

“Better Not Call Saul” // 1 Samuel 9, 15 // *The Life of David* #4¹

Can you believe it? NDC staff

Let’s PRAY, and then we’ll do what we dreamed of doing in this place when we started this journey 20 years ago... let’s open the word and dive into it.

You may be seated

Introduction

1 Samuel 9, if you have your Bibles...

In 1961, a counselor at a local community center in San Francisco reached out to Willie Mays, the all-star center fielder for the San Francisco Giants.

The **counselor needed help with a 14 year old boy**: the kid showed a lot of promise--he was tall, muscular, good-looking, charismatic--but recently he’d made a number of **disastrous choices**--MOST recently robbing a liquor store--and his life was starting to **spiral out of control**.

¹ Works Consulted: Tim Chester, *1 Samuel For You: For reading, for feeding, for leading (God’s Word for You)*, The Good Book Company, September 15, 2014; John Sailhammer. *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994); Timothy Keller, “The Disobedience of Saul,” sermon posted by GospelInLife.com, January 4, 2004; Charlie Dates, “I Refuse to Wast This Opportunity,” sermon posed by Progressive Baptist Church Chicago on April 3, 2022; Ryan Britt, “Prophets Priests Kings - Week 8: Me First,” this sermon was preached at The Church of Eleven22, June 16, 2019;

The counselor believed the young man **just suffered from a lack of positive male role models** and if he could just spend some time with an all-star athlete like Willie Mays, **someone he idolized**, maybe this kid could get his life back on track.

He knew it was a long shot, but he **reached out to Mays** and asked if he could bring him by.

Surprisingly, **Willie Mays accepted the invitation** and volunteered to spend an entire afternoon with the teenager. Not once did he talk to the young man about staying out of trouble or making wise choices. Instead, he **showed him his new car, big house** and fancy clothes. Willie Mays thought that if he showed this young man the kind of life possible for him to have, it might motivate him to change his behavior.

It worked. The kid went on to become a professional football player--so successful that he became a household name, surpassing even Mays in wealth and fame.

There was just one problem: In 1994, when this famous running back was accused of killing his wife Nicole Simpson and Ron Goldman, they called Willie Mays to be a character witness, but Willie said he couldn’t: the only connection he’d ever had with OJ was over professional success and material things.

OJ Simpson had learned to imitate Willie Mays’ success, but not to replicate his character.

The biographer who records this story says you have to wonder what might have happened had Willie Mays chosen to spend that San Francisco afternoon explaining to OJ Simpson what really mattered in life--character--and challenged OJ to leverage his talents not to enrich himself but to serve and protect others.²

² From the biography on Willie Mays, by James Hirsch, page 383.

At the end of the day, the most important quality in a leader's life is character. In our day we are painfully aware of leaders who look so flashy and attractive on the outside, but time, trial and temptation reveal that what's on the inside was not nearly as beautiful as what we saw on the outside.

The book of 1 Samuel is about Israel's search for a King, and the first half of 1 Samuel is about how God prepared Israel for that King.

- **God was not opposed to giving them a King** (a lot of people get that wrong). God had promised he would give them one—the problem was that Israel's motivations in asking were all off.
- And so, in **chapters 1–2,** through the story of Hannah, God warned Israel not to look to a King for **identity, security or happiness—those things come only from God.**
- **In chapters 3–7,** God showed them that the most important thing in a leader was **integrity.** Eli's sons had leveraged their positions of power to enrich themselves; what Israel needed was a representative who would say to God, "Speak Lord, your servant hears" and then be fully committed to relaying whatever he said.
- **In chapter 8 God told Israel that any King** they gave their hearts to, except God, would enslave them: only God satisfies and liberates.

And that brings us to chapter 9, where God shows them that inward character, not outward charisma, is the most essential element for blessing.

We're going to see that through the life of a man named "Saul." (TITLE)"

You say, "J.D., we're on week 4 of a series called "The Life of David" and still have seen neither hide nor hair of... well, you know, *David*." We'll get there, I promise. But LISTEN: BUT THERE'S A LESSON HERE FOR US IN HOW MUCH TIME GOD TAKES to set this up! We seek

salvation--and identity, security and happiness in all the wrong things. We're attracted to all the wrong things. So, these prequels are vitally important. These are David (and Jesus') "origin stories." Saul is Anakin to David's Luke; these stories are Saul's '1883' to David's Yellowstone.

Here we go: 1 Samuel 9:1 There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish... a man of wealth. 2 And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

- **Saul was like, "Mr. Israel."** He was everything you'd want in a King. If I were casting a movie, I'd cast **Hugh Jackman** in this role--tall, good-looking, commanding voice. I know, I know, you're surprised: 'Not **Nicolas Cage**?' No. I'd cast Nic in a different role, which I'll show you in a minute.

God said to Samuel, "**Go anoint Saul as King.** That's who the people will want." So, Samuel does. And Saul starts off pretty well.

His response when Samuel announces to him that he is going to be king is pretty humble: **Vs. 21** he said, "Saul answered: Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin?" He's small in his eyes.

- And then there's this endearing little story in chapter 10 about how when the moment came to officially crown Saul as king--they couldn't find him. Saul was hiding in a closet, he felt so unworthy for the role!
- That humility drove him to depend on God, and chapters 10–15 are all about great things God did through Saul.

But then we come to **1 Sam 15 (make sure you turn there in your Bibles).** [1] And Samuel said to Saul... [2] Thus says the LORD of hosts, 'I have noted what Amalek did to Israel in opposing them on the way

when they came up out of Egypt. [3] Now go and strike Amalek and devote to destruction all that they have.”

- **A little background here:** when Israel was on their way out of Egypt, en route to the Promised Land, defenseless and vulnerable, the Amalekites attacked them.
- **And then, for the next 300 years**, they pestered Israel perpetually--pillaging, and plundering them constantly.

So, finally, God says, “That’s it; I’ve had enough,” and he instructs Saul. *“The day of judgment for them has come. Go and wipe them out.”* [3] Do not spare them, but kill both man and woman, child and infant, ox and sheep, camel and donkey.”

Now, before I go on, I know many of you might get hung up right there. You say, “Why would God order something like this? How is that just? Killing the innocent with the guilty? This sounds like genocide.”

Great question--let me deal with it, otherwise you’ll blow up my email later:

- **First, note that this was not a war of conquest;** it was a war of justice. That’s why God told them not to touch anything. It was not about thinking you were better than someone and seizing the assets of one nation for yourself. **Throughout history**, whenever other nations have done this, they always enriched themselves with property or slaves. God said to “Israel, you are to gain nothing through this. This is about my justice, not your arrogance.”
- You say, **“Well, what about all the innocent people?** The women; the infants. And this is a **tough thing for us to get our minds around**--but here’s a few things to consider:
- **We Westerners think about justice only individually.** Every person, we believe, stands or falls solely by their own merit.

- **Eastern peoples, by contrast, thought about justice communally:** you’re not JUST an individual, you are part of a group—and the group lives and dies together.
- **The truth is that East and West are both partially right--there is a sense in which**, as Eastern people say, we are inextricably united to our community; we’re never just lone individuals. What we do affects others in our community and what they do affects us.
 - **We see this in our own families, right?** The child born with fetal alcohol syndrome didn’t do anything different from the child born to a healthy home. The **child suffers for the mistakes** of her parents.
 - **It works the other way, too.** Our kids are blessed by our obedience to God.
 - **In this passage, in fact (vs 6)**, God identifies another group--the **Kenites, who lived near the Amalekites**. God said, “Don’t touch them. Preserve them.” You see, generations before, the Kenites had helped Israel when they were in need. So the descendants of the Kenites were blessed by the righteous acts of their parents.
 - So, the Eastern view of just is partially right. **But it is also true, and biblical, as we say in the West, that ultimate justice is individual**, and each of us will be judged individually for our own sins, not for the sins of our fathers.
- **In a passage like this, when God delivers someone to death because of the actions of another, we are seeing only one side of the justice equation.** What we are not seeing is that after this action, when they stand before him, God gives the final word of justice, where each person is punished for their own sins.
 - When these children stood before God, they answered only for themselves and not for their parents. Tim Keller says that in this tragedy, God was just “collecting them early.”
 - When you look at it that way, there’s even an element of mercy in it for these kids. **What would have happened had these Amalekite kids grown up?** Undoubtedly they would

have walked in their parents' wicked ways. God was actually delivering them from that evil.

- **Now, that doesn't mean that you and I could ever justify violence** against the innocent in this way. We're not God, and our justice is only ever supposed to be focused on the individual. God makes that clear in the Bible in places like Ezekiel--**when you are setting up a legal system, children are not to be punished** for the sins of the parents; each one should be judged only for their own sins.
- **But at this point in the Old Testament**, Israel was used specially by God as his instrument of justice. No nation or individual represents God that way anymore.

Some of you say, "I still have questions..." Two things: I have a podcast called AMA, and there is a special episode on this very question. Or, you could get a **good study Bible** (I use the ESV Study Bible)--it will help you navigate these questions.

OK, let's get back to the story. God's instructions are clear: Saul and the people are not to keep anything because this is not a war of conquest, it is an execution of justice. [7] And Saul defeated the Amalekites from Havilah as far as Shur, which is East of Egypt. [8] And he took Agag the king of the Amalekites alive (PAUSE) and devoted to destruction all the people with the edge of the sword.

He took the king alive. Now, why would he do this? **Well, you see, in the ancient world, having an enemy king in your prison was a status symbol.** Once a year you'd have a parade where you'd cart out all your conquered kings like trophies, and you'd be like, "**Look at all these Kings I've conquered; I'm the king of kings.**")

[9] "But Saul and the people spared Agag and the best of the sheep and of the oxen and of the fattened calves and the lambs and all that was good, and would not utterly destroy them."

- **Now, little textual note here:** In Hebrew, the verb 'spared' is singular even though you'd expect it to be plural, given that the

subject of the sentence is plural: "Saul and the people (plural) spared (singular)." In English, that would be bad grammar; but In Hebrew, that's a way of showing that only the first person in the sentence is doing the action. The people were *there*, but Saul and Saul alone made the decision to spare Agag and the best of the sheep.

Which was, of course, exactly the opposite of what God had told him not to do. And so, vs 10, God said to Samuel, "I regret (some translations say 'repent') that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following me and has not performed my commandments." (15:10)

- **Now, I probably should deal with this, too, really quickly, lest you blow up my email here, too.** It's y'all's fault I have to do this. Y
- You say, "God has regrets?" God's like, "Man, I really blew it on that one. How did I miss those character flaws?" Every employer has had that experience: "How did I not see this in the interview? I so regret hiring this guy." Is that what God is saying here?
- Some Christian theologians **use this passage to suggest** that God doesn't really know the future—because he has made us free agents he doesn't always know what we're going to do. It's a **theological position called 'open theism,'** meaning that the future is open.
 - The problem with that is **the Bible clearly teaches** God *does* know the future. For example, Psalm 139:4 says Before a word is on my tongue, you know all about it, Lord.
 - Lamentations 3:37, Who is there who speaks and it happens, unless the Lord has ordained it?
 - Proverbs 16:33 says "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the Lord." (God knows what number the dice turn up stops before you even throw them.)
 - Isaiah 46:9–10: "I am God, and there is none like me, declaring the end from the beginning." This is one of the unique things that makes him God. No surprises. Has it ever dawned on you that nothing has ever dawned on him?

- **In fact, look down at vs. 29 of this chapter.** God says, “The Glory of Israel does not lie or have regret, for he is not a man, that he should have regret.”
 - **IOW, his regret is not like our regret**, where we missed some detail or made a bad decision. His regret means he feels sadness and anger over how he responded, not that he made an error due to lack of knowledge.
 - **Listen, whenever the Bible looks like it is contradicting itself**, it’s not; it’s usually that you’re dealing with a mystery hard for human minds to fathom. *How can God truly know the future and we still be free?* I don’t know. But I **figure if science has these kinds of mysteries** in it: Is light a wave or a particle and other quantum physics stuff, we should expect these things with God, too.
 - **Some truths you have to hold in tension**, and always interpret hard verses by easy ones.
 - The Bible **clearly says that God knows the end** from the beginning, so when it says that God has “regrets” (that’s the hard one), I know it can’t mean that God made a mistake.

OK, that’s the end of the 2nd theology lesson. Back to the story: Samuel was so upset over what Saul had done that he cried all through the night: [12] And Samuel rose early to meet Saul in the morning. Saul was an **Enneagram 8** who couldn’t rest until the confrontation had happened.

So, he heads down to the army camp where Saul is throwing his victory jam... beer kegs and karaoke machines. And as Samuel gets close to the camp: it was told Samuel, “Saul came to Carmel, and (get this) behold, he set up a monument for himself...”

- Saul had made all the **soldiers gather these huge rocks** and stack them end on end and then put a big plaque up on the top that said, **“SAUL rocks.”** Just kidding. It said something like, “*When*

danger strikes, Better Call Saul!” Also kidding. We don’t know what it said, just that Saul made a monument to himself.

- **What’s happening to Saul?** Keeping the king as a trophy, setting up a monument to himself... It’s pretty obvious, Saul is making a name for himself.

So, when Saul sees Samuel approaching, he says, “Blessed be you to the LORD. I have performed the commandment of the LORD.” (15:13) And Samuel says, “Oh really?” “What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears and the lowing of the oxen that I hear?” (15:14) “Saul, these are not your sheep. They all have little tags on their ears that say, ‘Amalekite.’”

Saul is caught red-handed.

Listen: All of us have a moment where we get caught in our sin. All of us. But what you do next when the Holy Spirit confronts you is of life or death importance. **What Saul does next here:** if you go down his path, there is almost no coming back.

[15] Saul said, “They have brought them from the Amalekites, for *the people* spared the best of the sheep and of the oxen

- **Who spared the best of the sheep?** “The people” spared the best of the sheep. “Hey, I was just doing what the people wanted.” But remember, the narrator already showed us that sparing the sheep was Saul’s decision and Saul’s decision alone.

And then Saul continues: “The reason they did it was... to sacrifice to the LORD your God, and the rest we have devoted to destruction.”

- **Now he’s rationalizing his disobedience,** “We planned to sacrifice some to you. You’re going to get something out of this, God!” Parents, **your kids ever do this?** You catch them with their hand in the cookie jar and they are like, “But I was getting one for my sister, too!” And **that would never work**, unless they offered one to me--and then I’d say, ‘That’s ok...’

- **The #1 substitute for obedience is religion.** It's not atheism. We use religious activity to cover up a heart that is not surrendered to God.

[16] Then Samuel said to Saul, "Stop! I will tell you what the LORD said to me this night: [17] Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.

- "Saul, it was when you were nothing that God gave you all of this. Was being God's servant, belonging to him, being anointed by him—was that not enough for you? Now you have to make a name for yourself?

[20] And Saul said to Samuel, (No, no, no, but...) "I have obeyed the voice of the LORD. I have gone on the mission on which the LORD sent me. (IOW, I did 98% of what God asked me!) I have brought Agag the king of Amalek, and I have devoted the Amalekites to destruction.

I just kept a few of the sheep and was for sure going to tithe them. Look at Samuel's response (oh, this is so important) [22] And Samuel said, Saul... "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD?

Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen than the fat of rams.

And then Samuel says something that sounds like an exaggeration, but I assure you it is not: [23] For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and presumption (becoming an authority to yourself; taking upon yourself the prerogative to determine what is right or wrong) is as iniquity and idolatry.

- I doubt very seriously that any of you has a little seance space built into your garage, or an idol set up over a pentagram in a circle of candles that you bowed down to right before you came,

and after church you plan to go home and sacrifice some kittens and cut off some chicken heads.

- And yet, **sitting in church w/ areas of your life** that you know are not surrendered to God is the **same in God's eyes as doing THAT. Rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft.**
 - Some of you are **very active Christians**, you are just dating somebody you shouldn't be dating.
 - Or you're sleeping with somebody you shouldn't be sleeping with. Or you're sitting in here with your boyfriend or girlfriend and you're sleeping together; you know the Bible says it's wrong, but you're like, "Yeah, but we love each other and one day we plan to get married. We're not hurting anybody." ***"For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry."***
 - Or maybe you've got some area where you are compromising your integrity--you are cheating on your schoolwork, or your taxes, lying on a resume. You're not a bad person, you just can't follow Jesus there.
 - Maybe you refuse to tithe--everything else in your life you do God's way, but you just won't give God the first and the best of your resources. That's too hard.
 - Maybe God has told you to go and serve overseas but you don't want to be far from your family.
 - Or **maybe your rebellion is in the area of beliefs**. You want to be a Christian, but you refuse to believe what Jesus taught about things like marriage or gender or sexuality. It's amazing to me how many people feel like they can just opt out of some part of the Bible they find objectionable.
 - ***"For rebellion, and compromise, and taking on yourself the prerogative to write the rules are as the sin of witchcraft or idolatry."***
- You say, "That seems a little harsh. Comparing these things to witchcraft?" Not really. What was the first lie of Satan? "You can be like God: IOW, you can decide good and evil for yourself, you

don't have to let God do that alone, and then you can opt out of whatever commands of God you have a hard time with."

- **Refusing to surrender to God's authority** is the **original sin**, and when you do that, you are following Satan.
 - **Surrender is one of those things that has to be total** for it to have any meaning.
 - It's kind of like how I surrendered **my romantic life to Veronica when we got married**... If it's not 100%, it's meaningless. Next year we'll celebrate our 23rd wedding anniversary. **Long time**. If on that day I give her a report card and it says, "Over these 23% years I have been 98% faithful," she doesn't jump up and down and say, "Oh, good, I have an A husband. He's summa cum laude!" Faithfulness in marriage has to be absolute for it to mean anything. Surrender in your walk with God has to be total for it to mean anything. If Jesus is not Lord of all, he's not Lord at all.
- **So, I ask:** Is there any thought, any habit, any relationship, any sin, any lifestyle, any possession, over which you have not turned over complete control to God? Any conviction you haven't surrendered?
 - Please note: **I don't mean you still struggle with sin**. We all struggle with sin. I do, every day. Every day is a struggle with compromise and disobedience.
 - What I mean is you are **sitting here this morning, saying, "I know this is against God's will, but I refuse to do this YOUR way."** That's different than struggling, it's a posture of rebellion, and it's like the sin of witchcraft.

And here's the thing: Some of you stood this weekend and sang out loud with everybody else, "God you are worthy of our praise..." You were like Saul answering Samuel, "I have kept the commandment of the Lord." It's like **AW Tozer often said**, "Christians don't tell lies; they sing them." Don't **add to your sin by lying to God**, like Saul. You can't proclaim his worthiness with your mouth if you deny his authority with your life.

Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king." [24] Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."

- **That looks like repentance, doesn't it?** But it's not. Did you notice he's still blaming the people?

And **look at what he says next:** [25] Now therefore, please pardon my sin and return with me that I may worship the LORD."

- When Saul says, "Worship the Lord" here, he doesn't mean "let's have a little private prayer time; you play the guitar and I'll sing along" He is referring to the official thanksgiving ceremony Israel held after they won a battle.
- **If Samuel doesn't stand alongside Saul**, people will know something is wrong and Saul will lose face in the eyes of the people. **PAUSE**
- Saul's main concern is still what he looks like in front of the people.

Saul doesn't repent--far from it. He's less concerned about God and more concerned about his reputation.

There is a point where God will confront you over your sin--it may happen this weekend, and some of you will only be concerned about what being caught does to your reputation.

- **What would be more upsetting to you?** Other people finding out about your sin, or the fact that God knows about it?
- **This is your moment to repent.** And you got to get everybody else out of mind and just do business with God.

[26] And Samuel said to Saul, "I will not return with you. For you have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you from being king over Israel."

[27] As Samuel turned to go away, Saul seized the skirt of his robe, and it tore. [28] And Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you this day and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you.

- o You gotta admit, this is some **great screenwriting**. As Samuel turns to go, Saul grabs his robe and RIP... Samuel then looks at his torn shirt and says, "God has **torn the kingdom away** from you, Saul, and given it to a **young shepherd boy** who is better to you.

[32] Then Samuel said, "Bring here to me Agag the king of the Amalekites." And Agag came to him cheerfully, saying, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." Agag is like, "Hey, hey... alright, alright. I've killed people. You've killed people. No hard feelings."

[33] And Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so shall your mother be childless among women." And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal.

- And **THAT'S why, if I were casting the part of Samuel**, I'd save this role for Nic Cage.
- Samuel **could only be played by an actor** who went all-In, and nobody goes all-in like Nic.

Alright--here's what I think we take away from this story:

1. **Prioritize character, not charisma**

If this story teaches us anything, it's that those things that usually catch our eye are not what serves us best in the long run.

Let me ask you this: Why do you think Israel was most attracted to flash and beauty and charisma? Because they were looking for a King to make them proud; to prosper and protect them.

But God was supposed to be those things. *If God is those things for you, then the most important thing you need in a leader, or a spouse, or job, is something that helps you obey God.*

- Would you rather have a great job with great pay and be out of fellowship with God, or a lesser job with lesser money and know what you were in God's will?
- Would you rather be **married to the girl or guy of your dreams**, and be out of fellowship with God, or **stay single** and know you're in fellowship with him?

Your answer to that depends on what you see as your primary source of identity, security and happiness. *If God is the source of those things, then the most important consideration is whether they will help you obey God.*

Given time, **someone's beauty and charisma fade**, no matter how good it looks on the surface.

One of the theories about the word "sincere" is that it comes from a combination of two words--'sine' in Latin, which means 'without' and 'cere' which means 'wax.' "Without wax." The theory was in the ancient world, when they were making a pot or a sculpture and it cracked, they would melt wax and put it in the crack or the chip and then paint over it and you'd never know. And that was great until you put the statue in the sun, when the wax would melt and all the imperfections would be revealed. A pot that was "sincere" was one "without wax," what you saw on the surface was consistent with what the pot was in substance. And so that word was used to refer to someone's character. A "sincere" person was someone who didn't have charm and beauty covering up a heart of compromise and rebellion.

I will tell you, as a very happily married man, when you age with someone what blesses you about them as you grow older is their character.

- All beauty fades, and when that wax melts away, or wrinkles or sags of whatever it does, what remains is inward character.

If you're choosing a spouse, or an employee, or a pastor, or a king, always prioritize character. **Character always composes the conclusion.**

2. Godly character grows in the soil of humility

Saul gives us a vision image of how lives spiral out of control. Here's how I'd summarize it:

Pride → Independence → Compromise → Turmoil

Pride: Like Saul, it all starts to be all about you. Your will, your agenda, your name, your abilities, your glory.

Independence: You believe that you've got things under control, that you are sufficient to the task. And so, you don't think a lot about what God wants, you are sufficient.

You have lost what the Bible calls "the fear of God." Sometimes we see that phrase "fear" and think it means to be terrified of God. And, in its place, you should be terrified of the wrath of God. But what "fear of God" usually means in the Bible is recognizing how important he is so that you'd be terrified of being separated from him.

I've been SCUBA diving a handful of times in Indonesia, and the last time I went my 'instructor' (and I put that in air quotes) took me down 40–50 feet underwater, which was pretty deep; deep enough that you couldn't just shoot up to the surface; if you do, nitrogen

bubbles form in your blood and you can get really sick or die. You have to go up about 10 feet, wait 5 minutes, then go up another 10. Which means that while you are down there tormenting Nemo you have to watch your oxygen because you need at least 10–15 minutes worth of oxygen left to surface... This was all new to me, so the whole time I'm down there I am fixated on that oxygen tank, making sure I had enough to resurface. **You could say in that situation that I had a healthy fear of oxygen.** It wasn't that I was scared of it; I was scared to be without it.

That's how we should feel about God. In any circumstance, I want to know I'm in his will, because I don't want to be cut off from him.

Pride → Independence → Compromise

- When you're not concerned about being cut off from God, you grow comfortable with compromise.
- Of course, you don't want to make God angry, so you attempt to offset your disobedience through religious devotion.
 - Dating a guy: I'll bring him to church
 - Tithe income; tithe time
 - Work on my marriage; instead I'll get involved in the church
 - Go overseas; I'll get involved in
 - Having an affair, give to the church
- But **you can't do that**: the **only deal God will make with you**: his salvation, his presence, his power, for your total surrender.

Which leads to the 4th stage:

Pride → Independence → Compromise → Turmoil

- Saul in this chapter loses the presence of God. **Chapter 16** says the Spirit of God departs from him.
- That leaves Saul feeling really insecure. He can no longer depend on God to take care of him, and fight his battles for him, it's all on him. And that produces in him an anxiety and jealousy that literally consumes him.

- **Read these chapters**, and you'll see Saul's life unravel
- **He becomes irrational:** The slightest criticism; the slightest unfavorable comparison with somebody else sends Saul into a **violent rage**. He's uber-competitive. Any loss feels like a challenge to his self-worth or self-value.
 - David is playing the harp in Saul's court and Saul looks at him and thinks about how much better everyone likes David more than him and he tries to pin David to the wall with a javelin.
 - Saul spends the last decade of his life traipsing around the wildernesses of Israel for 10 years trying to kill David because he's jealous.
- Are you the kind of person who really struggles with jealousy toward others; you are always anxious about the future; resenting others successes?
 - Or how about this--are you the **kind of person who hates** to lose?
 - **Pull back the layers, and what you'll find** is that a heart not fully surrendered to God's will or not fully convinced that he will provide all that you need to accomplish that will.
- **I think the greatest side-benefit of being fully surrendered to God** is the peace and security that comes from knowing the future doesn't rest on my shoulders; I don't have to make it all work out; I don't have to win everything or provide for everything.
 - I don't have to be sufficient: he is.
 - I don't care if others out perform me --it's not about my glory anymore; it's about his.
 - It's not devastating if others don't recognize my contribution--my job is to be a good and faithful servant.
 - I don't have to worry about providing for my future; I am his **servant**, which means he will supply all my need.

Surrender leads to peace; independence leads to turmoil. I love how one author says it: **"You are afraid of surrender because you don't**

want to lose control. But you never had control; all you had was anxiety."³

Tis so sweet to trust in Jesus, just to take him at his word, just to rest upon his promise, just to know, "Thus says the Lord!"

Throughout the Bible, the one virtue that leads to all the others is humility. A sense of your neediness. Jesus said in **Matthew 5:3, "Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God."**

- **That sounds so poetic, right?** But I've never wanted to be poor in spirit. You neither.
 - You ever been poor? Some of you college students say, "Yep." You feel powerless. You can't go wherever you want or do whatever they want. You have to constantly stay close to the money-givers so they can supply your need.
- **I've never wanted to be poor in spirit;** I want to be upper middle class in spirit, so I can do what I want when I want. **But God wants me poor in spirit**, terrified to be separated from him.

When you think about it, **how God created humanity** at the beginning demonstrated that. In Gen 2, after God was done creating the world, he looked around and said that everything was good except for one thing. What was that? "It is not good that man should be alone."

- So what did God do? Did he say, "Bud, you got a problem. Better fix it." No, first, he brought the animals to him 2x2, the hippopotamus and the Kangaroo. And that created a dilemma for Adam. He thought, "Well, Mr. Giraffe has a Mrs. Giraffe... Mr. Aardvark has a Mrs. Aardvark, and I'm not really attracted to any of them... What about me?" God says, "Great, that's what I

³ Elizabeth Gilbert, posted to Twitter, as quoted by Brene Brown in *Atlas of the Heart*.

wanted you to see.” Then what? He made him go to sleep. You are never more helpless than when you are asleep, right?

- And when he wakes up and there she is.
- BTW, ladies, the first time you meet a man in the Bible, he’s just woken up from sleep and he’s recovering from surgery! That’s a needy dude. Be ready.

God created us in a posture of neediness, where we’d have to depend on God. What was Satan’s lie? “You don’t have to be needy! You can be like God...”

“Blessed are the poor in spirit, for theirs is the Kingdom of God.” The main thing you need with God is need. And when you sense your need, you’ll surrender yourself to him. No conditions. No caveats. No compromises.

VAMP: Conclusion:

A King fully dependent on God is what God wanted to give them, but Saul was the opposite of that. And that caused Israel a lot of pain. But Saul’s story set them up for a different kind of king--a humble servant boy, who wouldn’t be that impressive to look at, but was humble and surrendered to God and a man after God’s own heart. And that sense of dependence on God gave that Shepherd boy a power to defeat giants in battle, a power that Saul never had.

But David is not the primary king God wanted to give them. When Jesus came, he was even less physically impressive than David. He had no money, no political clout, no army--so far as we know, he was not even good with a slingshot. He didn’t stand head and shoulder above anybody for any reason. The prophet Isaiah said he possessed no natural beauty that we would desire him.

Yet, he was fully dependent on God. In one sense, Jesus was the neediest person ever to live. I know that sounds almost offensive, but think about it:

- Jesus said, “I only do what I see my father doing!”
- He prayed all the time. He prayed all night before choosing a single disciple. He was desperate to know what God is doing.
- The Father’s presence was to him like oxygen; he never wanted to be separated from it.

And that gave him the power to overcome sin and then raise from the dead on our behalf. Because he was fully dependent on God, he could die in our place, for all the places, like Saul, we have been proud, independent and compromising. And we can receive that salvation; and his power can go to work in us and through us, when we depend on God like he did--expressed in full and total surrender.

Which path are you following? Saul’s: Pride → Independence → Compromise → Turmoil; or Jesus’: Humility → dependence → Surrender → Peace and Life and Power

Heads bowed... Are you fully surrendered?

Only 2 categories...

For some of you, like Saul, God is exposing your sin this weekend. I implore you: don’t make Saul’s mistake and try to cover it up with religion. Humble yourself. Admit your rebellion. Repent of it and surrender yourself fully. “The one who covers his sins will not prosper, but he who confesses them finds mercy.”

Don’t settle for religion when only surrender will do. What will it be?

