



Lethbridge
First Baptist
Church

Who is Your King?

A Devotional Guide through 1 Samuel

Part 1

This daily devotional guide is meant to help you explore the Scriptures in our sermon series on 1 Samuel. Each week, we will explore the passage that will be preached on the upcoming Sunday (for example, we are reading 1 Sam 1–2 from Jun 29—July 5; this passage will be preached on in the July 5 Sunday service).

Each day, a portion of the passage is provided to you to read or listen to. You may do this individually or with your household. Feel free to do this in whatever version you find most helpful. A key verse from each portion will be given. The default Bible version used in this devotional guide is the New International Version (NIV). If a different version is used, it will be indicated. If you're feeling extra ambitious, you might consider spending an additional 5–10 minutes meditating on this key verse, or maybe even memorize one of the key verses of the week.

A short devotional is provided for you with questions to consider for application, prayer, or discussion. Finally, a short prayer may be provided in italics. These prayers are meant to assist you in finding words for your personal prayers with God.

It is our prayer that these daily devotionals will help your walk with God so that you may encounter him daily and grow in faith and love.

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Monday, June 29

Read or listen to 1 Sam 1:1–8.

Key verse: “Hannah, why are you crying?” (1 Sam 1:8, CSB)

Hannah was one of two of Elkanah’s wives. While her sister-wife was having many children, Hannah had none. In a world where a woman’s value was based on her ability to have children, Hannah was left feeling empty. Elkanah didn’t understand. She was his favourite wife. He gave her extra portions of food to show her that he loved her. He thought that his love was enough to fill Hannah’s grief. It wasn’t.

Have you experienced grief that has left you feeling empty? Are you wondering whether God sees your pain? What sorts of things have you tried to fill your life with to block out your pain? Talk to God about it.



Watch this overview video on the book of 1 Samuel.¹

God, you keep track of all my sorrows. You have collected all my tears in your bottle. You have recorded each one in your book. (Ps 56:8)

¹ <https://bibleproject.com/videos/1-samuel/>

Tuesday, June 30

Read or listen to 1 Sam 1:9–18.

Key verse: Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the Lord and wept with many tears. (1 Sam 1:10, CSB)

Hannah brings her sorrow to God. She prays and weeps many tears, so much that the priest Eli mistakes her weeping for intoxication. He, like Elkanah, misunderstands her pain.

There may be times when people don't understand your pain. You might feel misunderstood by many. This is why support groups are so helpful. They make space for people with similar pain to share their stories together.

Who do you go to when you are feeling grief and pain? Write down the name of one person that you can go to when you are hurting. What might it look like for you to bring your pain to God?

May you see God's light on the path ahead when the road you walk is dark. May you always hear, even in your hour of sorrow, the gentle singing of the lark. When times are hard may hardness never turn your heart to stone, may you always remember when the shadows fall, you do not walk alone. Amen.²

² Author unknown

Wednesday, July 1

Read or listen to 1 Sam 1:19–28.

Key verse: The Lord remembered her. (1 Sam 1:19, CSB)

In Hannah’s case, her prayer for a child is answered. This is difficult, because reality doesn’t always match the miracles that we see in Scripture. It’s important to remember that Scripture is written to tell us a specific story about God through specific people in a specific time.

God’s miraculous provision of Samuel tells us something about God—that he willingly partners with those who have surrendered their desires to him. Hannah was at her wit’s end. She didn’t know where else to turn but to God, and God heard the desire of her heart. Sometimes God answers our prayers exactly as we pray them. Other times, he might answer the deeper, desperate desire of our heart, which might be different from the words that we prayed.

Consider the desire of your heart today. What do you long for in your life? God had not forgotten Hannah; he has not forgotten you.

God, I confess to you the desire of my heart. Remember me today. Amen.

Thursday, July 2

Read or listen to 1 Sam 2:1–10.

Key verse: “He raises the poor from the dust and lifts the needy from the trash heap.” (1 Sam 2:8, CSB)

Hannah’s prayer highlights her journey from sorrow to joy. She rejoices in God’s power to provide for her, and not only for her but also for all her people. She recognizes that God sees and hears the cries of every heart, and he meets the needs of those who cry out. He lifts up the poor and the needy. He raises up the lowest of the world and seats them with the most powerful. Hannah prays for God’s upside-down kingdom to come and turn her world on its head, and her child, Samuel, will be part of this story. Through Hannah’s desperate prayer, she becomes part of God’s kingdom coming to earth.

In what ways have you seen the poor lifted up and the rich brought low? In what ways can you be part of this reordering of the world?

Lord God, I trust that you will judge the world rightly. May we, the church, help bring your kingdom into our world. Amen.

Friday, July 3

Read or listen to 1 Sam 2:11–26.

Key verse: Meanwhile, the boy Samuel grew taller and grew favor with the Lord and with people. (1 Sam 2:26, NLT)

Eli's sons were wicked priests. This highlights just how far the people of Israel have fallen from living in a right relationship with God. Even the priests have no regard for God, and they quite literally skim the fat off the top for themselves. This is horrific to God.

Samuel, in contrast, is a little priest who grows up in the presence of the Lord. He is not of the right lineage to be a priest (priests had to be Levites and Samuel is an Ephraimite), but he behaves more rightly than the rightful priests of God.

Our pedigree counts for very little in God's eyes. While Eli's sons wore the garments of the priests, their actions showed that they served only themselves. Our actions speak the truth about who we really serve and worship.

What do your actions say about who or what you are worshipping? Write or draw your honest response to God. How is God responding to you?

Saturday, July 4

Read or listen to 1 Sam 2:27–36.

Key verse: “I will raise up a faithful priest for myself. He will do whatever is in my heart and mind.” (1 Sam 2:35)

The books of Samuel (1—2 Samuel is really one long book broken into two parts) highlight where desperate need meets divine intervention. Hannah’s deep sorrow for her barrenness parallels the deep sorrow that God feels for his people when they abandon him. After the downward spiral of the book of Judges, the answer to Hannah’s prayer, Samuel, is also God’s answer to the people: he has not abandoned them but will provide for them a leader and priest to bring them back into a right relationship with him.

Samuel means, “God has heard.” God saw Hannah and heard the cries of her heart, and in Hannah’s cries, we see a glimpse of the need for Israel at large to know God’s presence. God also sees and hears the cries of his people; the actions of Eli’s sons tell us that all is not well in Israel, and he will judge them for their blatant disrespect for their role as God’s priests.

Do you believe that God sees and hears your needs for you individually? What about for your people—your family, household, culture, and friends? Talk to God about it.

Sunday, July 5

If you have the time, read or listen to 1 Sam 1–2.

The Bible is written mainly so that we can grow to understand and know the character of God as he interacts with his creation. What have you learned about God's character in the first two chapters of 1 Samuel? What questions do you have for God this week?

Pray this prayer with God's people today:

*Christ with me,
Christ before me,
Christ behind me,
Christ in me,
Christ beneath me,
Christ above me,
Christ on my right,
Christ on my left,
Christ when I lie down,
Christ when I sit down,
Christ when I arise,
Christ in the heart of every man who
thinks of me,
Christ in the mouth of everyone who
speaks of me,
Christ in every eye that sees me,
Christ in every ear that hears me. Amen.³*

³ St. Patrick's Breastplate prayer

Sunday Sermon Notes

Monday, July 6

Read or listen to 1 Sam 3:1–10.

Key verse: Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.” (1 Sam 3:10)

Samuel is just a boy when he hears God’s voice call to him in the night. He’s confused; he runs to Eli, thinking that Eli was calling him. The third time this happens, Eli figures out that it is God calling Samuel and tells Samuel how to respond.

Have you ever heard God call you by name? It may not be as dramatic as Samuel’s experience, but it tugs at your heart just the same. It’s a nagging voice that won’t leave you alone. How have you responded? Did you know it was the voice of God, or did you think it was something else?

Often, we need the help of others to discern whether what we are hearing is the voice of God, just as Eli did for Samuel. Who can you ask to help you today?

*God of silence and God of all sound, help me to listen. Give me attentive ears that begin to separate the noise from the sounds that are you. Today help me hear you anew. Amen.*⁴

⁴ Author unknown

Tuesday, July 7

Read or listen to 1 Sam 3:1–18.

Key verse: “He is the Lord; let him do what is good in his eyes.” (1 Sam 3:18)

God’s message for Eli is a difficult one—he repeats his warning of judgment against Eli’s sons. His sons are *blaspheming* God, which means that they are mocking God and showing contempt for God. Despite the prophet’s warning in 1 Sam 2, Eli has not reprimanded them or removed them from their station as priests in the tabernacle. This suggests that maybe Eli is not taking God as seriously as he ought to either. Still, Eli acknowledges God’s plan to judge his family for their blatant disrespect. . . but he doesn’t repent.

While God calls each of us individually to follow him, he also calls us to follow him together as a community. Our Western culture doesn’t like to take responsibility for the actions of others; too often, we’d rather point fingers of blame or say that our actions have no consequences to anyone but ourselves. However, God is concerned with how we approach him in worship together, and this includes taking responsibility for others.

What is your attitude toward God and his people? Are you willing to take responsibility for the ways his people have disrespected God? Talk to God about it.

Wednesday, July 8

Read or listen to 1 Sam 3:19–21.

Key verse: As Samuel grew up, the Lord was with him. (1 Sam 3:19, NLT)

One basic principle of reading Scripture is to look for contrasts and comparisons that are made in the text. On one hand, we have Eli's wicked sons who treat God contemptuously and are promised judgment (while not explicitly stated, we know from elsewhere in Scripture that God's judgment is always a call to repentance... but we see no signs of repentance here)—twice. On the other, there is Samuel, who is repeatedly stated to be in God's favour.

Samuel is portrayed as God's faithful priest in a land where many were unfaithful. The contrast tells us that God takes sin seriously, but he's not done with his people yet. Through his words to and through Samuel, he invites all his people everywhere to repent and turn back to him.

What are the markers of God's faithful people today?
How can you, like Samuel, speak God's words of hope?

Lord God, we confess where we, your people, have been unfaithful to you. May we speak words of hope to those who need to hear it. Amen.

Thursday, July 9

Read or listen to 1 Sam 4:1–11.

Key verse: “Let us bring the ark of the Lord’s covenant from Shiloh, so that he may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.” (1 Sam 4:3)

The Philistines were one of Israel’s longtime enemies. They migrated to the Palestine area in about 1200 BC and established five major cities there. The early Iron Age was fraught with tribal warfare, and when one tribe won against another, the victory was presented as their tribe’s god’s victory over the other tribe’s god. It was common to carry a standard or statue of a deity into battle represent the presence of that god in the battle. This is what Israel is doing when they carry the ark of God into battle; to the Philistines, it means that the Lord is fighting on Israel’s behalf. The Philistines are familiar with what this God is capable of and they are terrified.

Except... God is not contained in a box or symbol, nor is he a good luck charm for Israel’s battles, but the Philistines don’t know that. Israel doesn’t even seem to know that. So, when the ark is captured, everyone understands that the Philistines had defeated God.

Have there been times when you have used God as a good luck charm for your personal battles? How has this turned out for you? Talk to God about it.

Friday, July 10

Read or listen to 1 Sam 4:12–22.

Key verse: “The Glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.” (1 Sam 4:22)

What God says will happen happens. God promised disaster on Eli’s sons for their open contempt, and they are killed. But even more tragically, the ark of the covenant has been stolen. By all appearances, Yahweh, the God of Israel, has been defeated by the Philistine gods. The ark is a symbol of God’s presence among Israel, and in its capture, it is understood that Yahweh has left Israel. This is tragic news, so much so that Eli falls off his bench and dies. He is more shocked by the news of the ark’s capture than the death of his sons.



Notice how often “glory” is repeated in this section. What is God’s glory? How has it left Israel through the ark’s capture? For more on *glory*, scan the QR code to watch a video by The Bible Project.⁵

Lord, help me to see your glory on the earth today—in my work, my relationships, in nature, when I am active or having fun, and even in the busy moments. Amen.

⁵ <https://bibleproject.com/videos/kavod-glory/>

Saturday, July 11

Read or listen to Ps 57:1–11.

Key verse: Be exalted, O God, above the highest heavens! Let your glory shine over all the earth. (Ps 57:5, 11, NLT)

In the Old Testament, God’s presence and glory was made known at the Tabernacle, especially in the Most Holy Place where the ark was kept. However, we’ve already seen how God’s priests were misbehaving and treated God’s holy place with contempt. As we read through Samuel, it is important to distinguish the actions of God from the actions of his people. His people might behave badly and even claim God’s name for their actions, but this does not mean that God approves of their actions. In fact, he lets the enemy win.

In the Psalms, David praises God for his glory. He recognizes that God’s presence is with Israel despite their moral failures, and the foundation of his worship is that God’s “unfailing love is as high as the heavens” and his “faithfulness reaches to the clouds” (Ps 57:10).

How might this help you to discern God’s presence in your world today? When leaders and politicians claim God’s name for their actions, can you identify God’s unfailing love and faithfulness? If not, where else might you see God’s glory? Talk to God about it.

Sunday, July 12

If you have the time, read or listen to 1 Sam 3–4.

God call Samuel as his prophet to speak hard words to Eli. God's severe judgment on Eli's sons emphasizes his holiness in contrast to their wayward and harmful leadership, and he allows his ark to be captured by their enemy when they treat it like a good luck charm.

What emotions rise up in you as you read these chapters? Where do you see God's presence or absence, and what might this tell you about his character?

Take a few minutes to pray and listen for how God is making himself known to you.

Gracious Father, I ask that you strengthen me with power through your Holy Spirit, for your glory. Show yourself to me so I can manifest you to those around me. Oh Lord, teach me to love you and love others the way you love me! If there is any sin darkening my life, reveal it so that I may confess and forsake it. Fill me with the fullness of your presence, so my life is a vessel of love, hope, strength, peace, and wisdom in this dark world. May your presence increase in me, and may I be an instrument to bring your kingdom to the people of this earth. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Sunday Sermon Notes

Monday, July 13

Read or listen to 1 Sam 5:1–7.

Key verse: They carried the ark of the God into the temple of Dagon... But when [they] went to see it the next morning, Dagon had fallen with his face to the ground in front of the ark of the Lord! (1 Sam 5:2–3, NLT)

Remember how the Philistines conquered the God of Israel? Or, at least this is what they thought they had done. This part of the story is both amusing and eerie. The people of Ashdod wake in the morning to find their god lying on his face in front of the ark. That’s a little spooky, but they set Dagon upright again and continue on their merry way. The next morning, the same thing happens, only this time Dagon’s hands and head are broken off—Israel’s God defeated Dagon in battle during the night. Dagon is humiliated and “killed” as an ancient prisoner of war.

In addition, the Philistine people are struck with a *heavy hand* of plague. This is the same as the Hebrew word for glory: *kavod*. God’s glory is made known to the Philistines through his heavy hand of divine victory against Dagon and the people who worship him.

How do you feel about the divine battle between God and Dagon? Do you think spiritual battles like this still occur today in a post-Jesus world? Talk to God about it.

Tuesday, July 14

Read or listen to 1 Sam 5:8–12.

Key verse: “Please send the ark of the God of Israel back to its own country, or it will kill us all.” (1 Sam 5:11)

It seems unfair that the Philistine people should suffer and die because of something as simple as the capture of the ark. However, the Bible is written about a specific people in a specific time and place; the ancient Near Eastern context paints this as a cosmic battle between the gods that plays out through the god’s people on earth. When natural disasters or plagues happened, the ancient people understood this as being deeply connected to the actions of the gods.

They acknowledge that Yahweh, the God of Israel, is more powerful than their gods and return his ark to Israel. Despite Israel’s failure in battle, God demonstrates his power to defeat the enemy gods, and he doesn’t need an army to do so. God demonstrates that his purposes will be done regardless of his people’s attempts to manipulate him for personal gain.

Memorize: For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms. (Eph 6:12)

Wednesday, July 15

Read or listen to 1 Sam 6:1–12.

Key verse: “Make these things to show honor to the God of Israel. Perhaps then he will stop afflicting you, your gods, and your land.” (1 Sam 6:5, NLT)

The ancient people knew how to conquer other nations and gods, and they also knew how to honor the gods of other nations if the need arose. The Philistine priests speak wisely, “Send the ark of the God of Israel back with a gift.” They return the ark with a tribute in acknowledgement of their defeat. Their motives are twofold: they hope to appease God, and they also hope to discern whether the plagues were truly from the hand of God. While God is not mentioned as a direct agent in this part of the story, consider what it would have meant to the rulers to see the mothering cows leave their bleating calves and deliver the ark to Israel. It’s a miracle. It can only be the work of God.

Have you ever witnessed something in your life that could only be explained by the presence and work of God? If you have, tell someone about it.

*Lord, grant me discernment to see what is hidden, understand what is true, and recognize what is false.*⁶

⁶ Author unknown

Thursday, July 16

Read or listen to 1 Sam 6:13–18.

Key verse: “When they saw the ark, they were overjoyed!” (1 Sam 6:13, NLT)

God has returned! In our Christian world now, I’m reminded of the joy that Jerusalem expressed when Jesus arrived on a donkey. The response of God’s people to his presence among them has always been one of great joy and celebration. The ways in which the people express this looks different depending on the time or place; the Israelites in the Iron Age showed this by promptly sacrificing the delivery cows, setting up the golden items on a rock altar, and worshipping all day long. The large rock that was used as an altar is later used as a memorial for these events.

As you consider the ways in which God has showed up in your world, take a minute to reflect on how you celebrate his presence. What “offerings” do you give him (e.g. your time, money, resources)?

*Gracious God, you are the giver and provider of all things. We give thanks for who you are and what you have given. We ask that our offerings would honour your name. Amen.*⁷

⁷ <https://get.tithe.ly/blog/offertory-prayer>

Friday, July 17

Read or listen to 1 Sam 6:19–7:2.

Key verse: “Who is able to stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?” (1 Sam 6:20, NLT)

God strikes down seventy Israelite citizens for looking into the ark. Like the plagues sent upon the Philistines, this seems unnecessarily harsh. However, this may be because today we all too often view God casually. Jesus is, after all, our Brother and Friend, right?

Well, yes, but he is also God our Creator, the One who breathes life into us. God had specifically commanded those in charge of transporting the ark to *not* look at it. (Num 4:20) By the time of Samuel, the Israelites have either forgotten God’s commands or they ignore them. Either way, God reminds them that he is holy and should not be approached casually.

How do you feel about the holiness of God? What is your attitude toward time spent with God in worship and prayer?

Check out this QR code for a video on holiness.⁸



⁸ <https://bibleproject.com/videos/holiness/>

Saturday, July 18

Read or listen to Exod 33:15–23.

Key verse: “You may not look directly at my face, for no one may see me and live.” (Exod 33:20, NLT)

In the time of the Old Testament, there was a high value placed on the holiness of God and, as a result, the holiness of his people. This is for (at least) two reasons: 1) It sets Yahweh up as the God of all gods, more powerful and far-reaching and also more intimate than any of the pagan gods, and 2) It identifies God’s people apart from the nations among whom they lived where brutal tribal warfare, conquest rape and slavery, cult prostitution, and child sacrifice were common.

When Jesus came to earth as a human, he fully embodied God in his human nature. For the first time, humans could look on God’s face. In Jesus, the Divine became human, making it possible for us to come near to God without fear. Paul calls the Church is the body of Christ—today, we can see God’s face in his people.

Consider how Jesus’ incarnation (becoming human) makes it possible for you to come near to God today. How does it allow you to see his face in the faces of his people? Talk to him about that.

Sunday, July 19

If you have the time, read or listen to 1 Sam 5:1–7:2.

Israel thought that their God had been defeated by the Philistines. Unbeknownst to them, God is still working to show his power to those who arrogantly thought they had conquered him, and they hand the ark back quickly in their fear and awe of him. However, God also shows his holiness to his own people who disregarded his commands to not look into the ark, and they too die. Instead of consulting the Law and continuing the journey in an appropriate manner, Israel hides it in fear.

What remaining questions do you have about the passage this week? Where is God present or absent, and what does this tell you about his character?

Take a few minutes to pray and listen for how God is revealing himself to you.

God, grant me the serenity to accept the things I cannot change, courage to change the things I can, and wisdom to know the difference.⁹

⁹ Serenity prayer

Sunday Sermon Notes

Monday, July 20

Read or listen to 1 Sam 7:2–6.

Key verse: On that day they fasted and there they confessed, “We have sinned against the Lord.” (1 Sam 7:6)

The return of the ark to Israel prompts large-scale repentance from the people of Israel. Samuel intercedes for them, explaining exactly what they need to do to repent: put away their other gods and worship the Lord only.

What place does group confession have in your worship? How about fasting? In a hyper-individualistic culture, we often forget that our sins—the ways in which we worship other gods like materialism, consumerism, capitalism, or secularism—impact others.

Watch this video on fasting.¹⁰ If you’ve never tried fasting, you might want to try it this summer.



*My Lord God, I have no idea where I am going... But I believe that the desire to please you does in fact please you. Amen.*¹¹

¹⁰ <https://bibleproject.com/videos/passage-insight-purpose-fasting/>

¹¹ Thomas Merton

Tuesday, July 21

Read or listen to 1 Sam 7:7–12.

Key verse: “Do not stop crying out to the Lord for us.” (1 Sam 7:8)

Samuel intercedes for Israel, that is, he cries out to the Lord on their behalf. In the ancient world, God spoke to and through only a very select few people, and Samuel was one of them. Today, we are privileged to have direct access to God through Jesus Christ. Heb 7:25 says, “Therefore he is able to save completely those who come to God through him, because he always lives to intercede for them.”

Consider how Jesus continues to intercede for you today. It wasn’t a one and done deal on the cross; he *continues* to intercede for us even now. He brings all your cries to God, who hears your deepest needs, and he acts on your behalf just as he fought the Philistines. And then, just as Jesus intercedes for you, you are called to intercede on behalf of others. Who can you intercede for today?

I pray also for those who will believe in Jesus through the message of hope, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. Amen.
(Adapted from John 17:20-21)

Wednesday, July 22

Read or listen to 1 Sam 7:13–17.

Key verse: Throughout Samuel’s lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines. (1 Sam 7:13)

In Scripture, the hand of the Lord is a metaphor for God’s justice. It is important to remember that the ancient world was consumed with war and especially divine war between their gods. When God defeats Israel’s enemies, he is communicating something important about himself in a way that the people understood: that Yahweh is not just “another one” of the regional gods, but that he is Creator of everything and sovereign over all other gods.

God is *not* approving holy war in his name against unbelievers and pagans—not in the ancient world and not today. Instead, God the Divine Warrior fights against sin in the land. He objects to the common ancient practices of violence, rape, conquest, and slavery done in the name of the gods, and takes dramatic measures to bring justice to the land.

Where do you see God acting for justice in the world today? Where do you see his hand stretched out against the evil practices of our day—violence, rape, conquest, and slavery?

Though we are surrounded by troubles, you will protect us from the anger of our enemies. You reach out your hand, and the power of your right hand saves us. Amen.
(adapted from Ps 138:7)

Thursday, July 23

Read or listen to 1 Sam 8:1–9.

Key verse: “Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have.” (1 Sam 8:5, NLT)

Ironically, Samuel’s sons are just as messed up as Eli’s sons were. The elders of Israel recognize their corruption and approach Samuel with a request: Give us a king. A king, they thought, would solve all their problems. A king would make them strong and a force for the nations to reckon with.

Their request reveals just how little they knew and trusted God, for God had shown them time and again that *he* would deliver them from their enemies and protect them in the land. They have rejected God. They would rather put their trust in a human ruler.

What requests do you have of God? Without judging yourself, consider what these requests say about who or what you are putting your trust in. What is revealed about your relationship with God?

*Loving Father, I surrender to you today with all my heart and soul. I surrender my understanding of how things ‘ought’ to be, my choices and my will. I surrender my weaknesses and strengths to you. Amen.*¹²

¹² <https://spiritualdirection.com/2011/06/25/a-prayer-of-surrender>

Friday, July 24

Read or listen to 1 Sam 8:10–22.

Key verse: “Then we’ll be like all the other nations: our king will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles.” (1 Sam 8:20, CSB)

It’s tempting to be like everyone else. To buy the same clothes, the same car, the same house, to go on that big vacation... we all want to fit in. So, too, did Israel. Despite Samuel’s warning that fitting in will have a far higher cost that Israel might want, they insist on having it their way. And God, loving and gracious as he is, gives it to them even though it will be disastrous.

When we insist on having it our way, God doesn’t stop us. No, he often answers that prayer, and we end up living out the consequences of it, even disastrously.

Can you identify a time when you prayed for something that you desperately wanted and God gave it to you? What was the result? Talk to God about it without judging it. Simply hold it before God and listen to what he might say to you about it.

*God of Goodness, I thank you that there is nowhere that I might walk through where your love cannot reach me. Teach me today to love you more. Amen.*¹³

¹³ <https://www.xavier.edu/jesuitresource/online-resources/prayer-index/gods-love>

Saturday, July 25

Read or listen to Ps 2:1–12.

Key verse: The kings of the earth take their stand, and the rulers conspire together against the Lord and his Anointed One. (Ps 2:2, CSB)

The Bible frequently explores the theme of kings: the “kings of the earth” are those who set themselves against the rule of God and conspire against him. Israel’s request for a king says that they would rather be associated with those who openly rebel against God than trust in God’s kingship. It is heartbreaking, especially Israel’s request comes on the heels of their repentance and God’s deliverance from the Philistines in 1 Sam 7. They were so *close* to living in right relationship with God, and then they failed (again!).

In the Bible, there is a choice: to live in the ways of the world following the rule of the “kings of the earth” or to live by following God’s rule and law. One leads to death and destruction; the other leads to life.

Which “kings” do we follow in our world today? They might be literal rulers—politicians and monarchs—or more likely metaphorical ones—cultural influencers, pastors, and celebrities. What keeps you from following God as your king? What encourages you to continue to follow him even as the earthly “kings” try to persuade you otherwise? Talk to God about it.

Sunday, July 26

If you have the time, read or listen to 1 Sam 7:2–8:22.

Fasting, prayer, and justice go together hand in hand. In the Bible, fasting is almost always for expressions of grief or repentance. Who or what do you tend to go to when you feel angry or hurt about the injustices done to you or to others? How can you bring these to God today?

If you're considering fasting, please tell someone about it, make sure that you set a time limit on it (e.g. 12 hours), and that you are drinking water. If you are feeling unwell at any point in time, you have permission to break your fast early. If fasting from food is not possible because of a health condition, consider fasting from some other physical need or habit.

*God of love, You see all the suffering, injustice, and misery in this world. Have pity on what You have created. In Your mercy look upon the poor, the oppressed, the destitute, and all who are heavy-laden. Fill our hearts with deep compassion for those who suffer, and hasten the coming of Your kingdom of justice and truth. Amen.*¹⁴

¹⁴ Eugène Bersier (1831–1889), from <https://faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/prayers-for-when-you-need-justice>

Sunday Sermon Notes

Monday, July 27

Read or listen to 1 Sam 9:1–10.

Key verse: Saul was the most handsome man in Israel—head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land. (1 Sam 9:2, NLT)

The book of Samuel introduces a new character to us: Saul. Saul stands out from the crowd by his height and appearance. But he has a problem: his father's donkeys are missing.

Saul and his servant search high and low for the donkeys, but they are nowhere to be found. Finally, Saul's servant recommends asking the local man of God—maybe he can find out where the donkeys are by divine means. Saul has nothing to lose; he sets out to find the man of God.

When you are searching for something (physical, spiritual, emotional, or other), to whom do you turn? Name a person who has helped you when you have had questions about God or life. Talk to God about it.

Tuesday, July 28

Read or listen to 1 Sam 9:11–27.

Key verse” “But I’m only from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe!” (1 Sam 9:21, NLT)

Despite Saul’s height and good looks, he clearly has some insecurities about his social standing. He doesn’t feel good enough for the job that Samuel is proposing, and he’s not the first one in Scripture to feel that way. You might recall Moses’ objections to God’s call to deliver Israel from Egypt (Exod 3–4) or Gideon’s complaints that he is not worthy to lead the Israelites against the invading Midianites (Judg 6:15).

These comparisons are deliberate; God frequently calls someone who feels inadequate to the task and gives them the supernatural power they need so that they will know that it is by *God’s* strength that they defeated the enemy, not by their own strength.

Have you ever been called to a task where you have felt completely unqualified? How is God encouraging you through Saul’s story? How is his strength enough for you?

Each time he said, “My grace is all you need. My power works best in weakness.” So now I am glad to boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ can work through me. (1 Cor 12:9, NLT)

Wednesday, July 29

Read or listen to 1 Sam 10:1–16.

Key verse: “The Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person.” (1 Sam 10:6)

Watch this video to learn more about the importance of being anointed.¹⁵



Even though God had advised Israel against having a king, Samuel still anoints Saul with God’s blessing and the Spirit of God comes upon Saul.

What does this tell you about God’s character? Discuss this with a friend or family member.

¹⁵ <https://bibleproject.com/videos/anointing/>

Thursday, July 30

Read or listen to 1 Sam 10:17–27.

Key verse: “He has hidden himself among the supplies.” (1 Sam 10:22)

Despite God’s supernatural pouring of the Spirit onto Saul in the previous verses, when it comes time to declare Saul as king, Saul hides. The author does not tell us *why* Saul hides, so we must interpret his actions based on the events in this chapter. Why do you think Saul hides? Is he ashamed? Afraid? Of what? Write down 2-3 reasons why Saul is hiding.

Most people are excited about their new king, but some express the same doubts that Saul has: “How can this fellow save us?” But this is exactly the point: it is *God* who saves, not humans—not even a king.

*Grant, O God, Your protection; and in Your protection, strength; and in strength, understanding; and in understanding, knowledge; and in knowledge, the knowledge of justice; and in the knowledge of justice, the love of it; and in the love, the love of existence; and in the love of all existence, the love of God and all goodness.*¹⁶

¹⁶ Ancient Welsh prayer, from <https://faithgateway.com/blogs/christian-books/prayers-for-when-you-need-justice>

Friday, July 31

Read or listen to 1 Sam 11:1–15.

Key verse: “The Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger.” (1 Sam 11:6)

Nahash the Ammonite attacks and violently threatens Jabesh Gilead, an Israelite city on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The citizens of the city send messengers to their new king imploring him to rescue them. Saul, coming in from the fields, overhears the anguish of the Israelite people and responds with divine indignation.

In the Old Testament, the Spirit of the Lord would descend on God’s chosen representative for a short time to perform some miraculous, supernatural act of justice. The judges commonly experienced this, even if their priorities or character were questionable (e.g. Samson—read Judg 13–16). Following the Pentecost, the Spirit of the Lord is always present at all times, and we believe that he continues to invite his people to join him in bringing justice to the world.



Check out the QR code to find out how First B is partnering with Evangeline Hammond in Lebanon to bring justice through children’s education and trauma-informed care.

How can you pray for God’s justice to be done today at home and in the world?

