us to read about Saul in Endor immediately after reading about David leaving Israel. He does not want us to miss the connection between David's going to the Philistines and Saul being completely abandoned by God. If he kept with the strict chronological order we might miss that. But we need to see the systematic, deliberate judgment of God on Saul. Piece by piece God is stripping away every last vestige of His grace from Saul. He had already taken Samuel away. Then David is removed.<sup>1</sup> God takes away any connection Saul might have with grace, and then drops the hammer of judgment on Saul. So here we are on the night before that fateful battle. And for Saul it is a dark night indeed.

## **The Horror of Abandonment**

### **Desperation (Goes to a medium)**

God would not respond to his prayers, so Saul reverted to plan B – which was to seek guidance through the occult. We left off last time right where Saul first shows up to the medium's house. He wants her to conjure up a spirit for him, and after a little bit of haggling she is willing.

#### *Samuel appears*

**11 Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said.**

Samuel!? Why Samuel? Samuel asks the same question in verse 15 – “If God has abandoned you, why call me up?” And Saul said, “Because I want you to give me the guidance that God will not give me.” Saul figured Samuel might give him a break. Saul is trying to bypass the punishment of God, and he seems to think Samuel will be more merciful than God.

#### *Catholicism*

Saul's strategy here is like that of many Roman Catholics. That religion teaches that it is a good thing to pray to Mary and other saints who have died – which is an effort to communicate with the dead. Praying to Mary is necromancy. And many Catholics will pray more to Mary than to the Lord Himself, because they actually believe Mary is more merciful than Jesus.

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<sup>1</sup> He “loses” David by means of his own actions. I mentioned last week that God is never mentioned at all in chapter 27. It is a rare moment in Scripture where the focus is not on what God is doing, but on what a man is doing. Our attention is directed to Saul's actions. He drove David away. That is not to suggest that God is inactive. We should assume God is still doing the same things He has been doing throughout the book. He is protecting David and punishing Saul. But the primary thing He wants us to see is the actions of Saul.

No one is more merciful than Jesus and the inability to see that is a mark of a person who does not really know the Lord. That is another difference between Saul and David. In 2 Samuel 24 God was punishing David and He let David pick his punishment from three options – a plague, a famine, or fleeing from enemies (verses 13-15).

**14 David said "Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men."**

God said, "Pick from three punishments," and David said, "I don't care – just don't give me a punishment that involves human beings. I would much rather rely on God's mercy than on man's."

Like the lazy servant who buried his talent in the ground because he thought of his master as a hard, unmerciful master. If your conception of God is that He is a hard Master, or if you would prefer to be at someone else's mercy rather than God's, you have a skewed understanding of what He is like, and it is possible you do not know Him at all.

***Was it really Samuel?***

But Saul figures he will have better luck with Samuel than with God so Saul says, "Call up the spirit of Samuel." And she says "All right, I'll give it a whirl." And she begins her process – whatever procedures she had for conducting a séance. And when she does that, all of a sudden she sees something that makes her panic. She sees something she did not expect to see, and it terrifies her and she starts screaming. I am sure they were already a little nervous being in a séance, but now with the medium screaming in fear – I am sure about now Saul's bodyguards are wishing he would have picked someone else for this mission. Down in verse 13, when she is done screaming, Saul asks her what she saw and she says it looked like a god coming up from the ground.

What did she see? Was it Samuel? Or a demon? Was it all a trick?

Both Luther and Calvin insisted there is no way this could be Samuel, because God is not going to give a wicked medium the power to control the spirits of departed saints. Plus, the text says that God would not speak to Saul, so how can we have a prophet of God speaking to him? And why would God reward Saul's wicked necromancy by allowing it to succeed? And on top of that, this spirit tells Saul that Saul is about to come and be where he is. Does that mean Saul was going to heaven or Samuel was in hell, or what?

So what is going on here? Who is this spirit? It was Samuel. And the main reason I believe that is because verse 14 says **it was Samuel.**<sup>2</sup> No matter how objectionable it seems to us theologically, there is really no way around the fact that the narrator states flatly that it was Samuel. Saul asks for a description of what she sees, she gives the description, and...

**14 ... Then Saul *knew* it was Samuel**

That phrase cannot mean "Saul thought it was Samuel, but was wrong." (And if you want a detailed explanation of why that is impossible, read the Appendix in the notes.) And not only does verse 14 say it was Samuel, but so does verse 12.

**12 And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried out with a great voice...**

Then again in verse 15 when the spirit speaks, the narrator says it was Samuel who was speaking.

Three times we are told by the narrator that it was indeed Samuel. And when the narrator in Scripture says something, you can take that to the bank – it is true. For example, when the narrator tells us that the Apostles saw the resurrected Jesus, that does not mean they *thought* they saw the resurrected Jesus, but may have been wrong. If the narrator says they saw Him, then they saw Him. And if they thought they saw something and were mistaken, the narrator will tell us that.

This spirit that appears knows the conversations between Saul and Samuel from the past, and speaks in exactly the same way Samuel spoke. He does not say anything deceptive or wrong. His words end up being perfectly accurate prophecy.

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<sup>2</sup> See the Appendix for a detailed defense of this view.

It is not impossible for God to bring the spirit of a dead person back. That is exactly what Jesus did when he raised the little girl from the dead in Luke 8.

### **Luke 8:55 Her spirit returned**

On the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17 Moses and Elijah came back to earth and were talking with Jesus.

#### ***What about the problems?***

When you interpret the Bible you do not start out with the theological problems and then adjust the interpretation to accommodate those. You figure out what the text is saying, and then you deal with any problems. So let's do that.

#### ***1) Can mediums control the souls of the saints?***

First, what about the problem of a wicked medium having power over departed saints? Did this woman really have that kind of power? I doubt it. It does not sound from the text like what happened was her doing. She was the most surprised person in the room. I believe this was a special miracle of God – a miracle of judgment.

In 1 Corinthians 10:19 Paul says that the false gods of the pagans are nothing. And then in the next verse he says they are demons. They are nothing in the sense that there is no actual god behind the idol. But there is a demon posing as a god. And no doubt it is the same way with necromancy. If you went to a séance and some voice started speaking, what is that? It is probably either trickery on the part of the medium, or it is a demon pretending to be that person.

And that would explain why she screamed. In verse 13 the NIV uses the word “spirit,” but literally what she said was, “**I see a god coming up<sup>3</sup> from the ground.**” She thinks it is a god. She had never seen anything like this before. No doubt all the other times she called someone up, what she saw was a demon pretending to be a human spirit. So all she had ever seen was disguised demons. She probably thought that was just what departed human spirits looked like. But here, for the first time in her life she sees a real departed human soul and it terrifies her. She does not even know what it is – she assumes it must be some kind of god.

#### ***2) Why would God allow it to succeed?***

What about the second argument? Why would God reward Saul's wicked necromancy by allowing it to succeed?

First of all, we have seen a number of times in this book that God sometimes punishes people for their sin by allowing them to succeed in what they are trying to do. God punished the people of Israel for the sin of asking for a king by giving them a king. God punished Saul for trying to drive David away by allowing David to be driven away. So it is not outside of the purview of how God has acted in this book to judge someone by allowing him to succeed in his sin.

However, that is not really what happened here, because Saul did not succeed. Saul's goal was to get guidance.

### **15 I have called on you to tell me what to do.**

He did not call up Samuel just to chat. And he certainly did not call him up to hear some more words of judgment. He called him up to get some guidance on how to survive this horrible crisis he was facing.

### **1 Chronicles 10:13 Saul died because he ... consulted a medium for guidance**

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<sup>3</sup> Elohim is the plural of El (god). When the Bible writers refer to Yahweh as Elohim they are using a plural form to show His majesty or complexity, but in order to keep us from thinking they mean “gods” they will use singular pronouns and verbs with it. So if they are talking about pagan idols they might say, “Elohim rise up,” but when talking about Yahweh they would say, “Elohim rises up.” Using the singular verb shows that a single Person is being referred to. In this text the writer uses a plural verb (coming up) to alert us that she is using “elohim” in a pagan, heretical way, not as a reference to Yahweh.

So Saul did not succeed. He wanted guidance but all he got was a rebuke and then a promise of irreversible doom.

**19 The LORD will hand over both Israel and you to the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also hand over the army of Israel to the Philistines."**

God says, "You want to speak with the dead, Saul? OK. You can speak to the dead and then you can join the dead.

### 3) *Saul will be with Samuel*

And that brings us to the third problem.

**19 ... tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.**

Where is that? It cannot be heaven, because people who are utterly abandoned by God do not go to heaven. And besides that, what kind of announcement of judgment would that be?

"I'm really going to punish you now Saul – you're going to heaven!"

No, I do not believe Samuel was saying that Saul would join him in heaven. What about hell? Are we to believe that righteous Samuel was in hell? The people who use that as an argument that it could not have really been Samuel still have a problem. If this is a demon, and the demon is telling Saul, "Tomorrow you will be with me in hell," the problem with that is if you solve the problem that way you create another problem. Now you have got Jonathan going to hell.

**19 ... tomorrow you and your sons will be with me.**

Remember, both Saul and Jonathan (along with the rest of his sons) died in that battle the next day.

So what are we to make of this statement? The answer is that in David's time God had not revealed much about the afterlife. They just knew that when a person dies he goes into the grave. In Genesis 37 when righteous Joseph is speaking about his death he says, "I will go down to SHEOL." Did that mean Joseph would go to hell? No, it meant he would go down to the grave. But in Numbers 16 we find the wicked went to SHEOL when they died too.

So at this time in revelatory history God had not revealed the details of the afterlife yet. They just knew that when a person dies he goes down to the grave. Samuel has been in the grave for some time, and now he is telling Saul that he is about to join him. That is simply a graphic way of saying, "You're going to die."

### ***Enlightened eyes – she can see Saul***

We already knew Saul was doomed, but here we find out when it is going to happen, and also that Saul's sons will also die. That is another evidence that this not the work of a demon. There is no deception. Everything Samuel says is true.

And the whole experience is one of this woman's eyes being opened. God opened her eyes to see the spirit of Samuel, and that spiritual action of God opening her eyes evidently enables her to also see through Saul's disguise as well.

**12 When the woman saw Samuel, she cried out at the top of her voice and said to Saul, "Why have you deceived me? You are Saul!"**

So God opens this woman's eyes to see both Samuel's spirit and who Saul was.

**13 The king said to her, "Don't be afraid. What do you see?" The woman said, "I see a god coming up from the ground." 14 "What does he look like?"**

Saul has to ask her what the spirit looks like. So either God did not open Saul's eyes to see Samuel's spirit, or she was just in another room. I think that is a real possibility because verse 21 says...

## **21 the woman came to Saul and saw that he was greatly shaken**

Whatever the reason – Saul cannot see the spirit so he asks what the spirit looks like. And she describes him in verse 14.

### **14 ...”An old man wearing a robe is coming up,” she said. Then Saul knew it was Samuel.**

Samuel’s spirit appeared in a form that looked like he looked when he had his body – evidently for the purpose of identification.

So she describes what she sees and immediately Saul knows it’s him. She mentions his robe, which was the characteristic garment of Samuel in this book.<sup>4</sup> In fact, it seems to be kind of a trademark garment for him – even from the time he was a little kid. Remember when he was a little boy and he stayed at the tabernacle and his mom came to visit him once a year?

### **1 Samuel 2:19 Each year his mother made him a little robe and took it to him when she went up with her husband to offer the annual sacrifice.**

So Hannah had him dressed up in these cute little robes. Each year he would write home just before the sacrifice and say, “Mom, I’m growing out of my robe” and she would make him the next size up and bring it to him. If it was normally only royalty that wore a robe, then no doubt he would have developed a bit of a reputation wearing this thing around the temple all the time. Everyone remembered seeing him with his cute little robe with “My little Sammy” embroidered on the back.

And we should not assume that every word is recorded here. She might have given more of a description. Maybe she said, “Yeah, it looks just like your robe – it doesn’t go all the way to the ground. It looks like someone ripped it.” Remember Saul did that to Samuel’s robe in chapter 15:27.

So Saul figures out that it is Samuel.

### **14 ...and he bowed down and prostrated himself with his face to the ground.**

I do not know what it is like to actually see the soul of a saint of the living God, but it was enough to make the woman scream and Saul collapse.

### ***The Horror of abandonment***

Now, I spent some time answering the question of who the spirit was because that is a big question people have about this text. But the time I have spent on this is a little misleading because that is not the main point of the text. A more important point is simply that fact that Saul was driven to such extreme desperation at this point. This chapter teaches us what a horror it is to be abandoned by God. And the first thing we see is the fact that it drove Saul to such extreme desperation.

If God were to turn His face away from you to the degree He did so with Saul, it would drive you out of your mind. And you would find yourself willing to engage in activity that you never dreamed you would do. I am sure Saul never dreamed he would end up involved with the occult.

### **Misery (God won’t answer me)**

That is the first thing we see in the passage. Another picture we get of the horror of being abandoned by God is from Saul’s own words in verse 15. Being abandoned by God – even for an unbeliever who has no love for God – puts the person in a state of **great distress**.

**15 ...”I am in great distress,” Saul said. ”The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do.”**

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<sup>4</sup> He is the only person besides Saul and Jonathan who appears with a robe in 1 Samuel.

Having God turn His face away is such a horror, that even for a man who has no love for God it is an unbearable experience.<sup>5</sup>

## **Hopelessness (No way out)**

So it is a horror that drives you to desperation, and it is a horror that puts you in a state of abject misery. Third, it is a horror because there is absolutely no escape. You can endure most anything if you have hope. But when there is no hope, even small suffering becomes unbearable.

And when you are depressed (which is another way of saying “when you lack hope”), even minor trials seem impossible to bear. Imagine having no hope and having the worst and most severe kind of suffering. That is what is happening with Saul.

Saul runs as far as you can run from God. He runs to the occult. He runs to the underworld – the realm of Satan and demons. And what does he find? The judging, condemning, voice of God. There is no escape.

In fact, his effort to escape just made the judgment worse. It would have been far better for Saul if David would have just let Abishai kill him in his sleep. But now Saul has to live through a period of terror before he dies. And not only does Saul have to live with fear, and not only does he know that he is about to die, but he also has a whole night to think about the fact that his sons are going to die tomorrow too. And that means no dynasty. If Saul had just died in battle, without this Endor incident, he might have died thinking, “Well, at least I know Jonathan will probably survive, and he will take the throne and my name and my house will continue in power after my death.” But God takes that possibility away.

“You and your sons are going to die tomorrow.”

This is what it is going to be like for unbelievers on Judgment Day. The horror of their situation is going to seem unbearable, the fear they will experience will buckle their knees, and there will be absolutely no way out.

## **Weakness (Saul cannot handle the truth)**

Being abandoned by God is a horror that drives you to desperation, it puts you in a state of abject misery, there is absolutely no escape, and fourth – it leaves you in a condition without strength. Look at Saul’s reaction.

### **20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone**

Saul cannot handle the truth. As soon as he hears it he collapses under the load.

### ***We need grace more than information***

The appeal of the occult is information. People want so desperately to find out what is going to happen. But what we need is not information about what is going to happen; what we need is grace to handle what is going to happen.

People are forever trying to find out what is in their future. People in the world do it through the occult – astrology, psychics, séances, tarot cards, Ouija boards. Leo Oppenheimer, in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago has studied ancient cuneiform writings, and he says that about 90% of all ancient writings ever found — secular and religious — have to do with divination. Man wants to know what is going to happen.

That is one of the pitfalls to watch out for when you study end times prophecy. If you are interested in end times prophecy ask yourself a very important question – Am I just interested in getting information about what is going to happen in the future or am I mostly doing this study because I am interested in getting the grace I need to handle whatever is going to happen?

I think one reason why we tend to be so eager to get information about the future is because of pride. We figure, “If I know what is going to happen tomorrow, then I will be able to adjust my decisions accordingly

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<sup>5</sup> Saul complains that God has left him. It did not seem to bother him before, but now that he is in need, he suddenly wants God’s presence again. That is always a sure sign of a heart that does not love God. If you love God you are distressed at any kind of estrangement from Him at any time – like David, who could longed so desperately all the time to be in the presence of God. But when you only find yourself seeking after God in times of trouble, when you need Him to do something for you, that is a sign of a heart that wants to use God but that does not love God.

and have a good outcome.” That is pride. Just knowing what is going to happen does not mean you will know the best way to prepare for it – nor does it mean you will have the power to do anything about it. Nor does it mean you will have the strength to handle it, as Saul discovered. What he needed was not information, but grace. And it is the same with us. We do not need to be beseeching God all the time, “Lord, what is going to happen?” We need to be beseeching Him for strength and grace to handle whatever is going to happen, and faith to trust Him with what is going to happen.

### ***Weakness is worse than hardship***

If you look up all the references to God turning away from a person in Scripture it is a frightening study. The consequences are devastating. For one thing it leaves you helpless and vulnerable to all kinds of disasters.<sup>6</sup> When God turns away He removes His protection. When God turns *toward* you it means He gives mercy,<sup>7</sup> blessing,<sup>8</sup> grace,<sup>9</sup> and favor;<sup>10</sup> so turning away means the removal of all that.

And that is a lot worse than it sounds, because it is much more than just hardship. Hardship is no big deal if you have enough strength to handle it. You know how sometimes when you face hardship it brings you to despair, and other times you can plow through the exact same trial with hope and joy in your heart? The difference is grace.

You can handle any suffering if you have enough strength. But the weaker you are the more horrible suffering is. Just think about it in terms of physical strength. A very elderly person who has been extremely sick might become so weak and fragile that just tripping and falling down on a carpeted floor can cause life threatening injuries. And at the same time a big strong, fit, healthy athlete could fall off the roof of his house and get up and just laugh it off. You see, your level of strength is what determines your level of suffering. And it is the same with your spirit. When you are spiritually weak, just the normal, everyday disappointments of life can reduce you to utter depression and despair. But when you are strong in your spirit you can easily endure even very difficult trials and still maintain your joy.

Hardship without the grace to handle it is the worst horror, and that is what happens when God turns His face away. Saul’s strength is gone.

### ***Fear***

And one of the symptoms of that weakness is fear.

## **5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.**

The combination of terms piled up in the Hebrew point to abject terror. Saul had faced the Philistines and other enemies in battle many, many times before over the years. But those other times he had some access to courage. This time he did not. He is facing this threat with God having turned away from him, and the result is unbearable fear.

He was so afraid he could not stand it, and was willing to risk everything to do something about it. And what is the result? Is his fear gone now that he consulted the medium? According to verse 20 he was **filled with fear**. He went there to solve the problem of his fear, and afterward he ended up with worse fear than he had to begin with. When you do not wait for the Lord, and you opt for some other alternative, that alternative will turn to gravel in your mouth. And the problem you thought you would solve becomes ten times worse.

It is hard to appreciate Saul’s suffering here because when you are not afraid it is very difficult to appreciate how miserable the feeling of real fear is. When we think about being scared of the dark, we laugh at ourselves. But when it is dark and you really do think there is some danger – that kind of fear is almost unbearable. And that is just a trivial fear. Saul is facing a very real threat – thousands of Philistines right in front of his eyes. And losing not only means suffering and death, but the defeat of the whole nation of Israel. Fear is one of the most agonizing kinds of suffering there is. And Saul is engulfed by it. He has no access to grace which means he has no access to courage. And facing a threat without courage is an unbearable trial.

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<sup>6</sup> Ez.7:22, Dt.23:14, Ez.23:18, Jer.6:8, Ps.6:4.

<sup>7</sup> Ps.119:32.

<sup>8</sup> Nm.6:26.

<sup>9</sup> Ps.25:16.

<sup>10</sup> Ps.119:79.



### ***Friendly witch***

And the fear is so overwhelming it causes Saul to physically collapse.

**23 ... He got up from the ground and sat on the couch. 24 The woman had a fattened calf at the house, which she butchered at once. She took some flour, kneaded it and baked bread without yeast. 25 Then she set it before Saul and his men, and they ate.**

You have got to love these women in 1 Samuel – they really serve up the food. It is not quite on the scale of Abigail's feast, but still – killing the fatted calf and all the rest – this is clearly a meal fit for a king (even if the king wasn't fit for the meal).

This is the only place in the Bible where you have a medium and nothing negative is said about her. In fact, if anything, she seems to be presented in a somewhat positive light. She is downright hospitable. But that is not to say what she was doing was OK. She was breaking the law of God, involving herself with the occult, and deserved to die for her sin against God. The point is simply that even as wicked as she was, *compared to Saul* she does not seem all that bad.

**25 ... That same night they got up and left.**

So after eating the last supper he would ever eat, Saul goes out into the night. You cannot help but to think of John 13:30. That was another last supper. That verse says that Judas, after eating the bread, went out into the night. And it was more than one kind of night. When Judas left that room he went out into an eternal night and soon after he found himself in outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth where he is to this day. Night falls on Saul here, and when he leaves and steps back out into the darkness it is a picture of the darkness of his soul.

## **The Blessedness of Access!**

What is the significance of this chapter for us today? Well, the most obvious application is for us to fear God. God is merciful and patient, but when His mercy and patience runs out, punishment is severe.

But that is not the only application. Equally important, if not more important, is for us to allow this account to teach us to treasure our access to God. The most important reason why we need to understand the horror of having God turn away and cut off communication is so we can appreciate the value of having God turn toward you and communicate with you.

When God turned away from Saul it resulted in spiritual weakness (no courage, no strength, no ability to handle suffering). But when God turns *toward* you you get just the opposite - strength.

**Psalm 86:16 Turn to me and ... grant your strength to your servant**

No matter how much suffering you are going through, it would crush you if it were not for the strength God is supplying you right now. Oh, how much more we would love God if we were more conscious on a minute-by-minute basis of the fact that we are experiencing what it is like to be supplied with strength from Him!

Did you know that the exact same trials you are suffering right now have brought others to suicide? And the only difference between you and them is the fact that God is granting you grace that provides strength.

And not only does it provide strength – it also provides inner peace. When two people both receive some bad news, and in one of them it causes turmoil and panic in his heart, and in the other one there is peace in his heart, then the first person suffers much, much more than the second person even if they are experiencing the exact same trial. The agony of lying awake at night worrying, and the distraction of having constant anxiety all day long – that is more painful than the trial itself. And so inner peace is a priceless treasure. And how do you get peace?

**Numbers 6:26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.**

Just like strength – the thing that determines whether or not you have access to peace is if God’s face is turned toward you or away from you.

Do not just pray for the elimination of suffering. Pray for God to turn toward you instead of away from you so you can have strength and peace. If the trials in your life all came to a halt, but you were left without strength and peace, you would still be miserable.

David understood that, which is why, for example, when David felt lonely, instead of praying for a friend he prayed for God to turn toward him.

### **Psalm 25:16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.**

David understood that when he was afflicted, in his mind the only solution was for God to turn to him. In Psalm 9:16 we see that it is only when God turns toward you that your prayers are answered. And in Malachi 3:7 we see that it is only when God turns toward you that you are restored after your own sin has brought trouble into your life.

## **Benefits of communication from God**

The list of benefits that come to you when God turns toward you is long. And perhaps the greatest of those benefits – the one that should be right at the top of the list is the one Saul complained the most about losing: communication from God.

### **15 “I am in great distress,” Saul said. “... God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me”**

When God turns away from you, you lose communication with Him – in both directions. He stops listening to your prayers, and He cuts off communication to you from Him.

That caused such great distress in the soul of Saul because God did not design the human soul to be able to handle no communication from Him. The benefit of having God listen to your prayers is obvious enough. But far more valuable is receiving communication from God. I think in many cases there is a lack of appreciation for the value of communication from God, because there is so much confusion over how God speaks to us. Very often the debate comes out this way: One side says, “God’s only communication to us concluded 2000 years ago when the last book of the Bible was written. When you read the Bible you are being spoken to by God, and that is the only time.” And the other side says, “No, God speaks mainly *apart* from the Bible. He speaks to me through my feelings and impulses and my own thoughts. He speaks through promptings and nudges and dreams new, fresh prophecies.”

Both sides are wrong. It is a grave error to assume that your own thoughts are the Word of God. The place to look for God’s Word is not in your own thoughts or anywhere else besides the Bible. God never reveals anything that is not in the Bible. Does God speak through the creation? Yes, but He does not say anything through the creation that He has not said in the Bible. Everything God has revealed is in the Bible, which means there is no reason to look outside the Bible for communication from God.

So the side that listens outside of Scripture for the voice of God is wrong. But so is the side that claims God stopped speaking when the writing of Scripture concluded, and He no longer speaks directly to individuals today. That is wrong as well. And it is also wrong to say that any time you are reading the Bible God is speaking to you. It is possible to read the Bible and be blind to the meaning and significance of it. And if you are blind to the meaning or significance of what you are reading, then you are not being spoken to by God. Saul could have read the Bible cover to cover if he wanted to and God still would not have spoken to him.

God does speak to us, directly, individually, today; and He does so by opening our eyes to understand and love Scripture. When God speaks to you through the Bible the way He does it is by opening your eyes to be able to understand the meaning, and by opening your eyes to understand the significance of that meaning for your particular situation. The Holy Spirit enables you to both understand and apply what the Bible says (not to mention directing you to the particular passage that you need at that particular time). And on top of that, He calls to your mind just the thought process that is necessary to make the right connections between the truth you just read and other truths from other passages of Scripture that you need to be thinking of in combination with this truth. And on top of all that He works in your affections and feeling and moods and emotions so that

when those truths do become clear to you, your heart will be inclined towards them and like them and embraces them rather than be turned off by them and reject them. He prepares your soul so that you will be delighted by the truth when you see it rather than being bored by it.

The first thing I do every day of my life is ask God to speak to me that day. Tomorrow God might hold back somewhat on how much He speaks to you. For whatever reason, He might not open your eyes to understand clearly what you read in Scripture. He might not give great insight into what the implications are for your life. It might be because of sin, or maybe because you are only seeking after Him in a half-hearted way, or maybe because He wants to test your faith, or maybe some other reason. But whatever the reasons, tomorrow God might speak to you in a greater way or a lesser way. And if you have any understanding at all of the literally infinite value of being spoken to and guided by God, you will be crying out to God continually to speak to you as much as possible tomorrow.

I could easily preach a series of sermons just on the value of being spoken to God, but we need to get on with studying 1 Samuel 28, so for now I will just limit it to one little paragraph of Scripture. According to Psalm 19:7-11, being spoken to by God has the effect of reviving your soul. It also makes you wise. It also gives joy to your heart. Not only that, it gives light to your eyes. It gives life and health and strength to your entire soul. It is more precious than much pure gold. It is sweeter than the sweetest, tastiest dessert. Being spoken to by God is the way to great reward.

The future is pitch black to us and we have no idea which way to go unless we have the guidance that comes through God speaking to us through His Word (Ps.119:105). Without that we are lost. God's Word is described in Scripture as being like food to your soul (1 Pe.2:2, Isa.55:1-12, Ps.119:28). It feeds and nourishes and strengthens and satisfies and brings pleasure to your soul.

When we sin we provoke God to turn away from us in some degree, and we forfeit, in some measure, communication from God. Some of you are in a period where God is speaking to you in very abundant and delightful ways. And maybe some others are under some severe chastisement from God. Because of sin in your life you have provoked God to withdraw His face from you, and the communication is greatly reduced. Or maybe it is not because of sin. Maybe God is just testing your faith, and so He has withdrawn His presence for a time. The amount and quality of communication back and forth with God varies with every person. But to whatever degree you are capable of understanding Scripture, and understanding the principles of God's Word when you hear them preached, and to whatever degree you are able to see the significance for your life, and apply them to your life, and to whatever degree you are able to discern the right path to take and know what to do in life – to that degree God is speaking to you. And if we could ever feel what it was like to be in Saul's shoes and not have that at all, then it would be a treasure that would cause uncontainable joy in our hearts.

(Taken from Psalm 119)

**How sweet are your words to our taste, Oh Lord, sweeter than honey to our mouths! Our souls are consumed with longing for your words at all times. Make your face shine upon your servants and teach us your decrees.**

**Do not snatch your word from our mouths, for we have put our hope in your laws.**

**Our souls are weary with sorrow; strengthen us according to your words. Open our eyes that we may see wonderful things in your law. Your statutes are our delight; they are our counselors.**

**Your word is a lamp to our feet and a light for our path. The unfolding of your word gives light, and so we open our mouth and pant, longing for your commands. Direct our footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over us.**

**We spoke to you and you answered us; teach us your decrees for we delight in your commands because we love them. Let us understand the teaching of your word; then we will meditate on your wonders.**

**Your decrees are the theme of our song wherever we lodge.**

**Remember your word to your servants, for you have given us hope. Our comfort in our suffering is this: Your promise preserves our lives.**

**We have promised to obey your words. We have sought your face with all our hearts; be gracious to us according to your promise. We have considered our ways and have turned our steps to your statutes. At midnight we rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.**

**It was good for us to be afflicted so that we might learn your decrees. The words from your mouth are more precious to us than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. If your law had not been our delight, we would have perished in our affliction.**

**Your commands make us wiser than our enemies, we have more insight than all our teachers, for we meditate on your statutes. We have more understanding than the elders, for we obey your precepts.**

**We have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught us.**

**Streams of tears flow from our eyes, for your law is not obeyed.**

**Trouble and distress have come upon us, but your commands are our delight. Your statutes are forever right; give us understanding that we may live. We call with all our heart; answer me, O LORD. We rise before dawn and cry for help; we have put our hope in your word.**

**Our eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that we may meditate on your promises. Hear our voice in accordance with your love.**

**We have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servants, for we have not forgotten your commands.**

**Benediction: Hebrews 1:1 In the past God spoke to our forefathers through the prophets at many times and in various ways, 2 but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and through whom he made the universe.**

**4:7, 11 So "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts." ...Let us make every effort to enter God's rest**

## Appendix: Was it really Samuel?

Is it possible that the narrator is simply speaking from the perspective of Saul - Saul *thought* it was Samuel – and the Bible writer is simply reporting it from the point of view of Saul? No. That would be possible if it were dialogue, but the beginning of verse 14 is not dialogue; it is a statement by the narrator, and the narrator in Scripture is God (speaking through the human writer). Saul asks for a description of what she sees, she gives the description, and...

### 14 ... Then Saul *knew* it was Samuel

Is it possible that that sentence could be translated, “Then Saul *thought* it was Samuel”? I wanted to consider that possibility so I looked up every use of this phrase in the Old Testament and every single time it refers to knowing something that is actually true. It never refers to believing something is true that really isn't. The word is YADA, and it means *to know*. There is a way, in the Hebrew, to communicate that – actually two ways that I found. One is just like in the English. If the thing believed is not actually true, instead of saying, “He knew it was true” they would say, “He thought it was true.”

**Genesis 38:15 When Judah saw [his sister Tamar], he thought she was a prostitute, for she had covered her face.**

That is the Hebrew word “HASHAV” (*to think*). The other was to say that in the Hebrew language is to say, “It was so in that person's eyes.” For example, in 2 Samuel 4 when the guy comes to David with the news that Saul is dead, he thought he was bringing good news to David, but he was wrong.

**2 Samuel 4:10 when a man told me, 'Saul is dead,' and thought he was bringing good news, I seized him and put him to death in Ziklag. That was the reward I gave him for his news!**

The phrase translated “he thought he was bringing good news” is literally, “He was in his own eyes like one bringing good news.”

So if the writer here wanted to say in verse 14 that Saul thought it was Samuel rather than that he knew it was Samuel, he could have done that. He didn't.

Additionally, in verse 12 the word “when” is not in the Hebrew – the translators just add it in the English to smooth out the reading. Literally verse 12 just says:

### 12 And the woman saw Samuel, and she cried out with a great voice...

Putting the word “when” in there is not wrong. It is a perfectly acceptable translation, because in the Hebrew when you put two facts in that kind of relationship to each other, it is proper to think of the second happening in response to the first. So there is nothing wrong with putting the word “when” in there, but the literal translation shows us that there really is a direct statement in verse 12 that says, **The woman saw Samuel**. It does not say she *thought* she saw Samuel. (In fact, she didn't. She did not realize it was Samuel until Saul told her. But even before Saul tells her that, the narrator tells us **the woman saw Samuel**.) Then again in verse 15 when the spirit speaks, the narrator says it was Samuel who was speaking.

It is a critically important principle for you to understand that when the narrator in Scripture says something, you can take that to the bank – it is true. If some other character in a story says something, it may or may not be true. But if the narrator says it, it is true. For example, when the narrator tells us that the Apostles saw the resurrected Jesus, that does not mean they thought they saw the resurrected Jesus, but they were wrong. If the narrator says they saw Him, then they saw Him. And if they thought they saw something and were mistaken, the narrator will tell us that.

The spirit knows the conversations between Saul and Samuel from the past, and speaks in exactly the same way Samuel spoke. He does not say anything deceptive or wrong. His words end up being perfectly accurate prophecy.

It is not impossible for God to bring the spirit of a dead person back. That is exactly what Jesus did when he raised the little girl from the dead in Luke 8.

**Luke 8:54 But he took her by the hand and said, "My child, get up!" 5 Her spirit returned, and at once she stood up.**

Her spirit had been with God in paradise, but when Jesus told her to get up her spirit returned to her body. On the Mount of Transfiguration in Matthew 17 Moses and Elijah came back to earth and were talking with Jesus

# Devotionals

## Day 1

**1 Samuel 28:11 Then the woman asked, "Whom shall I bring up for you?" "Bring up Samuel," he said.**

Why Samuel? Samuel asks the same question in verse 15 – “If God has abandoned you, why call me up?” And Saul said, “Because I want you to give me the guidance that God will not give me.” Saul figured Samuel might give him a break. Saul is trying to bypass the punishment of God, and he seems to think Samuel will be more merciful than God.

Saul’s strategy here is like that of many Roman Catholics. That religion teaches that it is a good thing to pray to Mary and other saints who have died – which is an effort to communicate with the dead. Praying to Mary is necromancy. And many Catholics will pray more to Mary than to the Lord Himself, because they actually believe Mary is more merciful than Jesus.

No one is more merciful than Jesus and the inability to see that is a mark of a person who does not really know the Lord. That is another difference between Saul and David. In 2 Samuel 24 God was punishing David and He let David pick his punishment from three options – a plague, a famine, or fleeing from enemies (verses 13-15).

**14 David said "Let us fall into the hands of the LORD, for his mercy is great; but do not let me fall into the hands of men."**

God said, “Pick from three punishments.”

And David said, “I don’t care – just don’t give me a punishment that involves human beings. I would much rather rely on God’s mercy than on man’s.”

Like the lazy servant who buried his talent in the ground because he thought of his master as a hard, unmerciful master, if your conception of God is that He is a hard Master, or if you would prefer to be at someone else’s mercy rather than God’s, you have a skewed understanding of what He is like, and it is possible you do not know Him at all. But Saul figures he will have better luck with Samuel than with God so Saul says, “Call up the spirit of Samuel.”

This chapter teaches us what a horror it is to be abandoned by God. And the first thing we see is the fact that it drove Saul to such extreme desperation. If God were to turn His face away from you to the degree He did so with Saul, it would drive you out of your mind. And you would find yourself willing to engage in activity that you never dreamed you would do. I am sure Saul never dreamed he would end up involved with the occult.

That is the first thing we see in the passage. Another picture we get of the horror of being abandoned by God is from Saul’s own words in verse 15. Being abandoned by God – even for an unbeliever who has no love for God – puts the person in a state of **great distress**.

**15 ..."I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me, and God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do."**

Having God turn His face away is such a horror, that even for a man who has no love for God it is an unbearable experience.

So it is a horror that drives you to desperation, and it is a horror that puts you in a state of abject misery. Third, it is a horror because there is absolutely no escape. You can endure most anything if you have hope. But when there is no hope, even small suffering becomes unbearable.

And when you are depressed (which is another way of saying “when you lack hope”), even minor trials seem impossible to bear. Imagine having no hope and having the worst and most severe kind of suffering. That is what is happening with Saul.

Saul runs as far as you can run from God. He runs to the occult. He runs to the underworld – the realm of Satan and demons. And what does he find? The judging, condemning, voice of God. There is no escape.

In fact, his effort to escape just made the judgment worse. It would have been far better for Saul if David would have just let Abishai kill him in his sleep. But now Saul has to live through a period of terror before he dies. And not only does Saul have to live with fear, and not only does he know that he is about to die, but he also has a whole night to think about the fact that his sons are going to die tomorrow too. And that means no dynasty. If Saul had just died in battle, without this Endor incident, he might have died thinking, “Well, at least I know Jonathan will probably survive, and he will take the throne and my name and my house will continue in power after my death.” But God takes that possibility away.

“You and your sons are going to die tomorrow.”

This is what it is going to be like for unbelievers on Judgment Day. The horror of their situation is going to seem unbearable, the fear they will experience will buckle their knees, and there will be absolutely no way out.

*Your presence, Oh Lord, is the only solution to misery. And the lack of Your presence is the only real cause of misery – at least the deepest kind of misery. Any hardship is bearable – bearable with joy even – when You turn Your face toward me. The only thing I have to fear is You turning Your face away. And I know I have provoked You to do just that. Oh Lord, please do not turn Your face away even though that’s what I deserve. Even though so many of my actions have indicated that that’s what I want. I have failed to seek hard after You, passed up opportunities to spend time alone with You, I have ignored Your grace and have pursued lesser things. I have taken the privilege of access to Your presence lightly, and I have so often sinned against You. Forgive me, dear Lord. Let me see Your face.*



## Day 2

Being abandoned by God is a horror that drives you to desperation, it puts you in a state of abject misery, here is absolutely no escape, and – it leaves you in a condition without strength. Look at Saul’s reaction.

### **20 Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone**

Saul cannot handle the truth. As soon as he hears it he collapses under the load.

The appeal of the occult is information. People want so desperately to find out what is going to happen. But what we need is not information about what is going to happen; what we need is grace to handle what is going to happen.

People are forever trying to find out what is in their future. People in the world do it through the occult – astrology, psychics, séances, tarot cards, Ouija boards. Leo Oppenheimer, in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at the University of Chicago has studied ancient cuneiform writings, and he says that about 90% of all ancient writings ever found — secular and religious — have to do with divination. Man wants to know what is going to happen.

That is one of the pitfalls to watch out for when you study end times prophecy. If you are interested in end times prophecy ask yourself a very important question – Am I just interested in getting information about what is going to happen in the future or am I mostly doing this study because I am interested in getting the grace I need to handle whatever is going to happen?

I think one reason why we tend to be so eager to get information about the future is because of pride. We figure, “If I know what’s going to happen tomorrow, then I will be able to adjust my decisions accordingly and have a good outcome.” That is pride. Just knowing what is going to happen does not mean you will know the best way to prepare for it – nor does it mean you will have the power to do anything about it. Nor does it mean you will have the strength to handle it, as Saul discovered. What he needed was not information, but grace. And it is the same with us. We do not need to be beseeching God all the time, “Lord, what’s going to happen?” We need to be beseeching Him for strength and grace to handle whatever is going to happen, and faith to trust Him with what is going to happen.

If you look up all the references to God turning away from a person in Scripture it is a frightening study. The consequences are devastating. For one thing it leaves you helpless and vulnerable to all kinds of disasters.<sup>11</sup> When God turns away He removes His protection. When God turns *toward* you it means He gives mercy,<sup>12</sup> blessing,<sup>13</sup> grace,<sup>14</sup> and favor;<sup>15</sup> so turning away means the removal of all that.

And that is a lot worse than it sounds, because it is much more than just hardship. Hardship is no big deal if you have enough strength to handle it. You know how sometimes when you face hardship it brings you to despair, and other times you can plow through the exact same trial with hope and joy in your heart? The difference is grace.

You can handle any suffering if you have enough strength. But the weaker you are the more horrible suffering is. Just think about it in terms of physical strength. A very elderly person who has been extremely sick might become so weak and fragile that just tripping and falling down on a carpeted floor can cause life threatening injuries. And at the same time a big strong, fit, healthy athlete could fall off the roof of his house and get up and just laugh it off. You see, your level of strength is what determines your level of suffering. And it is the same with your spirit. When you are spiritually weak, just the normal, everyday disappointments of life can reduce you to utter depression and despair. But when you are strong in your spirit you can easily endure even very difficult trials and still maintain your joy.

Hardship without the grace to handle it is the worst horror, and that is what happens when God turns His face away. Saul’s strength is gone.

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<sup>11</sup> Ez.7:22, Dt.23:14, Ez.23:18, Jer.6:8, Ps.6:4.

<sup>12</sup> Ps.119:32.

<sup>13</sup> Nm.6:26.

<sup>14</sup> Ps.25:16.

<sup>15</sup> Ps.119:79.

*Oh Lord, do not snatch the word of truth from my mouth, for I have put my hope in your laws. Remember your word to your servant, for you have given me hope.*

*My comfort in my suffering is this: Your promise preserves my life. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.*

*Trouble and distress have come upon me, but your commands are my delight. Your statutes are forever right; give me understanding that I may live. I call with all my heart; answer me, O LORD. I rise before dawn and cry for help; I have put my hope in your word. My soul is weary with sorrow; strengthen me according to your word.*

## Day 3

### **1 Samuel 28:5 When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart.**

The combination of terms piled up in the Hebrew point to abject terror. Saul had faced the Philistines and other enemies in battle many, many times before over the years. But those other times he had some access to courage. This time he didn't. He is facing this threat with God having turned away from him, and the result is unbearable fear.

He was so afraid he could not stand it, and was willing to risk everything to do something about it. And what is the result? Is his fear gone now that he consulted the medium? According to verse 20 he was **filled with fear**. He went there to solve the problem of his fear, and afterward he ended up with worse fear than he had to begin with. When you do not wait for the Lord, and you opt for some other alternative, that alternative will turn to gravel in your mouth. And the problem you thought you would solve becomes ten times worse.

It is hard to appreciate Saul's suffering here because when you are not afraid it is very difficult to appreciate how miserable the feeling of real fear is. When we think about being scared of the dark, we laugh at ourselves. But when it is dark and you really do think there is some danger – that kind of fear is almost unbearable. And that is just a trivial fear. Saul is facing a very real threat – thousands of Philistines right in front of his eyes. And losing not only means suffering and death, but the defeat of the whole nation of Israel. Fear is one of the most agonizing kinds of suffering there is. And Saul is engulfed by it. He has no access to grace which means he has no access to courage. And facing a threat without courage is an unbearable trial.

### **25 ...That same night they got up and left.**

So after eating the last supper he would ever eat, Saul goes out into the night. You cannot help but to think of John 13:30. That was another last supper. That verse says that Judas, after eating the bread, went out into the night. And it was more than one kind of night. When Judas left that room he went out into an eternal night and soon after he found himself in outer darkness where there is weeping and gnashing of teeth where he is to this day. Night falls on Saul here, and when he leaves and steps back out into the darkness it is a picture of the darkness of his soul.

It is interesting that Saul complains here that God has left him. It did not seem to bother him before, but now that he is in need, he suddenly wants God's presence again. That is always a sure sign of a heart that does not love God. If you love God you are distressed at any kind of estrangement from Him at any time. Like David, who longed so desperately all the time to be in the presence of God. But when you only find yourself seeking after God in times of trouble, when you need Him to do something for you, that is a sign of a heart that wants to use God but that does not love God.

*Guard Your servant, dear Lord, from treasuring Your gifts above You – or just using You to get Your gifts rather than using Your gifts to increase my delight in You. Protect me from caring about Your favor only when I need a favor. Oh Lord, I want to love You with all my heart and all my soul, and to long for You and hunger and thirst after Your presence and desire You alone.*

*As I move through the day today remind me of the horrors Saul experienced when You turned Your face away that I might learn to fear You, and in fearing You, long for You.*

## Day 4

What is the significance of this chapter for us? The most obvious application is for us to fear God. God is merciful and patient, but when His mercy and patience runs out, punishment is severe.

But that is not the only application. Equally important, if not more important, is for us to allow this account to teach us to treasure our access to God. The most important reason why we need to understand the horror of having God turn away and cut off communication is so we can appreciate the value of having God turn toward you and communicate with you.

When God turned away from Saul it resulted in spiritual weakness (no courage, no strength, no ability to handle suffering). But when God turns *toward* you you get just the opposite - strength.

### **Psalm 86:16 Turn to me and ... grant your strength to your servant**

No matter how much suffering you are going through, it would crush you if it were not for the strength God is supplying you right now. Oh, how much more we would love God if we were more conscious on a minute-by-minute basis of the fact that we are experiencing what it is like to be supplied with strength from Him!

Did you know that the exact same trials you are suffering right now have brought others to suicide? And the only difference between you and them is the fact that God is granting you grace that provides strength.

And not only does it provide strength – it also provides inner peace. When two people both receive some bad news, and in one of them it causes turmoil and panic in his heart, and in the other one there is peace in his heart, then the first person suffers much, much more than the second person even if they are experiencing the exact same trial. The agony of lying awake at night worrying, and the distraction of having constant anxiety all day long – that is more painful than the trial itself, so inner peace is a priceless treasure. And how do you get peace?

### **Numbers 6:26 the LORD turn his face toward you and give you peace.**

Just like strength – the thing that determines whether or not you have access to peace is if God's face is turned toward you or away from you.

Do not just pray for the elimination of suffering. Pray for God to turn toward you instead of away from you so you can have strength and peace. If the trials in your life all came to a halt, but you were left without strength and peace, you would still be miserable.

David understood that, which is why, for example, when David felt lonely, instead of praying for a friend he prayed for God to turn toward him.

### **Psalm 25:16 Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.**

David understood that when he was afflicted, in his mind the only solution was for God to turn to him. In Psalm 69:16 we see that it is only when God turns toward you that your prayers are answered. And in Malachi 3:7 we see that it is only when God turns toward you that you are restored after your own sin has brought trouble into your life.

*Make your face shine upon your servant and teach me your decrees. Streams of tears flow from my eyes, for your law is not obeyed. My eyes stay open through the watches of the night, that I may meditate on your promises. Hear my voice in accordance with your love.*

*I have strayed like a lost sheep. Seek your servant, for I have not forgotten your commands.*

*Turn to me and be gracious to me, for I am lonely and afflicted.*

*Answer me, O LORD, out of the goodness of your love; in your great mercy turn to me. Turn to me and restore me.*

## Day 5

The list of benefits that come to you when God turns toward you is long. And perhaps the greatest of those benefits – the one that should be right at the top of the list - is the one Saul complained the most about losing: communication from God.

### 15 “I am in great distress,” Saul said. “... God has turned away from me. He no longer answers me”

When God turns away from you, you lose communication with Him – in both directions. He stops listening to your prayers, and He cuts off communication to you from Him.

That caused such great distress in the soul of Saul because God did not design the human soul to be able to handle no communication from Him. The benefit of having God listen to your prayers is obvious enough. But far more valuable is receiving communication from God. I think in many cases there is a lack of appreciation for the value of communication from God, because there is so much confusion over how God speaks to us. Very often the debate comes out this way: One side says, “God’s only communication to us concluded 2000 years ago when the last book of the Bible was written. When you read the Bible you are being spoken to by God, and that’s the only time.” And the other side says, “No, God speaks mainly *apart* from the Bible. He speaks to me through my feelings and impulses and my own thoughts. He speaks through promptings and nudges and dreams new, fresh prophecies.”

Both sides are wrong. It is a grave error to assume that your own thoughts are the Word of God. The place to look for God’s Word is not in your own thoughts or anywhere else besides the Bible. God never reveals anything that is not in the Bible. Does God speak through the creation? Yes, but He does not say anything through the creation that He has not said in the Bible. Everything God has revealed is in the Bible, which means there is no reason to look outside the Bible for communication from God.

So the side that listens outside of Scripture for the voice of God is wrong. But so is the side that claims God stopped speaking when the writing of Scripture concluded, and He no longer speaks directly to individuals today. That is wrong as well. And it is also wrong to say that any time you are reading the Bible God is speaking to you. It is possible to read the Bible and be blind to the meaning and significance of it. And if you are blind to the meaning or significance of what you are reading, then you are not being spoken to by God. Saul could have read the Bible cover to cover if he wanted to and God still would not have spoken to him.

God does speak to us, directly, individually, today; and He does so by opening our eyes to understand and love Scripture. When God speaks to you through the Bible the way He does it is by opening your eyes to be able to understand the meaning, and by opening your eyes to understand the significance of that meaning for your particular situation. The Holy Spirit enables you to both understand and apply what the Bible says (not to mention directing you to the particular passage that you need at that particular time). And on top of that, He calls to your mind just the thought process that is necessary to make the right connections between the truth you just read and other truths from other passages of Scripture that you need to be thinking of in combination with this truth. And on top of all that He works in your affections and feeling and moods and emotions so that when those truths do become clear to you, your heart will be inclined towards them and like them and embraces them rather than be turned off by them and reject them. He prepares your soul so that you will be delighted by the truth when you see it rather than being bored by it.

The first thing I do every day of my life is ask God to speak to me that day. Tomorrow God might hold back somewhat on how much He speaks to you. For whatever reason, He might not open your eyes to understand clearly what you read in Scripture. He might not give great insight into what the implications are for your life. It might be because of sin, or maybe cause you are only seeking after Him in a half-hearted way, or maybe because He wants to test your faith, or maybe some other reason. But whatever the reasons, tomorrow God might speak to you in a greater way or a lesser way. And if you have any understanding at all of the literally infinite value of being spoken to and guided by God, you will be crying out to God continually to speak to you as much as possible tomorrow.

I could easily preach a series of sermons just on the value of being spoken to by God, but we need to get on with studying 1 Samuel 28, so for now I will just limit it to one little paragraph of Scripture. According to Psalm 19:7-11, being spoken to by God has the effect of reviving your soul. It also makes you wise. It also

gives joy to your heart. Not only that, it gives light to your eyes. It gives life and health and strength to your entire soul. It is more precious than much pure gold. It is sweeter than the sweetest, tastiest dessert. Being spoken to by God is the way to great reward.

The future is pitch black to us and we have no idea which way to go unless we have the guidance that comes through God speaking to us through His Word (Ps.119:105). Without that we are lost. God's Word is described in Scripture as being like food to your soul (1 Pe.2:2, Isa.55:1-12, Ps.119:28). It feeds and nourishes and strengthens and satisfies and brings pleasure to your soul.

When we sin we provoke God to turn away from us in some degree, and we forfeit, in some measure, communication from God. Some of you are in a period where God is speaking to you in very abundant and delightful ways. And maybe some others are under some severe chastisement from God. Because of sin in your life you have provoked God to withdraw His face from you, and the communication is greatly reduced. Or maybe it is not because of sin. Maybe God is just testing your faith, and so He has withdrawn His presence for a time. The amount and quality of communication back and forth with God varies with every person . But to whatever degree you are capable of understanding Scripture, and understanding the principles of God's Word when you hear them preached, and to whatever degree you are able to see the significance for your life, and apply them to your life, and to whatever degree you are able to discern the right path to take and know what to do in life – to that degree God is speaking to you. And if we could ever feel what it was like to be in Saul's shoes and not have that at all, then it would be a treasure that would cause uncontainable joy in our hearts.

(Taken from Psalm 119)

***How sweet are your words to my taste, sweeter than honey to my mouth! Open my eyes that I may see wonderful things in your law. My soul is consumed with longing for your laws at all times.***

***I have not departed from your laws, for you yourself have taught me. Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path. The unfolding of your words gives light; I open my mouth and pant, longing for your commands.***

***Your statutes are my delight; they are my counselors. I recounted my ways and you answered me; teach me your decrees. Let me understand the teaching of your precepts; then I will meditate on your wonders for I delight in your commands because I love them. Your decrees are the theme of my song wherever I lodge.***

***I have promised to obey your words. I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. At midnight I rise to give you thanks for your righteous laws.***

***Your commands make me wiser than my enemies, for they are ever with me. I have more insight than all my teachers, for I meditate on your statutes. I have more understanding than the elders, for I obey your precepts.***

***Direct my footsteps according to your word; let no sin rule over me.***