

The Story of Saul, Part 4

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

Getting back on track when you fail

KEY VERSE

“Have I not commanded you? Be strong and courageous! Do not tremble or be dismayed, for the LORD your God is with you wherever you go.” (Josh. 1:9)

EAR CHECK (STORY COMPREHENSION)

- Q: What does Samuel say King Saul must do to the Amalekites?
A: *Destroy everything and not let anything or anyone live*
- Q: Who does King Saul allow to live?
A: *Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the best of their livestock*
- Q: What does King Saul plan to build in Carmel?
A: *A monument to himself*
- Q: Who does Samuel kill?
A: *Agag*
- Q: What does God tell Samuel to do?
A: *Go and make David the next king*

HEART CHECK (SPIRITUAL APPLICATION)

Q: The story of King Saul is so sad. Why would the Bible tell a story that does not have a happy ending?

- A: *There are many stories in the Bible that are tragedies with very sad endings. Sometimes an important lesson can be learned best through a sad story. It is our hope that every child and every parent would be so frustrated with King Saul and his constant decisions to do what he wanted to do instead of obeying God that they would take a stand against this kind of behaviour, instead committing to obey God no matter the circumstances.*

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Q: Why would God tell King Saul to go kill every man, woman, and child of another tribe? This seems terribly cruel.

A: Even though this is a fairly shocking part of Saul's story, it's not the only time in Scripture that God commands this kind of slaughter. I think it is important to keep this moment of the story in the story—the context and background of the situation is crucial. The Israelites entered into a covenant with God, agreeing to worship Him alone and to obey His Law (Deut. 29:12-13; 30:1-5). However, they were surrounded by nations and peoples who worshipped other gods and participated in all kinds of sinful religious practices. Contact with these tribes often led the Israelites into idol worship and other sins. In order to keep the nation of Israel pure, God often called them to separate from these other nations, sometimes even calling for war, slaughter, or other kinds of judgment (Deut. 20:17-18; Num. 31:1-7). And simply because God commanded these actions (1 Sam. 15:2-3), King Saul and Israel should have obeyed immediately—whether or not they agreed with God's command.

But this is a perfect example of the kind of obedience that King Saul had so much trouble with. King Saul obeyed God when it made perfect sense to him—when he could do the math on the situation. But in this case, Saul weighed obedience to God's command against the wealth of the Amalekites (1 Sam. 15:9). Consequently, King Saul only partially obeyed this command of God—he allowed their king, Agag, to live, and he kept all of their livestock and other possessions. The single most important reason the Israelites should have slaughtered all of the Amalekites, distasteful as it was, is that God said it needed to be done. And when He gives a command, we follow. That is the lesson to be learned here, and unfortunately it's a lesson that King Saul never really learned.

“I” CHECK (PERSONAL APPLICATION)

1. King Saul's pride was so great he stopped listening to God. He never recovered from the damage he did to himself and the nation of Israel. When we're trying to obey God and do His will, it is possible, even probable, that we may fail at times. What should you do if you fail while trying to do what God wants you to do? If you were King Saul's friend, what would you have done to help him follow God?
2. King Saul was much closer to God at the beginning of his reign than at the end. Why do you think it is important when we sin to quickly confess our sins to God, repent, and repair our relationship? What do you think happens if you let more and more sins pile up while you “run” from God?
3. How do you avoid becoming prideful? Who in your life keeps you humble and helps you keep your eyes on God?

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4. Humility is the opposite of pride. Explain what it means to be humble. Why do you think humility is an important part of doing what God has called us to do?

DIRECTOR'S NOTES

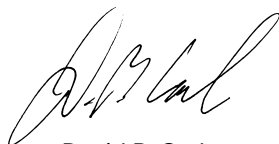
Though this is the last *Paws & Tales* episode on the story of King Saul, he actually went on to live and rule for decades after David was anointed as the next king of Israel. I ended Saul's story here for the simple reason that when David was anointed by Samuel it was, for all practical purposes, the end of the story of King Saul and the beginning of the story of King David. In a great example of irony, King Saul, who wanted to be the centre of the universe, became simply the anvil on which the character and soul of King David would be formed.

It occurred to me while studying the story of King Saul that he is the embodiment of the *lukewarm* believer. Now I realize the very term *lukewarm* is a New Testament phrase, but there were *lukewarm* believers long before John coined the phrase, and their numbers have only increased since. This term is an interesting one; it clearly defines this person as one who is not horrible—but rather one who is tepid, mediocre, neither hot nor cold. And to the average man on the street of ancient Israel, King Saul was certainly not horrible. I would even argue that in the pantheon of the kings of Israel, King Saul had to rank as one of the top five. He certainly wasn't the most wicked king in the history of Israel. He didn't marry many wives (like David and Solomon); he didn't build pagan altars (like Solomon and Ahab); he didn't personally worship idols (like so many others). To his credit, he built a kingdom that didn't previously exist, he rallied the nation together as one, and he beat back his enemies on all sides. These were the very reasons that the people of Israel wanted a king, and in this case they got just what they wanted. But what's so interesting about King Saul is that God singled him out as one king who was so rebellious that God took away his throne (1 Sam. 15:11, 26). I believe that what made him so distasteful to God was that he never gave his heart fully to Him. That is the very definition of the *lukewarm* believer. King Saul would do all kinds of religious things if they served his purposes, but he never worshipped God simply because God is worthy of worship. King Saul wanted to be close enough to God to use Him. And that is why I believe being *lukewarm* is so uniquely odious to God.

What scares me most about this scenario is that being *lukewarm* is not something anyone sets out to be. You become *lukewarm* by default. If you are not actively reminding yourself of God's greatness, if you are not around others who help point you toward God, His Word, and His plans for your life, you will tend, without any effort, to try to use God for your own purposes. This is idol worship of the darkest and foulest sort. It doesn't look so bad from the outside. As a *lukewarm* Christian, I can look very upstanding, I can be very kind, and I can even participate in successful ministry. However, if I am not doing these activities purely out of love and devotion to God, I am far worse than any high priest of Baal because I am actually using God to worship myself.

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If you're wondering whether you have ever done this, I can assure you that you have. We all have. I believe that's one of the reasons God included the story of King Saul in His Word. I think we are supposed to be so frustrated with Saul—so angry at his inability to get his eyes off of himself—that we utterly determine by the grace of God that his lukewarm attitude will not infect us! This story has had that effect on me, and I pray it will on others as well.



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