

The Story of Saul, Part 3

QUESTIONS FOR CUBS

NOTE TO PARENTS/TEACHERS:

The goal of this questions-and-answers section is to initiate interaction between you and your kids. Please do not just read the questions and answers to your kids. These answers are given for you at an adult level to think about and to process. Once that is accomplished, you can then translate them into appropriate answers for your kids.

LESSON

Avoiding distractions when doing God's will

KEY VERSE

"But I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh." (Gal. 5:16)

EAR CHECK (STORY COMPREHENSION)

- Q: Why are King Saul's military leaders and soldiers so frustrated?
A: *King Saul can't seem to make a decision about what to do*
- Q: What does Jonathan take Simon to do?
A: *Crawl across the crags to spy on the Philistines*
- Q: What happens as Jonathan and Simon attack the Philistine soldiers?
A: *God sends an earthquake to scatter and confuse the Philistine army*
- Q: What oath does Jonathan break?
A: *The King's oath that no man should eat before evening*
- Q: What does Danau talk the King into doing to celebrate their victory?
A: *Spare Jonathan's life*

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HEART CHECK (SPIRITUAL APPLICATION)

Q: It seems to me that King Saul was wrong in offering the sacrifice, but it didn't seem bad enough that he should lose his kingdom. Why did he make God so angry?

A: Everything that we think, say, or do is affected by how we think about God—our understanding of who He is and who we are in relation to Him. King Saul's view of God was warped, and he was teaching the entire nation of Israel to think wrongly about God as well. By not waiting for Samuel to perform the sacrifice, King Saul treated God like a good-luck charm. He wasn't interested in obeying God or even considering God's will, he just wanted to look good in front of his men and give them confidence for the coming battle. His actions weren't a minor "oops." By offering the sacrifice, a task God assigned only to the priests, Saul, as the King of Israel, basically told the entire nation that obedience to God doesn't really matter. Saul failed to complete his most important job as king—to lead the people to follow God. And that's why he was punished so harshly.

Q: Saul was terribly outnumbered by the Philistines. I think he had every right to be afraid and not want to go into battle. Is it a sin to be afraid?

A: It is normal to be scared—we all feel that way sometimes, because we're human. But when we allow ourselves to become so afraid that we disobey God that is a sin. The prophet Samuel told King Saul to wait for seven days, and then Samuel would come and perform the sacrifice to God. To anyone hearing or reading Samuel's words, the most important part of the message was to wait for Samuel. Saul chose to focus on the "seven days" instead. He was so afraid of the Philistines and so afraid of losing his army that he forgot to be afraid of disobeying God. In His Word, God tells us to do or not to do a lot of things. For instance, He tells us to always tell the truth, to never steal, and so on. But there are times when telling the truth looks like it will get us into trouble. And when that happens, like King Saul, we are tempted to disobey God. This brings us to one of the great lessons of the story of King Saul: to obey God is better than protecting ourselves. We are to obey God regardless of our fears—always.

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“I” CHECK (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

1. Many things can distract you from doing what God wants you to do. First, can you identify a few things you know God wants you to do regularly (such as pray, study the Bible, honour your father and mother, worship God, and so on)? Then name some distractions that can keep you from doing those things.
2. As King Saul's pride grew, he stopped relying on godly counsel from Samuel and his advisors and started listening to others who told him what he wanted to hear. So when he wanted to know what God's will was for him and his army, the Lord did not speak. What conclusions can you draw from this situation? What do you think pride is? If your Bible has a reference section in the back, look up what the Bible has to say about pride or boasting. Why is pride a bad thing? How can pride be a distraction from doing God's will?

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

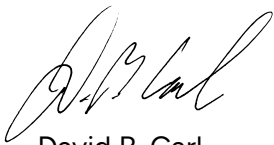
I believe despair and distraction are the bane of the modern Christian. I think Satan often tempts us with distraction first, and if we give into it, despair is soon to follow. We were created to be in close communion with God. Whether we acknowledge it or not, that is the cry of our hearts. Satan, in his nefarious wisdom, simply has to get us to think about anything or anyone other than God. He doesn't actually have to make us become awful, wretched, or disgusting people. He simply needs to get our minds off of God. Once he's accomplished that, he's won the day. The awful, wretched, and disgusting stuff will pretty much happen as a matter of course. Satan tries to distract us with suffering, with fear, and occasionally even with the longing for something in our past. I think perhaps one of the most powerful forms of distraction, one of Satan's most dangerous and defective weapons, is prosperity.

At this point in the story, King Saul was actually getting along very well. He was beating back the Philistines and building his kingdom. He was looking very much like a king. And on top of it all, perhaps even because of all of his success, he was immensely distracted from God. Consequently, despair took up residence in his heart. Some of Saul's behaviour seems to be insane. He was reckless and bold one moment, and then he was too afraid to bring himself to ask for God's guidance the next. He sat in his tent despairing before the battle, but when Jonathan routed the Philistines, Saul immediately jumped up, enthusiastically demanding victory over his foes. He swore death to any soldier who violated his oath of fasting, and when he found out the offender was his own son, he was prepared to have Jonathan executed to save his own pride. When you want to be the centre of the universe long enough and badly enough, occasionally God will give you your wish. I believe that's what happened here. King Saul was indeed the centre of his universe, but he found his universe to be one of increasing confusion, fear, and madness.

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One of the great joys of my job here at *Paws & Tales* is that I get to talk with some highly educated, wise, and tender-hearted believers. When I have difficulty with a concept or when my own thinking is muddled, I get to ask them the kinds of questions most people would love to ask highly educated, wise, and tender-hearted Christians. During one of those conversations about Saul, I was told that the place he camped with his 600-man army, those men who weren't hiding in crags and caves, was in fact a completely defensive position. King Saul was hiding. He was hiding from the Philistines, he was hiding from his own men, and he was hiding from God. He was unwilling to ask God for direction and unable to come up with a plan of his own. He could not even bring himself to retreat. So there he sat, with his army the size of a small high school facing a vast Philistine army. He was utterly alone and terrified in his self-created universe of distraction and despair. God gave him exactly what he wanted, and he responded with frozen indecision.

As I ponder the story of King Saul, I am burdened by the fact that he is not an aberration. He was exactly the way people will naturally become unless they focus on God, asking Him to help them die to their own selfish desires and personal ambitions, seeking instead to find and obey His will for their lives. King Saul was "normal," but he was not what he should have been. He was not what God wanted him to be. The same is true of us. Unless we do something unusual, even radical . . . unless we make God the centre of our universe and refuse to give in to despair and distraction, we will, with certainty, experience a universe of our own making. And it will be the last place we want to be.



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