



June 22, 2025
"The Fall of Saul"
1 Samuel 12,13,15
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Good morning. Please open your Bibles to 1 Samuel 12.

David Powlison, who was a Christian counsellor and has written many books which are in our library—wrote, **"To who or what do you look for life- sustaining stability, security and acceptance... What do you really want and expect [out of life]? What would [really] make you happy? What would make you an acceptable person? Where do you look for power and success?"**

In other words, why do you do what you do? What motivates you and drives you? (Sportchek—'what moves you?'). What brings you comfort, what gives you courage and clarity in life? Often times we do not stop to ask these kinds of questions, and we carry on our lives. David wrote, **Psalm 40:1,4 "I waited patiently for the Lord; he turned to me and heard my cry. He lifted me out of the pit out of the mud and mire... Blessed is the man who makes the Lord his trust, who does not look to the proud, to those who turn aside to false gods."**

Who would ever turn aside to false gods? In our day we like to think we don't have false gods, but if you pay attention to your motivations...you may be surprised. When we read the books of Samuel, Kings and Chronicles, we are reading a pile of mini-biographies—stories of people's lives on display seeing their mistakes and successes and learning from them.

In these chapters we read of the fall of Saul—the first king of Israel, the one 'Asked for'. He seemed to have everything going for him...but in the end he is rejected by God and loses it all—why? Why do any of us fall? Do you know why you do what you do? It was Paul who said:

Romans 7:15-17 "I do not understand what I do. For what I want to do I do not do, but what I hate I do. And if I do what I do not want to do, I agree that the law is good. As it is, it is no longer I myself who do it, but it is sin living in me." Saul 'turned aside to false gods'...on the outside he looked great, but the inside was something entirely different.

Once the dust settles at the end of chapter 15, Samuel says, "Rebellion is like the sin of divination and arrogance like the evil of idolatry."

In my prep over the past couple weeks, I've read about four root idols that drive our behaviour—these go below the surface of family, money, promotions or health. What do you struggle with? What do you think Saul struggles with?

Power: a longing for influence or recognition

Control: a longing to have everything go according to my plan

Comfort: a longing for pleasure

Approval: a longing to be accepted or desired

These are not bad in themselves. As Calvin put it, “The evil in our desire typically does not lie in what we want, but that we want it too much.”

Well, what motivated Saul to reject the Lord? Saul faces two crises in chapters 13 and 15 that reveal what is going on inside of him. Kick a bucket over, you find out what is inside.

Now the first test comes in chapter 13 with Saul’s son, Jonathan—we’ll spend time looking at him a bit more next week—but Jonathan gets the action going by assassinating the governor of the Philistines in Gibeah. Remember that was Saul’s job last week, which he didn’t do...but his son stirs the hornets’ nest, and the Philistines come on masse. Saul has 3,000 men, Jonathan has 1,000. The Philistines arrive with as many chariots as Saul has men; they are a war machine, with ‘soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore.’ To make things worse, Israel has no weapons; just sticks, stones and whatever they can make with their hands. The Philistines have in essence destroyed Israel’s ability to make weapons and they’re closing in.

No surprise that Saul’s men begin to flee—fear has a way of clarifying our motives. But Saul is still there. He was given the task by Samuel, to wait 7 days after the initial attack on the Philistines; he was to wait for Samuel to arrive to offer burn offerings. This was a way of committing themselves to God, submitting their lives and hopes to God. So, Saul waited. Days 1, 2 and 3 the Philistines marched closer and one by one, the Israelites began to drift away afraid. Day 4,5 and 6...now it’s getting really close, more than half the men have deserted, the rest are shaking. Finally, day 7 arrives and no Samuel. Saul did what he was supposed to do: he waited 7 days and Samuel did not arrive. So he takes matters into his own hands, burns the offering...and no sooner has the smoke cleared that Samuel shows up and asks, ‘What did you do?!’ Samuel is not pleased! Listen to Saul’s response:

1 Samuel 13:11-12

- a. I saw the men were fleeing
- b. The Philistines were advancing
- c. You (Samuel) had not arrived at the set time

Listen to his thinking: “I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord’s favour. So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.’”

What’s wrong with that? Would any of us have acted differently? Likely not. But Samuel’s response is brief and clear, **“You have acted foolishly...you have not kept the command the Lord God gave you.”** The kingdom would be taken from him, for **“the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart...”**

Here is our first clue to what is motivating Saul—*where is he looking?* ‘At his disintegrating army, at the advancing enemy, Samuel’s empty chair...’ more than being afraid, he wants to know what the right thing to do is—who wouldn’t? He thinks ‘seeking God’s favour’ is simply sacrificing something, doing something. Why didn’t he pray? Why didn’t he remember what Samuel said in chapter 1 **Samuel 12:22,25**, **“For the sake of his great name the Lord will not reject his people...Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will be swept away.”** Was this not a moment for Saul to drop to his knees? Instead he lights a match, does the expedient thing...then makes excuses.

So what is his motive here? Is it Power? Likely not. Comfort, no—he would have fled. What about Control—possible, he takes matters into his own hands. And about Approval—he seems worried about his men leaving... not sure, but something other than the Lord is motivating him. Go back to **Psalms 40:8** **“I desire to do your will, O my God; your law is within my heart.”** It’s not in Saul’s heart.

That is test #1. Let’s look at test #2—turn to chapter 15.

This time, Saul is not on the defensive, but rather he is on the offensive. He is commanded to absolutely destroy the Amalekites, not a human or animal is to be left alive. He gathers his army, puts together a great plan and they obliterate the Amalekites. Things go so well that Saul builds a monument to himself (vs.12)...interesting. You hear the cheer in his voice when Samuel arrives on the scene: **1 Samuel 15:13** **“The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord’s instructions.”** Samuel, never to lose a moment asks, **“What is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?”**

Saul did not fulfill his duties—he left the best of the livestock and kept the king alive and feels good about it! Twice he blames his soldiers for keeping the livestock, but he tries to put a good spin on it for Samuel by appeasing him saying, ‘They are for a sacrifice to the Lord God!’ Samuel says, “You didn’t obey God!” and Saul replies, “Yes I did!”

Listen to Samuel’s reply:

**“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the Lord?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has rejected you as king.”**

Listen to how Saul responds: **“I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them...”** Things are starting to get clear.

Saul now takes on the posture of begging. Again, Saul begs...**“I have sinned. But please honour me before the elders of my people and before Israel...”** I think we’re starting to see it more clearly now.

Which of the four idols is bearing fruit in his life? Let’s look at the evidence:

- a. **he worries what others think about him**
- b. **he worries about his image**
- c. **he makes excuses and blames those under him when he is blamed**
- d. **he won’t stand up to his people**
- e. **he builds a monument to himself**

Is it power, control, comfort...no. It’s approval. He wants approval, recognition and praise—at the cost of everything... For him ‘Life only has meaning when he is respected and loved and recognized by others.’ He is willing to give up his kingdom, his relationship with Samuel and with the Lord.

We see another pattern—and that is of the Lord God.

It’s absolutely ironic that Samuel—God’s prophet and priest—and the Lord God Himself both grieve over Saul. **1 Samuel 15:35 “Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel.”**

In 15:10, it says the Lord was grieved over Saul because ‘he turned away from me’...This is the Lord God...grieving! Saul is not grieving; he’s building a monument for himself and wanting to be praised by the leaders of the people...yet God is grieving. Isn’t that incredible? The giver and sustainer of life—is grieving over one man who turned his back on God. Our God is not a cold, mechanical being...he is sovereign, holy and true...but He grieves when people turn their backs on him—he is not indifferent when people are consumed by idols.

Depending on your translation of these texts it reads that God repents or changes his mind. The problem though is cleared up in 1 Sam.15:29 **“He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a man, that he should change his mind.”** But rather the Lord uses human language to help us understand how the Lord is responding to this. Samuel mourns for Saul—God is grieved over him.

He is seeking a man after his own heart—this is opening the door to David—who is known as ‘a man after God’s own heart.’ He is motivated to please the Lord. He is motivated to obey, follow and exalt God above all things...and to repent.

What hope did Saul have? What hope do any of us have? We all have root idols. **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.”**

Saul's craving for approval could not rescue him; it would devour him. He will spend the rest of this book seeking approval from people and from God—he is a man full of 'Anxious Uncertainty'—focusing on outward results and unable to find peace.

John 5:44 “How can you believe, when you receive glory from one another and do not seek the glory that comes from the only God?”

So we ask—where is there any hope? David wrote these words, “The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want.” Isn't that it? The Lord is our shepherd; his opinion of us is the only one that really matters. Isn't it His voice at the end we want to hear say, ‘Well done, good and faithful servant?’ Why do we worry about what others think? Why do we try to fit in with our neighbours, friends and the world around us? I think the church in Canada right now is struggling with this sin—of approval. It just wants to fit in. The challenge with Saul is that he would fit in really well with the church today. He's tall, impressive, gets it mostly right and everyone would like him. Is it any surprise that there is no more distinction between the people of God and the world around?

Thomas Chalmers was a Scottish minister who led a reformation in the Presbyterian church in the early 1800's. He said, **“The best way to overcome the world is not with morality or self-discipline. Christians overcome the world by seeing the beauty and excellence of Christ. They overcome the world by seeing something more attractive than the world: Christ.”** The problem with the idolatry of approval is our eyes are on everything around us—not on Christ. Our identity, security, purpose and comfort...come from how others view us. This is the backhanded curse of social media.

Saul didn't see the Lord; he heard what others thought about him. But oh, the medicine for the soul is that God knows you fully—and loves you. If only Saul could have grasped that God's approval is not earned but given—graciously. But Saul never learned that. How many Christians today do not let that sink in?

We do not overcome the idol of approval by trying harder...but it begins by seeing how much God is for you—you don't earn his love. Galatians 3:13 **“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us...”**

Consider our benediction: **Number 6:24-26 “The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face shine on you and be gracious to you; the Lord turn his face toward you and give you peace.”**

It rings with **“If God is for us, who can be against us?” Romans 8:31 and Philippians 3:8 “I count everything as loss because of the surpassing worth of knowing Christ Jesus.”**

The idol of approval gets smashed when we sit under the gaze of God's approval and grace, which leads to a changed heart.