

The Curse of Answered Prayer

Introduction to the life of David Pt.3: Israel rejects God as king

1 Samuel 8-9,12

Summary: Even though God had revealed that eventually Israel was to have a king, their request for a king was evil because it was a rejection of God as their king (they wanted a man who could deliver them from military threats without having to repent and depend on God). God warned them that a king would add hardship, and yet their wellbeing would still depend completely on God. They said “No!” to the warning and so God punished them by answering their prayer. He gave them tall, impressive, godless, inept Saul. But chapter 12 gives hope for all of us who have made similar bad decisions. We are not permanently separated from God’s plan for us – even after Saul became king they could still have God’s blessing if they were loyal to Him.

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Introduction

We are in the midst of a very quick overview of the first half of 1 Samuel preparing ourselves for an in-depth study of the life of David. We left off last week at the end of chapter seven, where the Israelites have about the sweetest deal they ever had going. They came to God in as wonderful and genuine an expression of repentance as you will see anywhere in Jewish history, and God responded by giving them total deliverance from their enemies on all sides. But before long they took their eyes off the LORD.

That is often the way it goes when God blesses us. We have some massive trial, we beg God to deliver us from it, and He does, and before long we find that the small trials in our lives have become intolerable. It is like a guy who is in agony because of a broken foot, and God does surgery and restores him to perfect health, and not long after that the man is suicidal because he has some pebbles in his shoe. No matter how many trials and troubles God takes away from our lives, until we learn how to derive all our joy from God alone, the level of misery stays the same. As soon as God takes away the huge trial, your soul just readjusts its perspective until the small trial is just as big. No matter how many trials and troubles and headaches God removes from your life, and no matter how many of your prayers He answers, if you do not learn how to find joy in God alone you will not find joy at all. And whatever remaining trials there are, no matter how tiny, will start to seem intolerable after a while.

And that is what happened to Israel. They have it made. God gave them everything they ever asked for and more. But they soon get restless and start wanting something different. Bottom line, they got tired of God and wanted a different king. And so in chapter eight they reject God.

I. The people reject God as king (chapter 8)

Having a king was in God's plan, so what is wrong with their request?

1 When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as judges for Israel. **2** The name of his firstborn was Joel and the name of his second was Abijah, and they served at Beersheba. **3** But his sons did not walk in his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

4 So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. **5** They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

Now, if you stop right there the request sounds reasonable enough, doesn't it? God hated rulers who took bribes and perverted justice. So what is so bad about not wanting that? And what is so bad about desiring a king?

The answer is nothing is wrong with either one of those. In fact, God had made it clear that it was His plan to eventually have a king. Way back in Genesis 49:10 Jacob prophesied that the kings over Israel would come from the tribe of Judah. We see it again in Numbers 24:7,17. There was even a section in the Law of Moses that regulated the way the Israelites were to ask for a king when the time came, and some things that king was to avoid. (Dt.17:14-20) Hannah even mentioned a coming king in her prayer back in chapter two – a whole generation before anyone was even asking for a king.

This is the very last line in her prayer:

1 Sam.2:10 He will give strength to his king and exalt the horn of his anointed.

So it was clearly God's plan for Israel to eventually have a king. There was nothing wrong with asking for a king per se. And there is certainly nothing wrong with them objecting to dishonest judges who took bribes. But if you look closely at the context you see pretty quickly that the corruption of Samuel's sons was not the real reason. If their concern were really just about having unrighteous judges, why not just ask God for righteous judges? Or a righteous king? They don't say anything about a righteous king. So what is really going on here?

They were rejecting God as king

6 But when they said, "Give us a king to lead us," this displeased Samuel; so he prayed to the LORD. **7** And the LORD told him: "Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. **8** As they have done from the day I brought them up out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods, so they are doing to you.

The real reason for all this is they are tired of God as their king and they want a different king. All through the period of the Judges, whenever they were overrun by enemies, they would finally be driven to repent of their sin and return to God with all their heart, and God would deliver them. What they want now is to get the deliverance without having to go through the repentance. Look down at verse 19.

"We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

When Israel was fully repentant they never lost. But they wanted a way to win without needing to rely on wholehearted commitment to the LORD. The real reason they wanted a king was not because of

Samuel's sons. It was because they were afraid of Nahash. Nahash was the king of the Ammonites. The Philistines were the big threat from the west, and the Ammonites were the big threat from the east. And in chapter 12 we find out that the real impetus behind the call for a king was the fact that the Ammonites were threatening to attack Israel. (12:12) Israel wanted a way to be safe from attack without having to go through the ordeal of repentance and returning to God.

Having a king would be a hardship – high taxes, the draft, oppressive laws, but all that is a lot easier than giving God your whole heart. External things are so much easier than internal. That is why legalism is so popular everywhere in the world.

And it even tends to creep into our lives as Christians. If I want to find joy in the Lord, seeking Him earnestly with my whole heart day after day, all day long requires so much effort, and it is hard to believe it is really going to work, and it is just so much easier to just buy a condo somewhere really fun. Or to cough up \$10,000 and get some really cool thing. Even if it costs \$100,000 that is still a lot cheaper and easier than giving my whole heart. For Israel it was military victory and international respect that they wanted to get some way besides through faithfulness to God. For us it is financial security or fun or happiness or rest or whatever. And when we do that we are doing exactly the same thing Israel did in 1 Samuel eight – rejecting God as our security/joy/rest, etc.

So often we have so little trust in God's promises to protect us and to provide all we need. So we appoint some king Saul to take care of us – some savior that we can see and control. We set up our career, or family, we get a great education, some really marketable skills, we do some shrewd investing, buy some great insurance policies, all these little king Saul's in our lives so that we are protected in front and in back and from every side. We think these little king Sauls – these little human efforts to protect us and provide happiness - will hold against any invasion or attack. And often we don't wake up from the folly of that until some massive disaster comes crashing through all our defenses. The phone rings and it's news you never dreamed you would ever hear. The doctor tells you, "It's inoperable. I'm sorry, there's nothing we can do." Or you lose a child or a loved one. Or you come home one day and your wife has her bags packed and nothing will change her mind – she's taking the kids and leaving. Or some addiction takes over and destroys your life and none of your little saviors you have in place can do anything to help you. Your career, your skills, your education, your plans, your savings, your insurance – suddenly you can see how absolutely powerless all of those are to really take care of you. Only then do you realize that cardboard fortresses don't hold up against hurricanes.

1 Samuel 12:21 Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless.

It is true that it was God's desire all along to establish a kingship in Israel. But God's plan was for that king to be a vice-regent for God. He was to serve only as the human instrument of God's kingship. God is the only real deliverer and the only real authority.

God's merciful warning

So Samuel comes to God with this request from the people. And God tells Samuel, "If I grant their request, it will mean a lot of hardship for them."

⁹ ...warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will do."

¹¹ Samuel said, "This is what the king who will reign over you will do: He will take your sons and make them serve with his chariots and horses, and they will run in front of his chariots. ¹² Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties, and others to plow his ground and reap his harvest, and still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. ¹³ He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers. ¹⁴ He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his attendants. ¹⁵ He will take a tenth of your grain and of your vintage and give it to his officials and attendants. ¹⁶ Your menservants and maidservants and the best of your cattle and donkeys he will take for his own use. ¹⁷ He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸ When that

day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day."

Not only are all our little king Sauls that we put in place not able to really protect us or rescue us – but very often we end up needing to be rescued from them! The very job or spouse or career you were trusting in to make you happy ends up being a disaster that you need to be rescued from!

So God says to the people, “If I grant your request it is going to be miserable for you.” In fact, when you read chapter 12 it is kind of comical. Because in chapter 12 Samuel says, “okay, now that you have a king, here’s the deal: and he gives them all the requirements for God’s blessing. And it is all the same requirements as before they had a king. Now that they have a king, they have all the taxes and draft and hardship and oppression that will come from the king, and still, if they want to win any battles or have any prosperity or wellbeing, they will have to be faithful to God – just like before! And if they are not completely faithful to God they and their king will be swept away. So if God grants their request they will be taking on a whole lot of new headaches, and they will gain exactly nothing. And so God warns them and explains all this to them. And we get their response in verse 19.

The people’s answer: NO! (Watch out for evil desire)

¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us.

God told them something and they just flat out said “No!” They refused to believe the warning. They wanted a king so bad, they did not want to be confused with the facts. That is what desire can do in the human heart. When your soul fixes its attention on something – some state of affairs that it really wants, and your soul is convinced that this thing will satisfy its longings and cravings, almost nothing can derail it from pursuing that desire. Even if you provide irrefutable proof that this thing will not make you happy and will not be what the soul expects it to be, it will not matter. Once covetousness and greed take over the heart, they commandeer the mind and refuse to allow any deviation from the quest to obtain the object of their desire.

Most people think their mind is in full control of all their reasoning. But your mind is mostly a slave to your affections. When your soul really, really likes something or someone, it will bend the facts enough to allow your mind to decide that that someone or something is good. And when your soul really, really dislikes something or someone, it will manipulate the truth enough to make that thing always appear bad. We are baffled at the Israelites, and wonder, “Why would you want a king when the king will bring you only trouble and no benefit?” And yet we do exactly the same thing every time we sin – any time we prefer anything over God.

This should make us realize how incredibly dangerous evil desires are! Once they take over not even the mind can overcome them. They can only be overcome by faith – truly, genuinely believing God’s warnings and promises. But the more an evil desire is nursed and cultivated, the more impossible faith becomes. Oh how important it is that we guard our hearts from evil desires and covetousness! Be very careful before you let your heart to set itself on a desire. Take some time to carefully and honestly examine which desires you have right now that are in that category, or that are moving in that direction. Is there some covetous desire that is driving me so much that it is hindering you from wholeheartedly embracing some principle in God’s Word? Are there truths that God has revealed that you are not understanding because your heart does not want to give up its belief that some object of its desire will really satisfy? Any time you find yourself having a powerful, strong desire for some earthly thing, let that set off warning signals in your heart.

Not being convinced by God’s warnings (or promises) is a rejection of God

So Israel got carried away with a desire for something that would not give them what they thought it would give them. And they wanted it so bad they actually rejected God in favor of that thing.

8:18-19 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day."

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us.

10:19 But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, 'No, set a king over us.'

So in 8:19 the people say, "No!" And in 10:19 Samuel tells them that when they said that they rejected God. Now keep in mind what it was they said no to. It was not in response to a command. They said no to a warning. God told them that if they went ahead with pursuing a king there would be some negative consequences, and they said, "No!" They did not believe God. They thought that either those consequences wouldn't really happen, or if they did happen they would be worth it. When God warns us not to do something in the Bible lest we suffer some consequence, and we think, "That's okay, I will just suffer the consequence," or we think, "I doubt that consequence will really happen," we are rejecting God. Consider one example of a warning in Scripture.

Heb.3:12 See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you will be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Do you read a warning like that and truly believe that for you, developing a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God is a real possibility? And that unless you have daily encouragement from other believers you will likely become hardened by sin's deceitfulness and fall into apostasy? Are there any warnings in Scripture that do not have much effect on your heart? In the moment of temptation do you find yourself thinking, "I know there will be consequences to this, but I am willing to suffer those consequences"? When we think that way we are saying "no" to God's warning. It is obvious to us that saying "no" to a command is serious, but it is also important to realize that saying "no" to a warning is also a very serious rejection of God.

God is not an inept parent who doesn't know how to come up with a punishment that is really painful enough to make it so the pleasure of the sin really isn't worth it. There is no sin, no matter how pleasurable and no matter how seemingly innocent – no sin that is worth the consequence. The price tag of loss of fellowship with God is so high that not even the most pleasurable sin in the world is worth it – even if it is the most minor of all sins and it is only the slightest loss of fellowship. It may seem worth it in the short run, but in the long term it will never be worth it.

And the same principle applies to God's promises. When God promises some reward, and that promise of reward is not adequate to motivate my heart, I am rejecting God through unbelief. I am saying "no" to His promise.

And the only way to really convince your soul that the loss of fellowship is never worth it, and that forfeiting of what is promised is never worth the pleasure of any sin, is to have greater and greater experiences of fellowship with God. God is so incredibly good and pleasing and delightful and satisfying to the human soul, that the slightest bit of fellowship with Him is better and more desirable and pleasing and satisfying than the most pleasurable sin in the world. What a wonderful life He has given us! To be the son or daughter of a God like that – to walk through life with constant access to the presence of a God whose grace, even if you experience only the tiniest measure of it, is worth far more than 1000 repetitions of the most intense pleasure sin or anything in this world is capable of delivering – to walk through life with constant, 24/7 access to a God like that – what an amazing joy this life is!

II. The punishment: answered prayer

So they say no to God's face and rejecting Him as their king in chapter eight, and in chapter nine God punishes them. God was willing to be their king. He was willing to graciously rule over them, and they refused. Just like centuries later when God came down in human flesh and the people said, "We do not want this man to be king over us" (Lk.19:14) When given a choice they shouted "Give us Barabbas!" (Jn.18:40) And "We have no king but Caesar." (Jn.19:15) Give us Ceasar, give us Barabbas, give us Saul – anyone but God.

And so for this treason God punishes them. And He punishes them by answering their prayer and granting their deepest desire. The punishment is the granting of the thing they wanted more than anything in the world. They wanted a king just like that nations around them had, so God gives them Saul.

From Benjamin

We find out in verse one of chapter nine that Saul was from the tribe of Benjamin. That tribe was not known for its godliness. The book of Judges ends with the most sickening, disgusting description of the depths of depravity to which Israel had descended at that time; And the tribe of Benjamin as at the very bottom of it. They were almost completely exterminated by the rest of the tribes for an incredibly wicked incident, in which men from Benjamin surrounded a house so they could rape a man who was traveling through with his concubine. Instead he sent his concubine out and they raped her all night until she died from her injuries. So then the guy chops her body into pieces and mails the pieces to all the other tribes. And when the other tribes want to carry out some justice on the murders the rest of the tribe of Benjamin would rather go to war against the rest of the tribes than give those men over. And so war ensues and Benjamin is almost completely exterminated. All that to say that Benjamin is not exactly known for turning out Israel's most godly, righteous men.

The desire to be like the world

That is the bad news. But the good news is in verse two

² He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites-- a head taller than any of the others.

He may not be godly, but at least he is tall. And for the people of Israel that is the kind of thing that really mattered. God was giving them just what they asked for. Usually when height is mentioned it is a description of Israel's enemies. The reason the first generation of Israel was so afraid to take the Promised Land was because the people were so big. They wanted a king just like the nations around them, and God granted their request. They looked at the wicked, vicious, selfish, greedy, despotic, fascist dictators in the Gentile nations, and they looked at humble, godly, righteous, selfless, holy Samuel, and they said, "We want what they have."

The most glorious thing about Israel was the fact that they were set apart from the nations for God. They were a holy nation, a royal priesthood, a people of God's own possession. That was their glory. And they said, "We want to be just like the nations." The only thing that was good about them they wanted to get rid of.

Keep that in mind, because now God has made the Church a holy nation, royal priesthood and people of God's own possession. That is important to remember because the trend today is to go so far in becoming all things to all men that we sacrifice holiness in order to reach the lost. We are not doing the lost any favors with that kind of compromise.

There is a lust for acceptance that lurks in the heart of much of the Church. We want to be taken seriously by the world. We want their scholars to respect our scholars, so now the conservatives are buying into more and more of the liberal perspectives. Meanwhile the liberals are not budging at all in our direction. We do not want to be thought of as uneducated or superstitious, so we try to mix evolutionist dogmas into our interpretations of Genesis. Many pastors these days are so afraid someone will think they are not cool, and so they use profanity and obscenity in their sermons. We are afraid people at work might think we are "holier than thou," and so we eliminate holiness from our conversation altogether. There is this bizarre lust in the heart of God's fine china to be like the paper plates. The holy nation of Israel wanted to be like all the nations and have a human king they could rely on instead of God. And so God finally says, "okay," and gives them a big, tall paper plate named Saul.

Ignorance of who Samuel was

When we first meet Saul in chapter nine he is chasing some donkeys. It is kind of funny. The great leaders of God's people in the OT are usually skilled shepherds. Saul appears to be a not-so-skilled donkey wrangler. He chases around looking for them for miles and miles and never does find them. And just as David's skill with the sheep was a picture of His ability to lead God's people, so Saul's debacle with the donkeys was also a preview of coming attractions.

When the servant suggests that they go ask Samuel for guidance, amazingly, Saul had never even heard of Samuel! Samuel was the greatest prophet/priest/judge since Moses. He had been leading the nation of Israel Saul's entire life. Samuel lived about five miles from Saul's home. And Saul had never heard of him. Saul must have been an incredibly secular person with absolutely zero spiritual interest.

But the servant suggests that they ask the prophet where the donkeys are. (Don't worry about righteousness or salvation or the kingdom of God or eternal life or forgiveness of sins. Just use a prophet of the living God to find out where your lost donkeys are. It is amazing sometimes how we will bypass eternal riches and glory so we can use God to get some worthless, temporal thing.)

The calamity of answered prayer

So this is what God gives the people – the answer to all their prayers. There are a lot of threats in life; a lot of dangerous things that can do you great harm. But one of the most dangerous of all is answered prayer. One of the most disastrous things that can happen to you is for God to answer your prayers and grant you what you most desire - if you pray like the Israelites prayed. You see, there are two very different kinds of praying. One is the Mark 14 type and the other is the James 4 type.

Mark 14:34-36 "My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death," ... 35 Going a little farther, he fell to the ground and prayed that if possible the hour might pass from him. 36 "Abba, Father," he said, "everything is possible for you. Take this cup from me. Yet not what I will, but what you will."

Jesus sincerely desired God's plan more than He desired the strongest compulsion of His flesh. Contrast that with the James 4 kind.

Jas.4:1 What causes fights and quarrels among you? Don't they come from your desires that battle within you? ² You want something but don't get it. You kill and covet, but you cannot have what you want. You quarrel and fight. You do not have, because you do not ask God. ³ When you ask, you do not receive, because you ask with wrong motives, that you may spend what you get on your pleasures. ⁴ You adulterous people, don't you know that friendship with the world is hatred toward God?

Mark 14 praying desires the plan of God above any impulse in my own flesh. James four praying is oblivious to God's plan and only wants to use prayer to get the immediate impulses of the flesh

satisfied. And one of the most horrific, disastrous things that could ever happen to you is for God to become so angry over your James four type praying that He starts granting your requests. We are like the Israelites – we want something so bad, and it seems like it would make us so happy, and we have no idea that what we are praying for is a Saul; A big, tall, beautiful, good-looking, impressive, *curse* that we will someday beg God to deliver us from. How can you possibly know if something you want that seems so good and so wonderful would eventually turn out to be a horrible curse on your life? You can't. No one knows that but God. Which is why Jesus so preferred God's plan even to His strongest contrary desires.

One really great thing about being a child of God is that if you use the Mark 14 type praying instead of the James 4 type, and you really do desire God's plan more than your immediate impulses, you can be assured with 100% certainty that God will never, ever grant you what you are asking for when what you are asking for will turn out to be a curse. What a blessing that we can trust God to say no to all our bad prayers when we pray with Mark 14 type praying! But if we pray with the Israelites' 1 Samuel 8, James four kind of attitude, God may very well punish us by granting our request for poison. Sometimes when we put our trust in something besides God, God will punish us by allowing that very thing we put our trust in to bring disaster into our lives so we can learn that He is the only Savior and that every substitute is worthless.

III. Second chance (Ch.12)

So this is pretty bad for Israel. What do you do when you are in a fix like this – where you have made a really bad decision, and now there are some lifelong consequences? God showed you His will, and you rejected it and took another way, and there are permanent aspects to this wrong path you chose. For example, suppose a Christian gets a sinful divorce. Or suppose a believing girl falls in love with a guy who claims to be a Christian, but deep down she knows he really is not, and now she is looking at a whole lifetime of pain with an unbelieving spouse that is not anything like what he was when they were dating. What do you do when God warns you and you do not listen and do not listen, and you end up making a choice that is the opposite of God's desire for your life, and now there is no way out? Does that mean you are permanently outside of God's will? You cannot undo the sinful divorce. You cannot leave your unbelieving husband and find the Christian guy that you were supposed to marry. You cannot turn back the clock. So does that mean there is no way back into God's favor?

Israel had made their bed, and now they had to lie in it, and it wasn't going to be any fun. So there was going to be some pain that would be ongoing – but does that mean they were forever separated from God's blessing? No! God is merciful! Let's peek ahead to Samuel's speech in chapter 12.

¹² ...you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'-- even though the LORD your God was your king. ¹³ Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the LORD has set a king over you.

And there stood Saul as a big, tall monument to their disobedience and rejection of God. Now, listen to the mercy of God:

14 If you fear the LORD and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the LORD your God-- good! 15 But if you do not obey the LORD, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

24 But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. 25 Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away."

God says, "You rejected me and would not listen to my warnings and chose another savior besides Me to rescue you. However, if you and your little savior fear and serve and obey Me, I will still take care of you." God gives them another chance! Even though they rejected Him, He tells them that if they turn back to Him He will bless them and their king. It will not be as pleasant as it would have been had they not sought another king instead of God, because now they have to live with the hardship of having a king, but God is willing to bless them nonetheless if they will turn back to Him.

Now, He does require a wholehearted return. It would have to be like the one back in chapter seven – not just some kind of partial repentance. He speaks of fear, service, obedience, and loyalty – addressing their actions, attitudes, motives, emotions – their whole heart. But if they do return to Him wholeheartedly, He will bless them again. God is so incredibly merciful!

No matter what bad decisions you have made in your past – no matter how horribly you have messed things up, there is never a time when you are irretrievably separated from the blessing of God if you repent with all your heart. Why? Why does He keep taking us back after we rebel against Him again and again? The answer is in verse 22.

22 For the sake of his great name the LORD will not reject his people, because the LORD was pleased to make you his own.

Some of you probably have the next verse underlined in your Bible.

23 As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD by failing to pray for you. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.

It would have been a sin for Samuel not to pray for these people. Why? Because of verse 22. The reason it would be such a horrendous evil for Samuel not to pray for those people was because God's mercy and kindness to those people was for the sake of His great name. So however much Samuel cares about God's great name, that is how earnestly he should pray for mercy for them. And however zealous God is for His own great name, that is how sure it is that He will bless His people.

None of your past sins can prevent God from blessing your life again, because the reason He blesses you is for the sake of His great name.

24 But be sure to fear the LORD and serve him faithfully with all your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. 25 [because] if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king (or your house, or husband, or money, or job, or whatever it is you have looked to for your security and joy and satisfaction and wellbeing – both you and your Saul) will be swept away."

The people needed to learn that the real threat was not the Philistines or the Ammonites, it was their own hearts. The things you are afraid of – the things for which you are tempted to look to other means besides God to save you - those are not any real threat. The only threat in your life is your own heart and its tendency to fail to seek God. But God is merciful.

Hosea 6:1-3 "Come, let us return to the LORD. He has torn us to pieces but he will heal us; he has injured us but he will bind up our wounds. 2 After two days he will revive us; on the third day he will restore us, that we may live in his presence. 3 Let us know the LORD; let us press on to know him. As surely as the sun rises, he will appear; he will come to us like the winter rains, like the spring rains that water the earth."

Benediction: 1 Ti.6:15,16 God, the blessed and only Ruler, the King of kings and Lord of lords, 16 who alone is immortal and who lives in unapproachable light, whom no one has seen or can see. To him be honor and might forever. Amen.

Devotionals

King

1 Samuel 8 Day 1

1 Samuel 8:5 They said to him, "You are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have."

The people asked for a king during a period that was close to the ideal picture of what it was like to have Yahweh as their king. It was a period of wonderful blessing and peace. The Philistines had been subdued for years – ever since the day Israel returned to the LORD. Israel had peace with all the Canaanite peoples as well. The situation of having God as a king was working out wonderfully.

But over time it started to seem like the benefits were coming to them “naturally” instead of from God. So when their leader got old, they wanted a human mechanism to continue their blessing. They wanted a military and a military leader they could see.

1 Samuel 8:19-20 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles."

The more you drift from closeness to God the more you start to desire earthly securities. When you are walking closely with the LORD you can sense that you are secure in Him. But the farther you drift from Him the less you feel His protective hand (and rightly so), and the more you want some alternative security.

Another reason they wanted a king was so they could be like the other nations. God wanted them to be set apart, but they wanted to fit in. They wanted a national identity they could be proud of.

1 Samuel 8:7 The LORD said to Samuel, "Listen to the voice of the people in regard to all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me from being king over them."

In desiring these things they were rejecting God as king. When we are not content for God to provide us with something apart from a tangible, visible means, we are rejecting God.

Examples:

- I want to be married or to have friends because I want the joy God provides through a spouse or friends, but I am not content to receive that same joy from God if it doesn't come through a spouse or friends.

- I want a good paying job because I want the provision and security and blessing that God provides through a good, reliable paycheck, but I am not content to receive that same provision, security, and blessing from God if it doesn't come through the kind of job I want.
- I want a nice new _____ because I want the satisfaction of soul that God gives through nice new _____'s, but I'm not content to receive that same satisfaction of soul from God if it doesn't come through a nice new _____.

The human heart wants to be reigned over. We naturally desire someone to tell us what to do and where to go, and we delight to obey and we delight in the favor we get from that king when we do obey. This is true even for rebellious teenagers, who will do almost anything to fit into whichever crowd they desire to fit into. The king they love to have reigning over them is the group of peers they want acceptance from. When demands and ultimatums come down from that "king" they snap to attention and wholeheartedly obey. If the law is you have to spend your own, hard-earned money on a certain brand of shoes, they obey willingly and eagerly. Even the woman who finds submission to her husband so incredibly difficult usually delights to submit to authority. She wants to follow the lead and win the approval and acceptance from some authority – whether it be her neighborhood friends, or the Hollywood culture, or just society in general. They dictate to her that she has to look a certain way and she will jump through hoop after hoop to obey their every requirement.

The question is not whether we will submit to authority. It is not even whether we will delight in submitting to authority. The question is which authority do we delight in submitting to?

Dear Father, my God and my King, teach me to delight in being reigned over by You alone. Teach me to delight in being told what to do and where to go by someone such as You – a King who is so glorious and so wise and who cares about me and takes better care of His own than any other "king." You provide security and safety and guidance and protection and provision and care for those who bow before Your marvelous rule. You don't need human means. You protect me from countless unseen threats and dangers and I don't even know it. When a king would win a war through raising an army and taking casualties, You might win the same way just by pulling few strings in the heart of the enemy king so that he does not attack in the first place. That is so much better, but so invisible. Instead of providing all the money I think I need, You might provide for me by making my washer and dryer last an extra 10 years or holding my transmission together a lot longer than it would have held together if an unbeliever owned it, or killing that first cancer cell in my body before it began to grow. What foolishness, dear Lord, for me to prefer to have the transmission go out and have some cash on hand!

Your reign is sweet to my taste, dear God. I delight to be directed and led by You. I delight in being told what to do by You. I delight to obey You. It is a grand and glorious privilege to be a subject in Your kingdom, and to even stand in Your very courts. Teach me to delight in it still more. Teach me, at the moment of temptation, not to see some grey, rationalized potential option that may be acceptable. Instead let me see a clear fork in the road. When I am tempted to entertain thoughts that are not godly, let me see a stark, clear choice – be

reigned over by God or be reigned over by the flesh, world and devil. And let my heart leap at the thought of the former, and recoil at the thought of the latter. Each time I'm tempted today, dear God, let me realize that it is a moment when You are willing to be a King to me, and to be eager and happy to take advantage of the opportunity to be ruled by such a King in that moment.

Help me to realize that each time I respond to Your authority and guidance, that is much more than a mere following of a rule. It is a personal interaction of fellowship with You, in which You guide and I follow. Dear Lord, don't let me be oblivious to Your presence even in the very moment I am obeying You. Let me thoroughly enjoy it for what it really is – an actual, personal, direct experience of God Himself!

And teach me to delight in all that You provide as a King – especially the things Israel craved from a human king. Teach me to love the protection and acceptance that I have from You that is so much better than the protection of a human army (or expensive insurance benefits); and teach me to love the acceptance I have from You that is so much to be preferred over acceptance or admiration from the world. Thank You that You accept me, and even honor me! What folly for me to prefer honor or acceptance from this blind, clueless, wicked world! Teach me to love what's truly valuable dear God.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Kingship

Promise to trust: He will reign over me if I will submit

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, , Guidance and clarity with regard to direction, Confidence, courage, a sense of being attended to and cared for, Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

King

1 Samuel 8 Day 2

1 Samuel 8:18-22 When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day." ¹⁹ But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. ²⁰ Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." ²¹ When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. ²² The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king."

God warned the people that if He granted their request and gave them a king, that king would do things that would make them miserable and they would end up crying out to God to deliver them from that king. And God would not listen. And amazingly, their immediate response was, "No!" God told them something and they just flat out said "No!" They refused

to believe what God Himself was telling them. They believed it was God speaking to them, and yet they rejected what He was saying.

That is what desire can do in the human heart. When your soul fixes its attention on something – some state of affairs that it really wants, and it is convinced that this thing will satisfy its longings and cravings, almost nothing can derail it from pursuing that desire. Even if you provide irrefutable proof that this thing will not satisfy and will not be what the soul expects it to be, it will not matter. Once covetousness and greed take over the heart, they commandeer the mind and refuse to allow any deviation from the quest to obtain the object of its desire.

How incredibly dangerous evil desires are! - Once they take over not even the mind can overcome them. They can only be overcome by faith – truly, genuinely believing that God's way will be more satisfying. But the more an evil desire is nursed and cultivated, the more impossible faith becomes.

Dear God, guard Your servant's heart from evil desires and covetousness. Let me always seek Your guidance first, before I allow my heart to set itself on a desire. Please protect me from fixing my sights on things that are less than Your perfect way.

And please, dear God, show me which desires I have right now that are in that category, or that are moving in that direction. Is there some covetous desire that is driving me so much that it keeps me from accepting some principle in Your Word? Are there truths that You have revealed that I am not understanding because my heart doesn't want to give up its belief that some object of its desire will really satisfy? Please, dear God, open my eyes to see if there is any of that in my life, and enable me to repent of it.

Father, any time I find myself having a powerful, strong desire for some earthly thing, let that set off warning signals in my heart. How dangerous strong desires for earthly things are! They can so easily and so quickly and so imperceptively blind me to the truth of Your Word and make it hard for me to believe You. Dear God, protect me from the strong desires of my flesh that are not desires for Your love.

The evil desire of Israel became the subject of their prayers. They asked God for the very thing God didn't want them to have. And when He revealed that and they refused to accept it, God punished them by answering their prayer. Sometimes God's most severe punishments can come in the form of an answered prayer. When we unknowingly pray for things that are not best, God is gracious and faithful to not grant us those things. He will only give us what is ultimately in our best interests. But when we persist in a sinful desire, we make it so what is in our best interests is some painful chastisement and discipline to teach us that what we desire is not a good thing. And in those cases God may very well give us the harmful thing that we so crave. If we ask for bread He will not give us a stone; and if we ask for a fish He will not give us a snake. But if we ask for a snake, and persist in rebellion by refusing to believe snakes are harmful, sometimes God will give us the snake.

I bless Your name, dear Father, for all the requests I have made that You have said “no” to. Thank You dear God, that when I am not in the rebellion of unbelief I can count on You to say no to me when I am asking for a snake.

Give me greater faith, dear God. Draw me closer to You that I might have a better understanding of and love for Your will, so that I ask for snakes with less and less frequency. Open my eyes to the beauty and wisdom of Your way, so that it will become the driving desire of my heart, and You will be free to grant my urgent requests, because they will be for the very thing You desire to do

You, O Lord, are greater than my greatest earthly desire. Those things my soul is so convinced it must have are nothing compared to Your grace. The things my soul thinks will bring such joy and satisfaction are garbage compared to simply being in Your presence and communing with You. .

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Superiority to my greatest earthly desires

Promise to trust: He will say no to my prayers for snakes if I don't rebel in unbelief when He shows me that those things won't satisfy.

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, A joyful, willing heart, Guidance and clarity with regard to direction, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

Providence

1 Samuel 9 Day 3

1 Samuel 9:16 "About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel

God said He would “send” Saul to Samuel at a certain time on a certain day, and He did exactly that. But the way God sent Him was by means of the most mundane circumstances. He didn't appear to Saul in a vision like He did when He sent Peter to Cornelius. He just let some donkeys escape from the farm. That was followed by a whole lot of natural, normal, mundane circumstances – the donkeys wandering wherever they pleased, Kish sending Saul and that particular servant to find them, Saul making decisions about where to look based on his best judgments, some girls going out to get water simply because they needed some water, etc. Who could have imagined that this assignment from Saul's father – “Go find the donkeys,” or the girls, “Go get some water” was a sending by God on a mission of national and global significance? How marvelous and amazing is God's providential work! How all the agents involved could have just acted according to their free will and still have the exact outcome that God had planned is more amazing and more difficult for the human mind to fathom and more astonishing and required more power than for God to have simply done a miracle and transported Saul to Samuel supernaturally.

I praise You, dear Father in heaven, for Your power and wisdom in How You bring about every detail of Your perfect plan through providence. You do miracles for other reasons – to mercifully make it clear to us that some person or some word is from You, but there is never a time when You have to revert to the miraculous in order to keep Your marvelous plan on track. You are capable of accomplishing absolutely anything through providence. When I begin to think of all the variables involved – each decision a person makes has millions of ramifications. If I forget my sunglasses as I am leaving for the store and have to run back in the house to get them, I'm a couple minutes later getting to the store. That results in a different person making a green light because I'm not where I would have been in traffic, a different person getting the parking space I would have had, a person being one place closer in line and a later person being one place further back, and the list goes on forever. And that's multiplied times all the human beings in the world, and that astronomical number is multiplied by the number of decisions all those people make – not to mention the decisions of all the animals that effect circumstances. To orchestrate all that in order to bring about one certain outcome in the end would be a feat beyond comprehension. But to be able to orchestrate all that to bring about billions and billions of outcomes – every outcome there is to be in line with Your plan is a work of wisdom and power so far beyond the ability of words to describe that breaks out of the very capacities of human imagination.

Teach me to love Your providential hand, dear God. Open my eyes to see it. When my transmission goes out, let me see that as an official, divine commission sending me on a royal mission to the repair shop. When the phone rings or someone stops by remind me that they have been sent by You to me for a grand and glorious purpose. I don't know if my role is like Saul's or Samuel's or the girls' or the donkeys' but I know I am part of Your marvelous providential work. Teach my heart to perceive that and to enjoy being used as a tool in Your hand. Teach me to enjoy the unfolding of Your perfect plan right before my eyes – a million times better than any movie. Teach me to watch the drama of Your work with greater interest than I watch an entertaining movie. Teach me to enjoy the feeling of being swept along by the blessed current of Your river of providence every moment of every day.

And when the characters in Your great Play do things that create an inconvenience or some pain for me, help me not to focus on them, but on the great Playwright who had a marvelous reason for putting that into the script.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: Providence

Promise to trust: He will carry out His perfect plan

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Safety and protection, Peace and calmness, Confidence, courage, Hope

Satisfying presence

1 Samuel 7 Day 4

1 Samuel 8:17-19 He will take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves will become his slaves. ¹⁸ When that day comes, you will cry out for relief from the king you have chosen, and the LORD will not answer you in that day."

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We want a king over us. 20 Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and fight our battles." 21 When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the LORD. 22 The LORD answered, "Listen to them and give them a king." Then Samuel said to the men of Israel, "Everyone go back to his town."

10:19 But you have now rejected your God, who saves you out of all your calamities and distresses. And you have said, 'No, set a king over us.'

In 8:19 the people say, "No!" And in 10:19 Samuel reminds them that they said that and in doing so they rejected God. Look back at the context of chapter eight and see what they said no to.

It was not in response to a command. They said no to a warning. God, through Samuel, told them that if they went ahead with pursuing a king there would be some negative consequences, and they said, "No!" They did not believe God. They wanted what they wanted so much that they refused to accept the warning. They thought that either those things would not really result, or they thought they would but that they are not sufficient reasons to give up the pursuit of this thing they wanted so much. Whichever it was, saying "no" to a warning in Scripture is a rejection of God.

Are there any warnings in Scripture that you have not taken seriously? You read them and your heart comes away thinking, "It is not really that serious"? For example, Hebrews 3:12 says

See to it that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God, but encourage one another daily, as long as it is called today, so that none of you will be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.

Do you read a warning like that and truly believe that for you, developing a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God is a real possibility? And that unless you have regular encouragement from other believers you will likely become hardened by sin's deceitfulness and fall into apostasy?

Are there any warnings in Scripture that don't have much effect on your heart? In the moment of temptation do you find yourself thinking, "I know there will be consequences to this, but I am willing to suffer those consequences"? When we think that way we are simply refusing to believe God when He says that the pleasure of this sin is not worth suffering those consequences. To the degree we take a warning lightly we are rejecting God. It is obvious to us that saying "no" to a command is serious, but it is important to realize that saying "no" to a warning is also a very serious rejection of God.

Forgive me, dear Lord, for taking Your warnings lightly. Every time I sin I make a statement that Your threats are nothing to be taking seriously. It is just pure unbelief. Dear Lord, You are a great and awesome King. You are all-powerful, and You hate sin. You are not an inept

parent who doesn't know how to come up with a discipline that is sufficient. There is no sin, no matter how pleasurable and no matter how seemingly innocent – no sin that is worth the consequence. The price tag of loss of fellowship with You is so high that not even the most pleasurable sin in the world is worth it – even if it is the most minor of all sins and it is only the slightest loss of fellowship. Oh dear God, help me to really believe that. Give me an experience of fellowship with You right now that is wonderful enough to begin to teach my soul never to knowingly do anything to jeopardize closeness with You. Let me see Your glory!

You are a God who is so incredibly good and so pleasing and delightful and satisfying to the human soul, that the slightest bit of fellowship with You is better and more desirable and pleasing and satisfying than the more pleasurable sin in the world.

What a wonderful life You have given me! To be the son of a God like that – to walk through life with constant access to the presence of a God whose presence, even if I experience only the tiniest measure of it, is worth far more than 1000 experiences of the most intense pleasure sin or anything in this world is capable of delivering – to walk through life with constant, 24/7 access to a God like that is an unspeakable joy. Open my eyes more, dear God, to what a joy it really is. Let it be obvious from the intensity of my seeking after Your presence that I believe all this.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God whose presence is more satisfying than any sin

Promise to trust: He will satisfy me if I prefer Him

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), A joyful, willing heart, Pleasure, Motivation, Fear of God, awe and reverence, Desire to obey

The touch of God

1 Samuel 7 Day 5

1 Samuel 10:6 The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.

⁹ As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day.

²⁶ Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched.

Good morning dear Father,

Come upon me in power by Your Spirit today, dear Lord. You are the God who transforms men, who changes hearts in an instant, and whose mere touch transforms ordinary men into valiant warriors. You have granted man knowledge that is astonishing to me. The fact that someone figured out how to make a computer or transplant a heart or to build the pyramids

– truly amazing. And yet with all the knowledge and research of all the experts from all the ages no one has ever figured out how to change the human heart. Hundreds of different theories of psychotherapy, millions of smart people using common sense, scientific research and studies – still, no one knows how to change a human heart or to transform a bad man into a good man. But You, O Lord, can do it with a mere thought. You changed Saul’s heart “as Saul turned to leave.” In the amount of time it took him to lift up his foot and step to turn around, You had done what not even all the combined wisdom and power of human knowledge and skill can do. Only He who made me a person to begin with can make me a different person.

And Oh how sweet is the way You do it – by touching the heart. I love the image in v.26. Your divine finger reaching down from heaven and making contact with those men’s hearts. And the mere contact was all that was needed for them to be transformed. Thank You, dear Lord, that You do not work only by indirect means. Thank You that You are not a God who is far off only. You are also near. And if Your finger so much as touches my heart, I will be transformed in only good ways.

Touch the heart of that man who beat up Rich’s sister-in-law and who has now evidently kidnapped her. And touch her heart. Bring them both to a knowledge of You and bring them back to the infant she left behind. Touch the heart of my brother, and my neighbors. Dear God, touch my heart afresh this morning. Only Your omnipotent, creativity can do anything to reverse the decay of this corrupted heart.

Teach me, dear God, to long to be touched by You, that I might seek after that with all my heart and all my soul. Make me crave contact with You that is deeper and more profound than what I’m used to. O forgive me, dear God, for rushing through my times with You as though there were of little value – less value even than the things I am so eager to do instead. Make me a man who is so consumed and obsessed with entering into Your presence that all through the day I am constantly reverting to seeking hard after You.

1 Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, "Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?"

I want to have such fellowship with You that my love for You increases. Let it grow, dear Lord, until it is like that of Samuel and David, who loved You so deeply that they loved Your anointed, even when Your anointed was such as Saul. The moment he was first anointed Samuel immediately kissed him with a kiss of homage and honor. David bowed before him and was struck in his conscience even for cutting his robe – while he was being hunted like partridge by Saul. I want to be like that dear Lord. It is easy enough for me to show honor to someone You have honored. But I want it to be more than that – not just a decision, but a drive that overflows from my love for You.

When I see politicians or policemen whom You have placed in power and whom You call Your servants to do good, when I see those men and women You have placed Your hand upon and called into leadership in Your Kingdom, when I see people whom You have set aside as

Your beloved children; Oh Lord, let my love for You be so strong that my heart has a powerful, urgent yearning to show them honor and respect and love and affection because they have been chosen by You.

And let this serve to increase my love for You, dear God – the enjoyment of serving a God who is so good and so powerful that the mere touch of His finger on the human heart transforms it. The enjoyment of knowing a holy God who is willing to touch an unclean heart and who is not defiled by it, but whose touch takes the defilement away. The enjoyment of being loved by a God who is not only afar off, but who is also nearby and willing to touch me. Open my eyes to the wonders of these attributes, that my heart might enlarge in its capacity to be delighted by You.

Attribute to behold, desire, experience & enjoy: The God of the gracious touch

Promise to trust: He will touch and transform me

What will result if I experience this attribute today: Gladness and joy, Greater love and desire for God (and all those He loves), Encouragement and comfort, Restoration, Confidence, courage, Honor and vindication, Fullness and satisfaction, A sense of being attended to and cared for, Hope Renewal and transformation, Strength, Motivation, A greater abiding presence of Christ in the heart, Experiential knowledge of the love that surpasses knowledge