

Let's open our Bibles tonight to 1 Samuel 26 as we continue our study through the historical books of the Bible.

We've mentioned to you more than once that when you read the historical books, they are written in a way - the narrative form - that your best way to learn is to put yourself in the shoes of the people you're reading about. How would you react? What would you say? How would you respond? And the LORD gives to us sometimes enormous amounts of information over just a short period of time. Other times, one chapter covers fifty years. But what we have is what we have. This is what He wants us to learn from.

We are currently studying the life of David - Saul and David, the first and then the second king of Israel. David has been on the run for his life, as a young man in his early 20's, for the past two years (by the time we get to this chapter). I think, sometimes, if you can discern the times, it helps - especially since you know that David is going to be running almost eight years - seven-and-a-half years to be exact. And he's two years in, and he's got five more years to go, and those five years will be covered in the last five chapters of this book. So, another almost five-and-a-half years before Saul will die on the battlefield. And even then, when David comes to the throne, for the next seven-and-a-half years, he will only have the support of about one-and-a-half of the tribes; whereas the rest of the tribes are still trying to rally behind Saul's family and those who opposed David. So quite a tough journey for a young man to go through, and yet he is right where God wants him to be.

In all of the things that we've been studying, we keep pointing out that there is this providential hand of God at work, that the LORD is doing lots of things. He's preparing David for the work that He's got prepared for him. He's preparing six hundred men that are looking up to David now, to be men that will walk with God and serve the LORD. He is preparing a nation to finally be led in the ways of the LORD. He's teaching David how to be very dependent upon God, that he can't survive it on his own, that he would be a king after God's own heart. And there's just lots of lessons to learn from David. David is one of those guys that God gives

a lot of press to - he gets a lot of airtime, if you will. He gets lots of chapters over his forty years.

Tonight, in chapter 26, is the last recorded meeting that we have between David and Saul, though it is five-and-a-half years from Saul's demise. The last time that they had met together had been in roughly the same area; not in the same place but in the same general location (back in chapter 24). And David is given, tonight, another opportunity to take matters into his own hands. One of the lessons, I think, that you learn from this chapter is that if you do it really well two years earlier, hopefully two years later you're doing even better - not worse. In other words, that your spiritual life improves. Right? Sometimes you go forward and backwards. Pastor Chuck Swindoll wrote a book one time on Nehemiah called "Three Steps Forward, Two Steps Back." And I think that's sometimes the way we spiritually grow. But David is doing a good job of going forward. What he learned with Saul two years earlier - and this is two years of on the run for your life - he's still willing to apply, even though it's been two years. It would have been a good argument to go, "I've been trustin' the LORD for two years. It's about time I fixed this." And he certainly could have. But he doesn't, and he stays the course. And I think, after two years, one of the things that you should walk away from David in this chapter is that David has decided to wait upon the LORD no matter how long it takes.

On the other hand, we have Saul who, tonight, five years before his death, gives us an honest assessment in a very weak moment of time - at an unguarded moment - of what he thinks about his own life; and it's not very good. He gives us an insight into the fact that he was far more aware of his sin than he was willing to admit. And I think that's true of most people. We know better, don't we? And I think folks know when they're not right with God, in many ways. But he wasn't willing to admit this publicly. But it's awful hard at the end of your life, or as you head toward the end of your life, that you have to cry out, with Saul, "I've been playing the fool with my life. I've been foolish." And you don't want to end up living that way, certainly.

So, the last three chapters, I think, of this book - and we'll get to them in just a few weeks - are one story in three chapters. So we really are near the end, at least, of Saul's life and of David's preparation years in that regard. Because by the time we get to chapter 28, 29, 30, 31, they all kind of roll into one story that is

told from three or four different angles so that the LORD wants you to get the 360-degree look at what's going on in the narrative.

But tonight we're just going to stick with chapter 26 and look at perseverance, faith should grow, and how you're going to assess your life when it's over. Verse 1, "Now the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah," (which is where Saul lived), "saying, 'Is David not hiding in the hill of Hachilah, opposite Jeshimon?' Then Saul arose and went down to the Wilderness of Ziph, having three thousand chosen men of Israel with him, to seek David in the Wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped in the hill of Hachilah, which is opposite Jeshimon, by the road. But David stayed in the wilderness, and he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness. David therefore sent out spies, and understood that Saul had indeed come" (was out to get him as opposed to some other business). Verse 5, "So David arose and came to the place where Saul had encamped. And David saw the place where Saul lay, and Abner the son of Ner, the commander of his army. Now Saul lay within the camp, with the people encamped all around him." David returns. And we mentioned to you a couple weeks ago, but I'll just mention it again, chapter 23, the Wilderness of Ziph was basically David's hometowns. This is the park he played in. This is the woods that he hunted in. These were the people that he grew up with. These are the folks that knew him best. And so the last time he had come here, he had come here to do some ministry, if you will, to serve the people; and he'd been ratted out by his own countrymen. It had happened up the road at another town that was less familiar with David. But everyone was being moved by this great fear of Saul. He was good at reprisals. He was good at getting even. And so everybody had to be forced to make a decision: "Am I gonna walk with God? Am I gonna do the right thing? Am I gonna vote for the right person here?" (so to speak) Or, "Am I gonna just try to endear myself to a very wicked and ruthless king in hopes of surviving?" So that had happened the last time. David had been ratted out. It was tragic. It was the people that were the closest to him - the people he would trust in the most, the folks he considered family - and yet fear had driven these folks to rat David out.

Now, if you remember chapter 23, David barely got away. The way that it worked out, at least from what we're told, is that David was overwhelmed with three thousand men (same group of guys, probably, as these). They flooded the mountain side. David was just one step ahead of them. In fact, we read in chapter 23, they were just around to the next side of the mountain; so it was close, it was nip-and-tuck. And David was pretty sure that maybe he was going to get caught. It had to

be frightening, and yet God miraculously intervened, and He had someone go to tell Saul that they were being invaded by the Philistines, that he should come home. And they had to stop the hunt right then and leave, and David went, "Phew, that was close."

The last time David had met with Saul, in chapter 24, was over a year earlier; in chapter 24, just a couple chapters back, almost two years, maybe, but at least a year-and-a-half or so in the caves of En Gedi, where Saul had emotionally admitted to David that, "Oh, David, you're more righteous than I am." You remember he was in the cave, and the boys with David thought, "Well, we should just kill him," and David said, "I can't lay my hand on God's anointed." And he cut off a portion of his robe. You remember? And then when he left, he yelled to him, "Hey, look, I could have killed you, but I just killed your robe. And what are you doin', trying to kill me?" And Saul had admitted that David was right, that God had chosen him to be king; just asked David to spare his family when he takes power. And David said, "I will," and David would. But Saul, he's emotional a lot, but he doesn't repent at all. So he goes back to the palace rather than leaving the palace. "I'll be moving out this week, and David, you're in charge." He didn't do it. Saul was constantly sorry, but he's under the conviction of sin, but he doesn't change. Nothing changes. When the dust settles, he's back in the same place that he started. Paul, when he wrote the second Corinthian letter, said that "godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation" (2 Corinthians 7:10). In other words, if you're really sorry, things change. But the "worldly sorrow produces death," (verse 10). And Saul's sorrow is always sorry in a worldly sense. "You've embarrassed me, you've caught me, you showed me for who I was, I'm sorry." But right back to it again. So, though Saul had confessed he knew David was to take his place, like I said, he returned to his palace.

Well, tonight, we're a year-and-a-half or so forward. David's hiding in the same area, amongst his friends. And someone again goes to Saul and says, "He's hiding here." Oh, man, who you gonna trust? And the three thousand men come looking for him again. This had to give him some flashbacks.

We read, in verse 3 and in verse 4, that David - not sure whether Saul was out to do a military campaign for the nation or if, really, his purpose was out to get David - sends out some spies, wants to see what's going on and what the mission of the king might be. I love the fact that David even gives consideration to the fact that maybe this isn't the worst. I mean, there's a guy with either a pure heart or very

blind to what's going on. But he goes, "Well, maybe he's not out to get me." Well, he's been out to get you for two years but maybe not this time. And so he finds out - he's very cautious, but he doesn't believe the worst. I think I'd be pretty cynical by now. Same place, same number of troops, same wicked Saul, and betrayed again by his own people.

David, in verse 5, came to the place where Saul was encamped, and they were by the road. But the people were kind of all camped around Saul, and Saul had learned a lesson: don't go sleep in a cave by yourself; surround yourself with thousands of people and sleep right in their middle. And so that's what he'd done.

Verse 6, "Then David answered, and said to Ahimelech the Hittite and to Abishai the son of Zeruah, brother of Joab, saying, 'Who will go down with me to Saul in the camp?' And Abishai said, 'I will go down with you.' " When he saw where Saul was, and the troops were camped, David wants a volunteer to go on a pretty dangerous mission. "Let's sneak into the heart of three thousand people." And to do what, I don't know. No idea. I would tell you if I knew. I've got all kinds of guesses, but I'm thinkin', "Leave them alone, David. He's asleep. Just go your way. You'll be gone by morning." But he wants to go maybe confront Saul, who doesn't sleep alone anymore. The only lesson he learned from the cave is how to sleep. Spiritual lessons, he doesn't really take to heart. But this is a pretty dangerous idea. It's David and one guy against three thousand. And if anybody wakes up, you're kind of stuck. So, David had learned not to touch God's anointed. I don't know why he was there. I'm gonna guess that he went simply because he wanted to see what God wanted to do; that he was being chased and he wanted an end to it. But I can't begin to tell you. I read every book I know....because that doesn't make sense to me. But here he goes on this extremely dangerous mission. And he wanted to take someone with him, and Ahimelech, verse 6, seemed willing to ignore the invitation, which is exactly what I would have done. Abishai, who is one of the three sons of David's sister, was with David (Asael and Abishai were the other two). So David's sister had three kids, three boys (1 Chronicles 2). They were all with David. I don't know if his sister thought that her boys hangin' around with David was a good idea. "David, you'd better be a good uncle." David's going, "Hey, you want to go with me, fight three thousand guys?" "Sure, Uncle, I'll go with you." Whether this guy, Abishai, is a real man of faith this time, or he's just simply a daredevil like kids are about that age, I don't know. He will, in a minute, offer to kill Saul for David, knowing David's had trouble with that. "I know it bugs you, man, but I'm telling you, Uncle, it don't bug me. I'll just hit him once, and that'll be the

end....I won't have to hit him twice." Sounds like a boy, a young man. But this isn't your safest assignment. Right? This would be for Saul, though, and don't lose track of the time; two years earlier, God had said to Saul, "You're finished." He took the Holy Spirit away from him. He was troubled by a troubling spirit from the LORD, and yet he's gonna hang on for seven-and-a-half years; which tells me God, for seven-and-a-half years, waited for Saul to wake up. Right? He could have just closed the door on Saul and said, "I've given you enough chances. You had thirty-three years of seeing what I could do." He decides not to walk with God.

But every one of these chapters, to me, is just - if you want to know how patient God is with us, here's how patient God is with us. He just wants to wait upon you. In fact, how longsuffering.....when you read the words, "God is longsuffering," it's not your kind of longsuffering; it's His kind of longsuffering. Our kind of longsuffering is, "You've got till morning" kind of longsuffering. "I'm calling tomorrow." His kind of longsuffering is thirty years, forty years, fifty years. He just waits. I remember reading years ago that if you want to overcome the love of the LORD, you're gonna have to be really determined. To go to hell is not going to be easy for you. You're gonna have to step over His love time and again, step over the cross, step over the godliness of others reaching out. You gotta work really hard to get to hell. And God is working real hard to bring you to Himself.

Well, verse 7 tells us, "So David and" (his little nephew) "Abishai came to the people by night; and there Saul lay sleeping within the camp, with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. And Abner" (who is the captain of the army) "and the people lay all around him." To their surprise, here're three thousand and one people, at least, asleep. In enemy territory, just cocky as can be. "We're not even setting a guard." Or, if someone was to guard him, it certainly should have been Abner. But, needless to say, three thousand people sawing logs without anybody setting a watch. Now, verse 12 (we're just jumping ahead for a minute, towards the end, just so we can get this in now) - it says, at the end of verse 12, "For they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them." So this was divine, I think maybe because David shouldn't be there. I don't know. "All right. You all sleep! Snap My fingers. Sleep!" I don't know, but they were all knocked out. God is good at puttin' you to sleep, you know? I think about Genesis 2:21, where the LORD put a deep sleep upon Adam. And you find a lot of these deep-sleep things. I look around here sometimes at night.....I see a deep sleep. (Laughing) And don't you dare blame the LORD. Maybe you just got up too early.

For Abishai, verse 8, this was more than just a coincidence. In fact, just like in chapter 24, where six hundred men were just surprised at their good fortune in the eyes of the LORD, Abishai says to his Uncle, " 'God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now therefore, please, let me strike him at once with the spear, right to the earth; and I will not have to strike him a second time!' " That's a macho guy. Much like the opinion of the people in the En Gedi cave, Abishai believed that somehow this was God's good doing, and it was their good fortune. "God gave him to us, David, and I'll kill him for you. One blow. Don't worry. I know you don't want to do it. I'll be willing to do it."

But here's David's response. And David's response, though it is much like we read in chapter 24, is two years later. So, look at a young man that's now pushing 25, and he's learning to trust God. Rather than changing his mind about gettin' rid of this guy who's hounded him for twenty-four months on end, without letup, David seems to have grown even more convinced that doing things God's way is right.

So he says, in verse 9, to his young nephew, Abishai, " 'Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD's anointed, and be guiltless?' " In other words, David's first response was, "This is sinful. That's a bad idea. That's sin. It doesn't matter who does it. You're gonna have to answer to the LORD. And this isn't just my persuasion. This is God's will. This isn't just the way I feel. Sin is sin no matter who commits it. And only God can remove Saul because God established Saul, and we have to wait on God's timing." "Yeah, but David, you haven't had a good meal or slept in your own bed for two years." "I know! And I hope that's tomorrow. But I can't make it happen this way. Can't remove him. I can't fidget with him. I can't establish myself. I can't open and shut a door. I get it. It's hard, but it's vital that we do it right. We cannot do this. This is sin." That's what he says. "First and foremost, this is sin." I love David's heart because it seems to me David realized that he was going to have to answer to the LORD for his behavior. It's a good thing for us to remember. Right? "You mess with him, you're not gonna be guiltless. God's gonna deal with you." So it's better that we find ourselves in a place where sin isn't a part of our lives, and we don't want God's wrath. It's so freeing to just let God fix things. So, verse 9, "It's sinful. We don't and can't do that."

Second of all, verse 10, it's also unnecessary. Notice that "David said furthermore," in verse 10, " 'As the LORD lives, the LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish.' " In other words,

sooner or later Saul is going to run out of gas. And David's not quite sure how the LORD is going to end this thing. You could argue, "Well, if he dies in battle, that was the LORD. If he dies of old age, that was the LORD. If the LORD just strikes him, that was the LORD." But David made a distinction between all of those. One is a direct act of God in judgment; the other one is just live out your life - and life catches up with you because there's a life to be lived and then the judgment; or maybe he'll just get killed in battle - his life itself will bring censure from the LORD. David didn't seem to put them all in one basket. One way or the other, God is going to say, "That's the end of Saul," and whether it's divinely acted or it's in the mundane things of life, either way, God's going to strike him, and that's going to be done. Just like He had struck Nabal last week. "He could just be a battle statistic, but I'm gonna wait it out." So David's not sure whether it's going to be direct intervention or just life that takes its course, but he was willing, even at 25 years old, to wait a lifetime if necessary. Whatever God wanted, it is His choice. It is sinful in verse 9; it is unnecessary in verse 10. God will do it.

And finally he says, in verse 11, " 'The LORD forbid that I should stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But please, take now the spear and the jug of water that are by his head, and let us go.' " One thing for sure - in all of these equations, David said, "I can't be a part of taking his life. I can't mess with this." Isn't it amazing how much we like to mess with things and then say, "The LORD did it"? "I can't give in to this temptation." But, David says (in his behavior), "Maybe I can prove my innocence to him yet again and convince him he doesn't need to chase me. I have no ill feelings to him. I'm not out to get him like he thinks that I am." So he encourages his little nephew, "Take his jug of water, take his spear, and let's leave." See, I still don't know why he's here. You understand that, right? "Let's just go into the camp and goof around." You can't do this. The LORD put 'em to sleep because David is goofin' around. I don't get it. If you have an answer, you can come tell me what it is afterwards, and we'll throw it in here next time. But I don't know. So I'm just readin' along with you. "Take his sword, take his canteen, and let's go." And David continues.

And my argument might be that David continues to be in a position where God wants to say to Saul, "There's still a way home. There's still a way out of this. There's still a way of forgiveness. There's still a way that you can be redeemed." It's the only plausible explanation in my own heart towards what's David doing here dancing around in the enemy's camp. David hasn't laid a hand on Saul, and he isn't about to do it again. But I'll tell you what - this is one of those landmarks in

David's life because here, eighteen months or so later, he still makes the right choice when the wrong choice is available. And not only is it available, it's within his grasp. I don't know if you've ever repaid evil for evil or considered it. But to say, "Well, I'll just leave it with the LORD" can be the hardest decision of all of those. Getting even's easier. Threatening to get even's better. Not doin' anything is no good at all. But yet God help us to make the right choice when public sentiment or opinion - like here - says otherwise. That's what good leaders do. They lead. It was Moses who said to the children of Israel (in Exodus 23:2), "Don't you dare follow a crowd just to do evil. Don't turn aside to pervert justice and take the wrong side. Don't throw in with the wrong decision." So, David's not a weak guy. He's really being a good leader, I think, to these men that he's training. He takes a stand. He changes the crowd. His disciple.....his young, this is a relative..... but, in the process, rather than being changed by them, he's changing them. He's having an influence. That's pretty good. But it's hard.

It's hard to choose the slow, unfolding work of God's plans over the swift I-can-make-it-happen-today scenario, isn't it? Waiting is worse than just doing, don't you think? I hate waiting. Waiting is the worst. For just about anything, it's the worst. Standing in line for ice cream. Worst! (Laughing) I took my wife to see Carrie Underwood last night in San Diego. So we stood in line to get water.....at a place where they were selling tacos. And there were fifty people in line. And the woman at the front went, "What do you put on those?" And to her kid, "Do you want one or two of those?" "I don't know. What do they look like? How big are they?" And there's fifty people standing there. (Laughing) And you can see them doin', "This is not good." There's no joy at the concert. (Laughing) And this woman was oblivious, and she was there....no exaggeration.....ten minutes. And then she did this, "We'll come back." (Laughing) You will never come back, ever come back!!!! (Laughing) Waiting is the worst, and when it comes to waiting on the LORD, it's so hard but so worth it, isn't it? So right. In the long run, there's only one thing that satisfies, and it's waiting upon the LORD.

Now, in the years to come, David waiting upon the LORD will pay great dividends. He'll have learned to do it right. And so will you. Sowing to the Spirit, reaping eternal life. But, man, that's hard. Later David will be accused by a relative of Saul; his name is Shimei. It's in 2 Samuel 16 when David's leaving town, and the guy's yelling at David that he had taken the throne of Saul by shedding innocent blood. He was yelling all kinds of stuff at David. David had an absolutely clear conscience. "I didn't do any of that." So the insults didn't bother David. In the

years that follow, David will have an increasing ability to wait upon the LORD, and he seems to be less and less tempted to take matters into his own hands because he finds that God is the One that's worth waiting for. It isn't a lesson, probably, that you learn overnight. Here, in three chapters, you cover almost two years of time, and he's still a young man, he's still learning. And so do we. Let God handle it. "Oh, I wish I had, but I didn't. But I will. But I haven't." So, "Let's just take the jug of water and take his spear, and let's go."

Verse 12, "So David took the spear and the jug of water by Saul's head, and they got away; and no man saw or knew it or awoke." (Because the LORD had knocked them all out.) Verse 13, "Now David went over to the other side, and stood on the top of a hill afar off, a great distance being between them." (That seems smart enough.) Verse 14, "And David called out to the people and" (especially to the head of the army) "to Abner the son of Ner," (there's a name if you're having children - just call him Ner) "saying, 'Do you not answer, Abner?' Then Abner answered and said, 'Who are you, calling out to the king?' " God had made them sleep miraculously, yet David goes so far away to wake them up. I think there's a good balance between God's work and your own. Right? Dumb if David would have went, "Well they're all asleep. I guess God can always make them slower" and stood right in the middle and gave this speech. But no, no. He's smart. "They'll never catch me." Right? He moves as far away as he can. God will do what you can't, but don't tempt the LORD...like David crawling into the camp to me, but I don't know. So, when God puts you to sleep, it does require someone to yell at you to wake you up, apparently. I can give you a lot of Scriptures for that as well. God put my son to sleep every night, it seems, for years, and he never woke up when you first called him. And apparently I've inherited that from him.

But we read, in verse 15, "So David said to Abner, 'Are you not a man?' " Wow! " 'And who is like you in Israel? Why then have you not guarded your lord the king? For one of the people came in to destroy your lord the king. This thing that you have done is not good. As the LORD lives, you deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master, the LORD's anointed. And now see where the king's spear is, and the jug of water that was by his head.' " Well that is a pretty good argument. David had been kinder to the king than his own chief of staff. He had allowed someone to get so close to the king that he could steal these things from lying beside his head. It was unreasonable, at this point, to have Saul conclude that this guy who stole those things was also out to hurt him and hadn't hurt him. "Abner, you're more of a threat to the king than I was." That's a great argument,

especially when you're holding his spear and his jug of water. About that time, Saul wakes up.

Verse 17, "Then Saul knew David's voice, and said, 'Is that your voice, my son David?' David said, 'It is my voice, my lord, O king.' And he said, 'Why does my lord thus pursue his servant? For what have I done, or what evil is in my hand?' " Now David makes his defense and, again, with such humility. I think you would probably have yelled a couple of things at Saul that would probably have been deserved. But not in a spiritual sense. And so no personal attacks whatsoever, no personal epithets. "I'm your servant. I always have been. Why are you trying to kill me? This is the most unfair deal of all." God has been allowing this justice to go on for over two years. We read it and understand why; David lives it, and I don't know if he understands why. He was going through it so that David might become the man that God wanted him to be. I know that. I don't know if he knew that.

We read, in verse 19, " 'Now therefore, please, let my lord the king hear the words of his servant: If the LORD has stirred you up against me, let Him accept an offering. But if it is the children of men, may they be cursed before the LORD, for they have driven me out this day from sharing in the inheritance of the LORD, saying, "Go, serve other gods." ' " David said, "Look, there're only two reasons why you're out here to kill me. Either (a) God has sent you because you're to bring judgment upon my life, and if that's the case, I want to ask for forgiveness; I want to offer an offering, I want to make it right, I don't want the LORD to be angry with me, I want to fix it. Or (b) you're chasing me because you're hearing all kinds of things about me that aren't true. And if that's the case, may God do to those men what you intend to do to me.....if you've just gotten wicked counsel." Now, I want you to notice David doesn't accuse Saul directly. He could have. Nobody was throwin' those spears at him but Saul. That wasn't advice. That was just plain-on hatred. "But either way, look, I'm not able to come into the land that God has given us to worship God. I've been told to go somewhere else. I've been locked out of the land of God's choosing. So what is it? I just want to fix it."

" 'So now,' " verse 20, " 'do not let my blood fall to the earth before the face of the LORD. For the king of Israel has come out to seek a flea, as when one hunts a partridge in the mountains.' " "Look, I'm an insignificant threat to you. You're hunting a small little bird in a range of mountains. And, look, I know God is watching us. You kill me, He'll be watching. When my blood hits the ground, He'll be watching. His face is turned towards me. So what're you doin' out here? Why

are we even in this battle?" I like the conversation. I'm still not sure why he went there, but I like the back-and-forth.

Well, Saul says this to David, verse 21, " 'I have sinned.' " (Yeah, we've heard this before.) " 'Return, my son David. For I will harm you no more, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Indeed I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.' " It is certainly wrong to think that people, when you witness to them, don't know the truth about themselves. I know we spend a lot of our energy trying to paint a picture of something we're not, but we know - deep down inside - what we're all about. And notice here, after a deep sleep - a divine sleep, he gets woken up in the middle of the night. He hears a strange voice that he recognizes from afar, in the dark. He speaks the truth now. Of all the people in the Bible who went away from the LORD and wrecked their lives, few are on display as much as Saul. He is given, I think, twenty-three chapters in all - where you watch him just kind of implode. Every turn wrong and every decision questionable. His highs and his lows were extreme because his commitment to the LORD never was extreme. Thirty-five years on the throne. Five years to go before he dies. And he says of his life, in an unguarded moment, "I have played the fool. I have just played the fool. I've been foolish."

Now, if you think back over Saul's life, just from a highlight standpoint, back in chapter 9, Saul was born with tremendous abilities - good home, godly parents loved him, wanted the best for him. Early on he did seem to be willing to seek God's direction for his life. When the prophet, Samuel, told him what God's plans were, he seemed to be all right with it; didn't seem to upset him too much. In chapter 10 of 1 Samuel, when it was time for God to anoint him to be a king over Israel (the first one - given the people chose him, not the LORD, but God is faithful), He sent to him three distinct miracles - all one after the other, in succession - just so that he might be convinced that this was really the work and the will of God's Spirit; not just something he imagined or something somebody else wanted. We read, in chapter 10, that God changed his heart that day. In fact, it's mentioned twice - in verse 6 and verse 9 of chapter 10 - that he was given the Holy Spirit upon his life. He had God's work upon him. That's pretty good. Eventually, in chapter 10, he was to be publicly proclaimed as king. But that day, rather than coming out as God's choice (that he should have known), he hid, and somebody had to go find him. It was his first public reluctance to stand with God. We are told, in chapter 10, that once God anointed him to be king that God surrounded him with godly men who were filled with His Spirit, and He gave to Saul a temperate heart, a

heart that was slow to speak, quick to listen. I mean, he was given the gifts of someone that should have functioned just well. He had everything that he needed - both in him, upon him, around him, and he still decided, "I don't need any of that. I just can't bow my knee." In chapter 11, for the moment, Saul is rallied by the nation of Israel to fight the Philistines, who were threatening them in a big way. He actually goes to pray and seeks God, does what God says and has great victory, and he's off to a good start. And you go, "Man, he's one for one." Well, he's one for that's all he'll ever be. The people accepted him with open arms - bright beginnings, promising future. And yet, if you're gonna make it, you're gonna have to have better than just a good start. Don't you? Running the race is a lifetime calling from the LORD. I know sometimes you get up, and you go, "Man, I thought this was a 100-yard dash. I didn't know I was running a marathon." But you are. And it's gonna take perseverance and commitment before the potential in your life that God has given you is to be recognized.

So, what went wrong with Saul? Why does he, thirty-five years later, say, in an unguarded moment, "I'm a fool"? Pretty strong word, too. "I'm an idiot. I've done the wrong thing every step of the way." And if you read through just these chapters, and I know we're doing them a little bit piecemeal, but if you just sit and read through a couple of chapters, from the minute that Saul is anointed or inaugurated, he was reluctant. Even his Uncle, when he said, "Hey, what happened to you the last few days, these great miracles?" he goes, "Yeah, well we, you know,nothin'. Nothin' happened." He didn't want to say anything, even be associated with that. All of the portraits of Saul say the same thing, "I don't want to do things God's way. I want to have them my way. I want to do it myself." No submission to the LORD at all. I think Swindoll, in his book on 1 Samuel, called it "the gathering clouds of woe." I mean, you can just see Saul unwilling in his life. All of these storms of disobedience were brewing, and they just waited for him down the road. Never changed. Jonathan goes out to fight; Saul takes the credit. He's not concerned with God's glory. He doesn't really care about the people. But he really does want them to think he's the most spiritual guy on the block. He doesn't want to protect them. When later, under attack, Saul doesn't have the prophet, Samuel, show up in time, he actually presumes upon that holy place of the priest, and he goes in and offers sacrifice. Man, he treads completely underfoot the ways of God. And then, when he's asked about it, he makes all kinds of spiritual excuses about, "The LORD spoke to me. I tried to wait. The people are upset. We're gonna get killed. You weren't here on time. The LORD should know. I'm just doin' the right thing." Lamé excuses. People were being scattered and all. He's

just blind to his own sin. He's impatient with God. Doesn't even pray. Just does what he wants and then offers an explanation.

Compare him to David, who was constantly seeking to honor the LORD. Even when he's being foolish, he's quickly on his knees, saying, "LORD, I'm foolish," and, "restore me and forgive me." Samuel is not moved by the situational ethics argument by Saul to him about that, and God says, through the prophet, "All right, Saul, strike one. You are now never going to have your children sit on the throne. This is a one-term issue because you have failed to obey Me." When Jonathan and his armor bearer, in chapter 14, go out and battle in faith, outnumbered two to infinity, asking God to help them, when Saul wakes up - again wakes up hours later - he makes the people swear an oath that whoever's caused this fight down in the valley, that no one eats until Saul has gotten his pound of flesh. Seems like the only person who needed to eat that day was his son who's been out there all night and who didn't hear the rules and ate some honey and revived himself. But the people weren't allowed to eat because Saul wanted to be the Saul of power. As a result, the army was kept from full victory because they were weakened. The enemy got away. Saul threatened to kill his own son in front of the people who absolutely abandoned him at that point and said, "You're gonna kill your own kid? He's the only one that helped us here! We quit," and they stepped away from him. And Saul goes home with no desire in his heart to serve the LORD at all, or his people. Chapter 15, he gets another order from the LORD through the prophet, "Go kill the Amalekites. It's time for them to be destroyed - every one that moves. Their days of grace and mercy are up." And Saul goes to fight, and he doesn't, again, do what the LORD says. He knows better. He keeps the king, the nicest of the animals. Samuel, by this time, is blind, but his ears work pretty good, and he comes and he says to Saul, "How's it goin' in the battle?" "Oh, we're servin' the LORD, man." "If you're servin' the LORD, what is the bleating of the sheep in my ears?" "Oh, well, the people have decided that God's wrong and they're right. We're gonna save these for sacrifice later. And the king we're going to hold on to because he's a good bargaining chip." And again Saul's just oblivious to God's Word. He thinks he knows everything far better. And so what happens? Disobedience. The prophet says, "To obey is better than sacrifice." Samuel begins to question Saul again. Saul has that great spiritual jargon that covers his sin and blames others and rationalizes his approach. And the LORD says to the prophet, "Tell him he's done. I don't need him. I can't work with him. He's not listening. He's done." Takes the Holy Spirit from him; has a troubling spirit that is sent from the LORD to make it difficult. He lives self-willed for the next seven-and-a-half years, as

God allows him to run into David time and again with the one purpose of just bringing him back. It's all about God's grace at that point, and David's learning. Chapters 16 and 17, David is anointed by the LORD to be king. Soon Goliath is slain. Saul sees something in David. He's soon jealous and suspicious of him. It isn't long before he determines to kill him. He's been chasing him for two years. This is the second time he's gotten that up close, face-to-face meeting, and this'll be their last meeting. This is it. This is as much as it goes. We'll learn a little bit more about Saul between here and chapter 31. We'll learn about his confession - that even this word here is not heartfelt, it's not honest. He sounds a lot like Judas. If you go back and read Matthew 27, as Judas returns the money that he used to betray Jesus, his words were, "I have sinned by betraying innocent blood" (verse 4). And they said, "That's your problem, not ours." Saul had the same words.

Well we read, in verse 22 here, "And David answered and said, 'Here is the king's spear. Let one of the young men come over and get it. May the LORD repay every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness; for the LORD delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the LORD's anointed. And indeed, as your life was valued much this day in my eyes, so let my life be valued much in the eyes of the LORD, and let Him deliver me out of all tribulation.' " So he's not buying Saul's, "Come home, David, you'll be fine." He's just saying, "May the LORD judge, and I'll just live with His judgment."

Verse 25, "Then Saul said to David, 'May you be blessed, my son David! You shall both do great things and also still prevail.' So David went on his way, and" (notice) "Saul returned to his place." So David's not trusting in Saul's promises there. "Oh, David, just come home. I won't hurt you anymore." That's a lie. He was willing to forgive and walk away, asked God to restore. But he couldn't trust Saul. And I think that's something about forgiveness. People say, "Well, you gotta forgive." You gotta forgive, but you don't have to forget. Sometimes it's better not to forget. In fact, I don't know how to forget. The LORD forgets. That's miraculous, that God would forget my sins, throw them away. Well, He doesn't forget, but He chooses not to remember them. I can't do that. Can you? You go, "I love you bro, but I remember that time....." (Laughing) You may not act upon it, but it's awful hard to scrub that out of your head. And David had good cause. People go, "I'm sorry" again. "All right, you're sorry, but I can't trust you." And, to me, forgiveness is immediate; trust takes time. So, in verse 21, Saul invites David to go home and worship. David goes, "Yeah, I'm just gonna let God work it out. I'm gonna commit my life to Him. I'm asking Him to keep me from evil." And for the

next five more years - David'll be in his 30's now - before he gets there, he will hear of Saul's death in battle. But he's going to wait patiently.

So Saul plays the fool, and we can play the fool. You have all that you need in God's hand, by His Spirit, in His Word. But look at Saul - he seeks glory for another man's work. He blames others for his personal failure. His lack of faith is evident in all the decisions that he makes. He admits sin, but he doesn't repent, which is really odd. He excuses sin with spiritual jargon. He takes matters into his own hand. He doesn't trust God. And then he comes to the end of his life, and he goes, "I'm an idiot!" And we want to go, "Yes, you are! How much you missed out on." Unfortunately for Saul, his life ends, in the Bible, with a horrifying experience where a witch tells him his future, where the ghost of Samuel (that's who he's looking for) says, "You're gonna be dead tomorrow." And it freaks him out, where he just kind of locks up, and he has to be carried home. Don't miss that chapter. That's comin' up. (Pastor Jack laughs.)

Yet if you, like David, put your life in God's hands, you'll never have to regret the things you've decided on. I know you don't have to handle all those things. God will do that. How different his life would have been had he just sought the LORD. How glorious God's plans are if you'll just let Him. Jesus said, in John 14:15, "If you love Me," what does He say? Anybody. "Keep My commandments." That's right. That's life. And David is willing to do that.

Next week we'll pick up the.....David's been doing so well, right? Next week not so much. And the week after that, not so much. So would you read the next couple of chapters? I don't know if we'll get to both of them next week, but I love how the LORD just sets before us the whole picture. And this is David at his worst, and it's at his worst for months on end. In fact, this is gonna go on for quite some time; for, verse 7 says, a year and four months - sixteen months - where David drags three thousand men and their families and their children to live in the enemy territory and fight the battles for the enemy. Really, David? What hit you in the head? But it shows me something. Our spiritual life is only as good as we're doin' today. Right? Are you doin' good tonight? If not, pray for somebody around you.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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