



A SEVEN-WEEK STUDY  
**Quarter 1**  
**2025**



G R O W I N G  
**TOGETHER**

# Young Adult

**SDA CHURCH CURRICULUM**

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Have you ever sent a message and been left on “read”? What emotions went through your mind? Perhaps it triggered a sense of abandonment or rejection, or maybe you concluded that the person was simply busy. Your reaction to silence often depends on the relationship you have with the person whose response you seek. If the relationship is new or feels uncertain, their silence can be crippling. But if it's a trusted friend or loved one, you understand that their lack of response doesn't indicate a problem in your relationship.

Sometimes, prayer feels like sending a message to God and waiting for God's response. There are seasons when it feels like our message has been left on “read,” and the lack of response can be overwhelming. But if our relationship with God is secure and trusting, we can believe that God's silence doesn't indicate that God's love for us or the promise to give us good things has changed. Instead, we can be confident that God hears us and will respond at the right time.

In the Bible, Hannah displayed a safe and secure relationship with God. Even when it seemed like her prayers went unanswered year after year, she trusted God enough to continue communicating. In this study, we will explore the lessons we can learn from Hannah's trust in God and her persistence in prayer.

Read: **1 SAMUEL 1:3-19**

# Hannah: persistent in prayer





## FOR DISCUSSION

- **WHY** was Hannah in such deep pain?
- **WAS** Samuel an answer to Hannah's prayer, or did her prayer demonstrate that she was prepared to steward the gift of Samuel?
- **WHAT** can we learn from Hannah about the value of persistence in prayer?

## REFLECTION

To truly grasp the depth of Hannah's agony, it's essential to understand the cultural weight of being a barren woman in Biblical times. In the ancient world, a woman's worth was closely tied to her ability to bear children. Fertility was considered a direct blessing from God, as seen in scriptures like Leviticus 26:9, Deuteronomy 7:14, and Deuteronomy 28:11. Psalm 127:3 declares that children are "a gift from the Lord," while Leviticus 20:20-21 associates barrenness with a curse. Rachel's desperation in Genesis 30:1 speaks volumes when she cries out, "Give me children, or I'll die!"

In this cultural context, infertility brought profound shame and disgrace. For Hannah, this burden was made even heavier by the presence of Elkanah's second wife, Peninnah, who cruelly taunted her. Peninnah's constant mocking only magnified Hannah's feelings of failure, leaving her with no refuge, not even in her own home. Though Elkanah tried to comfort her with extra gifts and expressions of love, the weight of her humiliation and sorrow was overwhelming.

Yet, despite her pain, Hannah remained steadfast in her prayers. What gave her the strength to continue asking God for something that seemed impossible? Perhaps she drew hope from the stories of other barren women like Sarah and Rachel, trusting that the same God who had worked miracles before could do so again. While we can't know exactly what fueled Hannah's persistence, we do know that despite her broken heart, repeated disappointments, and deep grief, she continually poured out her soul before God.

As Hannah prayed in the temple, her anguish was so intense that the priest Eli mistook her for a drunken woman. Yet, at that raw and vulnerable moment, Hannah encountered God. And in her unembellished honesty, God granted her deepest desire—a son. This leads to the question: Was Samuel the result of Hannah's prayer, or did Hannah's prayer reveal that she was ready to receive Samuel?

When Hannah prayed, she vowed to dedicate her child's life to God. As a result, Samuel grew up in the temple and, shaped by his unique upbringing, became one of the most significant prophets in the Old Testament. Throughout Scripture, we see God raising up leaders for specific times and purposes. Joseph was placed in power to save his world from famine, Moses was chosen to deliver the Israelites from Egypt, and Esther became queen at the precise moment her people needed rescue. Esther 4:14 declares that they were all positioned "for such a time as this." However, their preparation for leadership began long before they assumed positions of power. Could it be that Samuel was also part of God's plan all along? Surely, Israel would need a leader to guide them back into a relationship with God. But Samuel's journey as a leader didn't start at birth—it began with his mother. Just as Mary was chosen to be the mother of Christ, Hannah was chosen as the mother of Samuel.

Hannah was not a forgotten woman—she was a chosen woman. And during those long years of agony, praying over and over for a son, it wasn't that her prayers went unanswered. Rather, the answer had not yet been revealed. During that season of waiting, God was preparing her to be the mother of a prophet.

How differently might we view our own lives if, instead of assuming our prayers are unanswered, we reframed them to believe that the answer is not yet revealed? What if, like Hannah, we are being prepared to receive the answer to our prayers through this long process of waiting and trusting? Persistence in prayer is not about begging God for something that doesn't exist, but trusting that God can align us with what is best at the right time. Most importantly, persistence in prayer positions our hearts to receive this vital truth: that regardless of the outcome of our prayers, the One who hears them is with us through it all.



# digdeeper



## HOT TAKE

In 1 Samuel 3, Eli is ultimately revealed as a failed religious leader. However, the foreshadowing of his shortcomings begins earlier, hinted at in his initial response to Hannah's prayer. Isn't it striking that Eli's first response to Hannah's agonized prayer is to assume she is drunk? Perhaps drunkenness was common at that time, but Eli's assumption may reveal something deeper about his spiritual journey and relationship with God. If Eli had ever experienced a moment of deep anguish, where he poured his heart out before God, wouldn't he have recognized that same posture in Hannah? As a man of God, one might expect him to be able to discern when someone is seeking solace in the presence of their Savior. Yet, Eli could not. If Hannah hadn't spoken up for herself, Eli would have cast her out of the very place she came to for solace and respite. Have we ever been like Eli—claiming to know God but casting away those who are seeking God? What causes the hardness of heart that we see here in Eli?



## EXPLORE FURTHER

Hannah's story ended well, with Eli eventually acknowledging that God would bless her with the very thing she prayed for. But how many people have been turned away from the church because they encountered a leader like Eli—someone who couldn't recognize that all they needed was a safe place to meet God and pour out their hearts? How many individuals no longer want to walk through the church doors because they fear their brokenness will lead them to be judged severely?

It's important to remember that holding a title or position of leadership doesn't automatically mean someone accurately represents the heart of God. God always cherishes your vulnerability, hears your deepest cries, and wants every part of your story. God welcomes every question, doubt, and broken piece of you—despite what any leader says. God extends an open invitation to you. Every chapter in your story is welcomed in the heart of God.



# conclusion

In Hebrew, the name Samuel means “God has heard.” The birth of Hannah’s first son was not only proof that God had heard her prayers, but also that God had already heard the future prayers of the Israelites, who would one day need a leader. Hannah’s agony did not go unnoticed by God, and her persistent prayers were not in vain. Despite facing repeated disappointments, enduring taunts in her own home, and the shame associated with being a barren woman in her culture, Hannah found solace in God’s presence. She never stopped praying and recognized that her blessings came from God.

In the same way, God hears your cries and sees your tears. You are not overlooked or forgotten. Keep holding on to God and open your heart to receive God’s presence and align yourself with God’s will.

## reflect

Is there something in your life that you’ve prayed for consistently but perhaps stopped because you feel God has ignored or forgotten you? How can you, like Hannah, remain persistent, vulnerable, and honest in your prayers?

***“Prayer is not asking. Prayer is putting oneself in the hands of God, at His disposition, and listening to His voice in the depth of our hearts.”***

— Mother Teresa

## challenge

### Invest in Your Prayer Life

For the next two weeks, commit to intentionally investing in your prayer life. The key is to find an approach that feels authentic and sustainable for you. Here are some creative ideas to consider:

- Start a prayer journal—this could be written, audio, or even video-based.
- If possible, take intentional prayer walks during the day.
- Create a dedicated prayer space in your home where you feel safe and comfortable to connect with God.
- Find a prayer partner who can hold you accountable and support you on this journey.

There isn’t a one-size-fits-all method for prayer, but what’s most important is setting aside time to pour out your heart to God and allow God to pour into you.



# the art of recognizing God's voice



One of the most challenging aspects of the Christian life is learning to recognize and understand God's voice. From a young age, we are taught how to talk to God through prayer, but not always how to recognize God's response. This can lead to a sense that God does not communicate with us. But could it be that God is speaking and is all around us—but we haven't yet learned how to recognize God's voice?

In this study, we will explore the story of Samuel as he learns to discern the voice of God. Through his experience, we will glean valuable lessons to help us in our faith journeys.

*Read: 1 SAMUEL 2:12-36*  
*1 SAMUEL 3:1-15*



## FOR DISCUSSION

- **HOW** do you think Samuel's upbringing in the temple, surrounded by Eli's corrupt sons, affected him?
- **WHY** was it important for Samuel to recognize God's voice?
- **DOES** God still speak to us the way He spoke to Samuel?

## REFLECTION

In 1 Samuel chapter 2, we learn that Samuel was dedicated to the Lord by his mother, Hannah. As part of this dedication, Samuel grew up under the care of Eli, the priest. However, Samuel's environment was far from ideal despite Eli's spiritual leadership. We get a glimpse of this through the life of Eli's sons. Eli's two sons, whom the Bible refers to as "scoundrels," lived in blatant rebellion against God. They were stealing sacrificial meat, engaging in immoral behavior, and showing complete disregard for God's commands. Even more troubling, Eli failed to hold them accountable, revealing his shortcomings as a father and spiritual leader.

This raises a crucial question: Under Eli's guardianship, what guarantee was there that Samuel wouldn't follow the same corrupt path as Eli's sons? It seems that God's timing in calling Samuel was essential—not only because Samuel was destined to be a prophet but also to ensure that he would learn to distinguish God's voice from Eli's familiar yet flawed voice and influence.

Notice that when God first called Samuel, he ran to Eli, mistaking the divine voice for Eli's. Samuel had not yet learned to recognize God's voice. Interestingly, it took Eli three rounds to realize that God was calling Samuel—a surprisingly long time for someone who was supposed to be a prophet.

God's call to Samuel was more than just a prophetic summons; it was a way of setting Samuel apart from the corruption around him. In calling Samuel, God chose him for a particular purpose and protected him from the negative influence that shaped Eli's sons. Once Samuel recognized God's voice, he committed himself entirely to the Lord, developing a deep and lasting relationship that empowered him to serve as God's mouthpiece to the nation of Israel.

We may relate to Samuel's early struggle to discern God's voice. Like Samuel, we often elevate the voices of family members, church leaders, peers, or society, allowing them to influence the direction of our lives. But has a personal and intimate call for each of us. God's voice remains accessible amid the noise of other influences. While we may not always hear God audibly, as Samuel did, God still speaks to us. We can learn to distinguish God's voice from all others as the one that will guide us down the unique path purposed for us.



# digdeeper



## GETTING PRACTICAL

Here are some ways to practice recognizing God's voice in your life. Remember, you are unique, and so is your relationship with God. The way God speaks to you will be specific to who you are, but these are some ways God may speak to you.

1. God connects with you through your interests and experiences.
2. God speaks through nature, bringing lessons, clarity, and peace as you observe and engage with it.
3. God speaks through Scripture, offering wisdom, direction, and comfort.
4. God speaks through convictions, impressions, and advice from mature and godly counselors.
5. God speaks through peace and assurance. God's voice is never marked by anxiety, fear, or shame.
6. God will never speak in ways that cause self-loathing or self-destruction. God's words are always life-giving, redemptive, and restorative, even when convicting and challenging us.
7. God's voice will never promote exploitation or injustice.
8. God's words will never contradict God's character or God's words in Scripture.
9. God speaks through introspection and silence. The more you eliminate chaos and distraction, the easier it is to recognize when and how God speaks to you.
10. God speaks through your healing. Anxiety, insecurity, shame, trauma, and heartbreak can distort your understanding of yourself and God, sometimes leading to an unhealthy, fear-based relationship with God. You will never be able to truly communicate with someone you are afraid of or perceive as unkind. The healthiest version of yourself—the one that sees both you and God through the lens of love—is the version best-equipped to connect with God.



## HOT TAKE

Serving God is not the same thing as truly knowing God. In 1 Samuel 3:1, we read that "Samuel ministered before the Lord under Eli." Yet in verse 7 of the same chapter, it says, "Now Samuel did not yet know the Lord: The word of the Lord had not yet been revealed to him." How could Samuel minister faithfully without knowing God? Even more unsettling, how many believers today have spent their entire lives serving the Lord but still do not truly know God? How can we determine if we are one of them?



## EXPLORE FURTHER

There is often a belief that doing good works is a sign of knowing God. This assumption can be harmful, leading people to equate service or outward piety with genuine faith. In Matthew 7:15-23, Jesus gives a profound warning, urging believers to be wary of false prophets who come in sheep's clothing, reminding us that "by their fruits you will know them." The culmination of this passage in Matthew 7:21 is particularly sobering: "Not everyone who says to me, 'Lord, Lord,' will enter the kingdom of heaven."

Looking at the world today, we see a deep religious and political divide, with many people using religion as justification for bigotry and hate. They claim to be serving God yet cause harm to God's image-bearers. Like Samuel, who ministered before the Lord before he learned to recognize the Lord's voice, it is possible to master the Christian "language" and the traditions of faith without actively seeking God's direction for our lives. What are some indicators of this spiritual condition?

# conclusion

When Samuel didn't understand God's voice, there was no judgment or disappointment from God. God simply called him repeatedly until Samuel gained the insight to recognize God's voice. In the same way, there should be no anxiety or self-judgment attached to understanding God's voice. God calls us gently and persistently, lovingly speaking until we can hear and recognize God's voice with clarity.

The true prerequisite to knowing God's voice is a genuine desire to know God Himself. It's not about just attending church or going through the motions; it's about having a heart that is authentically drawn to God. As you deepen your relationship with God, not only will your most authentic self be revealed, but—like Samuel—God will also give you insight into the glorious and beautiful purposes God has for you.

## reflect

If you've ever used noise-canceling headphones, you know they are designed to block out surrounding sounds. It's not that the noise around you ceases to exist; the headphones simply neutralize it. What in your life serves as noise-canceling headphones? What habits, practices, situations, or relationships drown out the voice of God that is constantly present around you? Conversely, what habits, practices, situations, or relationships help turn up the volume of God's voice in your life?

## challenge

Refer to the "Getting Practical" box and choose one of the categories where you feel you can connect best with God—whether it's through personal experiences and passions, nature, God's Word, godly counsel, etc. Spend time this week intentionally creating space to listen for God's voice in that way. Be patient and give yourself grace if you don't hear God immediately. Learning to listen to God is a practice that is always developing. Remember, Samuel didn't recognize God's voice instantly either, but he learned to hear it clearly in time.



# give us a king!

Throughout the Old Testament, the children of Israel were promised unique blessings for following God's instructions. Yet they repeatedly forfeited these blessings by adopting the rituals, beliefs, and practices of the nations around them. One significant example is found in the book of Samuel when they demanded a king.

This week, we will explore the lessons we can learn from Israel's request for a king and how to apply those insights to our personal, relational, and professional lives.

Read: **1 SAMUEL 8**  
**1 SAMUEL 10:17-19**



## FOR DISCUSSION

- **WHY** did the Israelites want a king?
- **WHAT** do you think about God's response to their request?
- **WHY** do you think God gave this warning to the Israelites?

## REFLECTION

In 1 Samuel 8, we see that as Samuel grew old, he appointed his two sons, Joel and Abijah, to leadership positions. However, his corrupt sons led the Israelites to demand a king. But the Israelites' desire for a king was about more than just the failure of Samuel's sons—it revealed a deeper issue: their lack of faith in God and their rejection of God's unique way of leading them. In 1 Samuel 8:19-20, the Israelites explicitly state that they want a king so they could be like the other nations. They envied the world around them, longing for what others had and focusing their energy on trying to attain it.

Samuel was troubled by their request, but God reassured him, explaining that the Israelites were not rejecting Samuel—they were rejecting God. God reminded Samuel that this pattern of rejection was not new. Since the day God brought them out of Egypt, the Israelites had continually chosen themselves, serving other gods. Now, in their desire for a king, they were repeating the same mistake. Their request wasn't just a political move; it was rooted in an idolatrous desire to abandon God's plan for something that seemed more appealing.

God had always intended for the Israelites to live in freedom and holiness, set apart as a witness to the world. Their flourishing under God's guidance was meant to show others that God's way was a path of abundance. By asking for a king, the Israelites chose to follow the oppressive systems of the world, sacrificing the freedom that comes with God's direction.

This story invites us to reflect on our own lives. How often do we pursue personal, relational, or professional goals because we lack faith in God's way? How often do we chase after what society promotes, assimilating to its standards and timelines rather than seeking God's direction? Our desires are often shaped by the world around us, and in that pursuit, we can miss the opportunity to witness God's goodness by following God's example.

The Israelites' decision to demand a king was one they would later regret. They received what they wanted, but it came at a significant cost. While there is virtue in pursuing goals, our ambitions must be grounded in a deep trust in God's guidance, not a desire to conform to worldly standards. Only then can we experience the true freedom and abundance God desires for us.



# digdeeper



## HOT TAKE

What does “set apart” really mean? We often repeat ideas within Adventism, such as “We Are the Remnant” and “We Have the Truth.” These ideas have become central to our identity and are sometimes weaponized against the world around us. We often act as if we possess privileged access to divine knowledge that other believers do not have. We emphasize our identity through actions, behaviors, or lifestyle choices that “distinguish” us from others. But what if being “set apart” was never meant to create division but was meant to be an invitation to extend acceptance?



## EXPLORE FURTHER

In Deuteronomy 14:2, when God tells the Israelites that they are a chosen people, set apart for holy purposes, God is not calling them to isolation. When the children of Israel finally entered the Promised Land, the geographical significance of their location was profound. The land was a bridge between Europe, Asia, and Africa, meaning all nations had to pass through it to reach other destinations. The Israelites were positioned at the crossroads of the world, ensuring that surrounding nations consistently engaged with and had access to them.

The laws and systems God established for the Israelites were intended to make them a beacon of light, not to foster a sense of elitism in being “the chosen,” as Adventist culture sometimes projects. Instead, the Israelites were meant to live in a way that honored God so that everyone who crossed their path would have the opportunity to know God more deeply.

John 13:35 reminds us that people will know we are Christ’s disciples by our love for one another. This is what it means to be set apart: to exhibit a love so countercultural, so different from the world, that everyone interacting with us cannot help but wonder why.





# conclusion

In our modern world, comparison has become an epidemic. Access to photos and videos of others' lives is constantly at our fingertips, and our interpretations of those lives often shape our own pursuits. Many of us spend our time chasing things simply to feel validated by our communities or to fit into the world's expectations.

Similarly, the Israelites were convinced they knew what they wanted when they demanded a king. They believed that having a king would help them blend in with the nations around them and that it was the best course of action. However, their hearts were distant from God. They did not trust God's method of leadership, nor did they have the faith that God would provide for and guide them.

It's easy to be influenced by the ideas and practices of those around us. This isn't limited to a Christian-versus-worldly perspective; sometimes, our metrics for success are shaped by our immediate community. We strive, push, and sacrifice from a place of lack, setting goals to receive validation or acceptance from people whose opinions may not even matter.

But God's desire for us has always been different. God calls us to be set apart, to live in freedom. We were never meant to be shackled by our pursuits and desires but instead liberated, with our accomplishments reflecting God's glory.

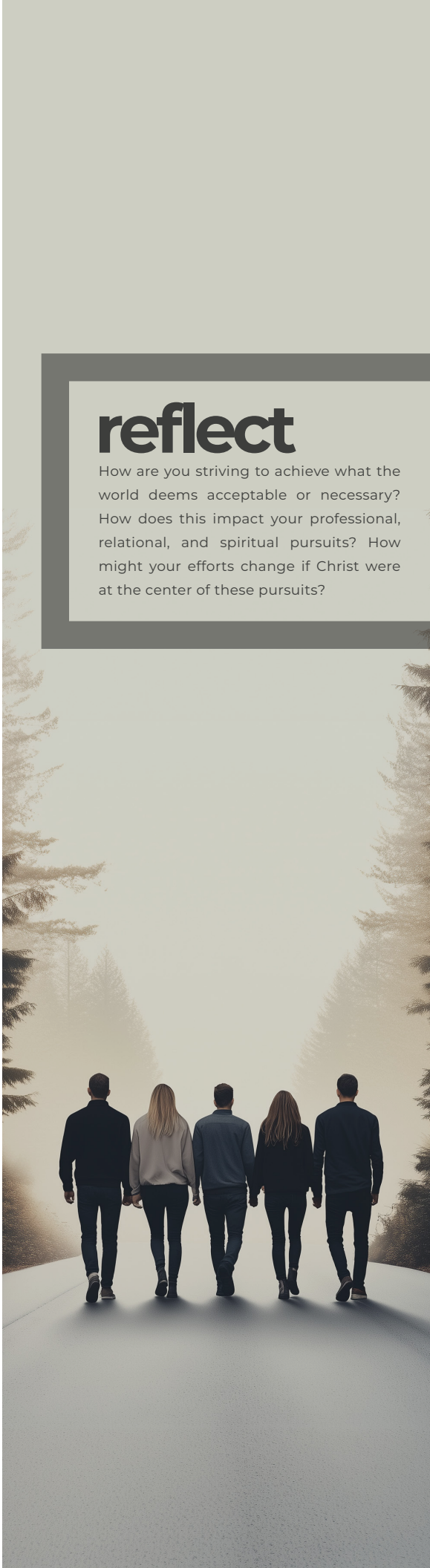
The Israelites desperately wanted to be like the world around them, and they suffered because of it. God has chosen you to be set apart. Don't forfeit that gift just to fit in.

## reflect

How are you striving to achieve what the world deems acceptable or necessary? How does this impact your professional, relational, and spiritual pursuits? How might your efforts change if Christ were at the center of these pursuits?

## challenge

If you use social media, set aside time to unfollow or mute influencers and accounts that leave you feeling the sting of comparison. If you find yourself frequently doom-scrolling or losing valuable time, set daily time limits for your social media usage, or try a one-week social media fast.





At every step of his journey, Saul's actions revealed that the power he had been given was more than he could bear. Once a man with great potential and the capacity to lead God's people, Saul tragically descended into a figure consumed by jealousy and self-destruction. His story serves as a cautionary tale for all of us.

In this study, we will explore two pivotal moments that set Saul on his destructive path. By reflecting on these critical choices, we can better understand how easily we, too, can stray when we elevate the gifts or positions God has entrusted us with above our relationship with God.

*Read: 1 SAMUEL 13:1-14*  
*1 SAMUEL 15:1-3, 7-30*

# Saul: a man after his own desires





## FOR DISCUSSION

- **WHAT** might have motivated Saul's impatience in 1 Samuel 13 and his disobedience in 1 Samuel 15?
- **LIST** some of Saul's character flaws highlighted in these two chapters.
- **WHAT** do you think about God's response to Saul's actions?

## REFLECTION

Saul was Israel's first king, and as with all firsts, setbacks and a learning curve were to be expected. However, a key downfall in Saul's story was the condition of his heart. His actions revealed that, at his core, he was a people pleaser—more concerned with how others perceived him and with protecting his position than with following God's will. In 1 Samuel 13, we see Saul's first major act of defiance against God's instructions.

Samuel told Saul that he would return in seven days to perform a sacrifice as a blessing for their war efforts and instructed Saul to wait. Saul waited the full seven days, but when Samuel didn't arrive, he took matters into his own hands and offered the burnt offering himself. When Samuel finally returned, he rebuked Saul for his impatience and disrespect toward God.

What made Saul's offering of the sacrifice so egregious? Traditionally, sacrifices were performed by religious leaders or priests. However, in 2 Samuel 24:25, we see that David also offered a burnt offering, so the issue wasn't solely that Saul lacked spiritual authority. There was something deeper at play. When Samuel confronted him, Saul deflected, blaming the scattering troops, the threat of the Philistines, and Samuel's delay. There was no repentance or accountability. It was then that Samuel informed Saul that, because he had not kept the Lord's command, his kingdom would not endure, and God had already sought out someone else to take his place. Saul's actions were significant enough for God to decide that Saul was no longer fit to be king.

What motivated Saul to offer the sacrifice? Although Saul claimed it was to seek God's favor, his actions revealed otherwise. According to 1 Samuel 13:6-7, Saul's troops were trembling with fear and beginning to scatter. Saul was more controlled by the

fear of his people than by a desire to honor God. How could Saul be trusted to lead when he was subject to the opinions of those he was meant to guide? And how could he be trusted to follow God when he placed his own judgment above God's commands?

This pattern emerges again in 1 Samuel 15. The Lord gave Saul clear instructions to destroy the Amalekites and everything they owned as punishment for their sins. Instead, Saul spared King Agag and took the best sheep, cattle, and lambs, as noted in verse 9. God expressed regret to Samuel for making Saul king. When Samuel confronted Saul, he claimed he had obeyed the Lord's instructions. Yet, once more, he failed to take responsibility for his disobedience. Even after being rebuked by Samuel, Saul doubled down, insisting that he had obeyed. It wasn't until Samuel told him that God had rejected him as king that Saul finally admitted his sin and asked for forgiveness—but it was not sincere. In verse 30, Saul acknowledged his sin only to beg Samuel to honor him before the elders and the people of Israel. His motives were self-centered, lacking any true remorse or humility. Saul never recovered from this moment and continued to spiral into jealousy, hatred, and murderous intent.

In both chapters, we see that the root issue is Saul's heart, not just his actions. He never took accountability for himself and valued the opinions of others more than the instructions of God. We also gain insight into how much Saul valued his position as king and how deeply it was tied to his identity. Although God rejected Saul as king, he was not rejected as a person—Saul still had access to God's grace and love. However, because his role as king had become the core of his identity, he couldn't let it go. The more tightly he clung to his position, the further his heart strayed from God.



# digdeeper



## EXPLORE FURTHER

External success is not always an accurate metric of God's approval. Saul reigned as king for 42 years, and for much of that time, he led after God had already rejected him. Despite this, he continued to hold power, influence, and the respect of his people. Outwardly, Saul still appeared to be king, but God knew the true condition of his heart. This teaches us an important lesson: it's easy to confuse external success with being in alignment with God's will, but success is not always a sign of divine favor. The consequences of disobedience and misplaced priorities may take time to manifest fully, but they are inevitable.





# conclusion

The rise and fall of Saul is a tragic story, but one filled with important lessons. You cannot seek God's favor while craving the world's validation. True repentance requires accountability for your actions; without it, genuine change is impossible. The unchecked pursuit of personal desires, without regard for God's will, inevitably leads to destruction—just as it did with Saul.

Saul's later life was marked by deep internal unrest and hateful actions, highlighting that the consequences of a self-centered life are reflected not only in how we affect others but also in the inner battles we fight. Perhaps Saul's story is included in the Bible to remind us how easily any of us can fall into these patterns and to encourage us to actively choose a different path.

## reflect

Take a moment for an internal audit: What motivates your actions? Are your decisions driven by a desire to please those around you or to honor God? Are you taking responsibility for your missteps, and do you have a community that helps hold you accountable for the areas in your character you may overlook?

## challenge

Read the rest of Saul's story in 1 Samuel and note how his character unravels over time. Reflect on this honest question: In what ways might I be similar to Saul?



Let's start with a little game. Take a moment to look up the answers to these trivia questions: What is the largest flower in the world? The fastest-growing plant? Which animal has the longest gestation period?

And which bird has the longest wingspan? (If you'd rather not search, here are the answers: the corpse flower, bamboo, the African elephant, and the wandering albatross.)

The corpse flower can reach over 12 feet tall but blooms for only 24 hours every two to three years, often taking seven to ten years to produce its first bloom. Bamboo, the fastest-growing plant on Earth, can shoot up nearly 3 feet in a single day—about 1.5 inches per hour. However, some species, like Chinese bamboo, develop underground for five years before breaking the surface. The African elephant, the largest land animal, carries its young for an astonishing 22 months—the most prolonged gestation of any animal. The wandering albatross, with a wingspan stretching between 8 to 11 feet, is known for its slow maturation, sometimes taking over 10 years before it's ready to breed

Each of these examples represents a superlative in nature: the tallest, the largest, the fastest. Yet, they all share a long path required to reach their full potential. Nature itself teaches us that greatness takes time. And yet, in our lives, we often find ourselves rushing as if racing against an invisible clock. In this study, we'll explore the contrasting journeys of Saul and David as they rose to kingship. Their stories offer powerful lessons for our personal, professional, and relational pursuits. Just as nature shows us, true greatness isn't about how quickly we achieve something—it's about the time, patience, and dedication it takes to grow into who we are meant to be.

*Read: 1 SAMUEL 10  
1 SAMUEL 13:1, 13-14  
2 SAMUEL 5:4*

# Saul vs. David pt. 1: long path to power



## FOR DISCUSSION

- **HOW** did the reasons behind Saul and David being chosen as kings differ?
- **HOW** old was Saul when he was anointed king?
- **COMPARE** Saul and David's first actions after being anointed and before officially becoming kings. What is the same? What is different?
- **WHAT** is the key difference between Saul's ascension to king and David's?

## REFLECTION

Saul was chosen because Israel rejected God; David was chosen because Saul rejected God. In 1 Samuel 13, we learn that Saul was 30 years old when he was anointed and became king. Scholars estimate that David was between 15 and 19 when he was anointed, and he was 30 when he officially became king.

After Saul was anointed and the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, he began to prophesy, just as Samuel had told him. However, shortly afterward, when Samuel went to present Saul to the nation of Israel at Mizpah, Saul was found hiding among the supplies. One of his first acts as the anointed king was to cover in fear. Later, in 1 Samuel 10:27, we see Saul remain silent in the presence of men who spoke ill of him, potentially highlighting his initial insecurity and hesitancy.

In contrast, after David was anointed, he continued working in his father's house. One of his first notable acts was challenging Goliath, refusing to wear the king's armor. David was less than 20 years old when he fought Goliath because, according to Numbers 1:3, young men aged 20 and above were eligible for military service. While Saul's introduction to power was marked by hiding, David's was defined by courage and faith.

Perhaps the most significant difference between Saul's and David's paths to kingship is the timing and nature of their preparation. Saul's ascent to the throne was swift, leaving

little room for meaningful character development. In 1 Samuel 10:9-11, we see that Saul's heart was changed, and he had a powerful encounter where he prophesied, but soon after, he was introduced as king. There was no extended period for growth or transformation.

In contrast, David's journey was more gradual. Anointed at a young age, he had years to mature and develop in character. He gained experience serving as a musician in Saul's court and as a prolific and victorious warrior. During the years between his anointing and becoming king, David also endured great hardships. His character was tested and refined over an extended period.

Many of us desire a quick path to success. We want to achieve our goals as swiftly as possible, often overlooking that God frequently appears with timing much slower than we are comfortable with. In our haste, we may desire instant gratification over lasting impact. Still, the risk of moving too fast is that we may go beyond what our character can sustain, leaving us unprepared to steward the responsibilities we have received.

When we rush ahead of God's timing or force things into place, we fail to realize that the same effort required to achieve "it" will also be needed to sustain "it." There is beauty in moving according to God's timeline. True growth and lasting impact come when we surrender to God's timing and trust in God's perfect plan.

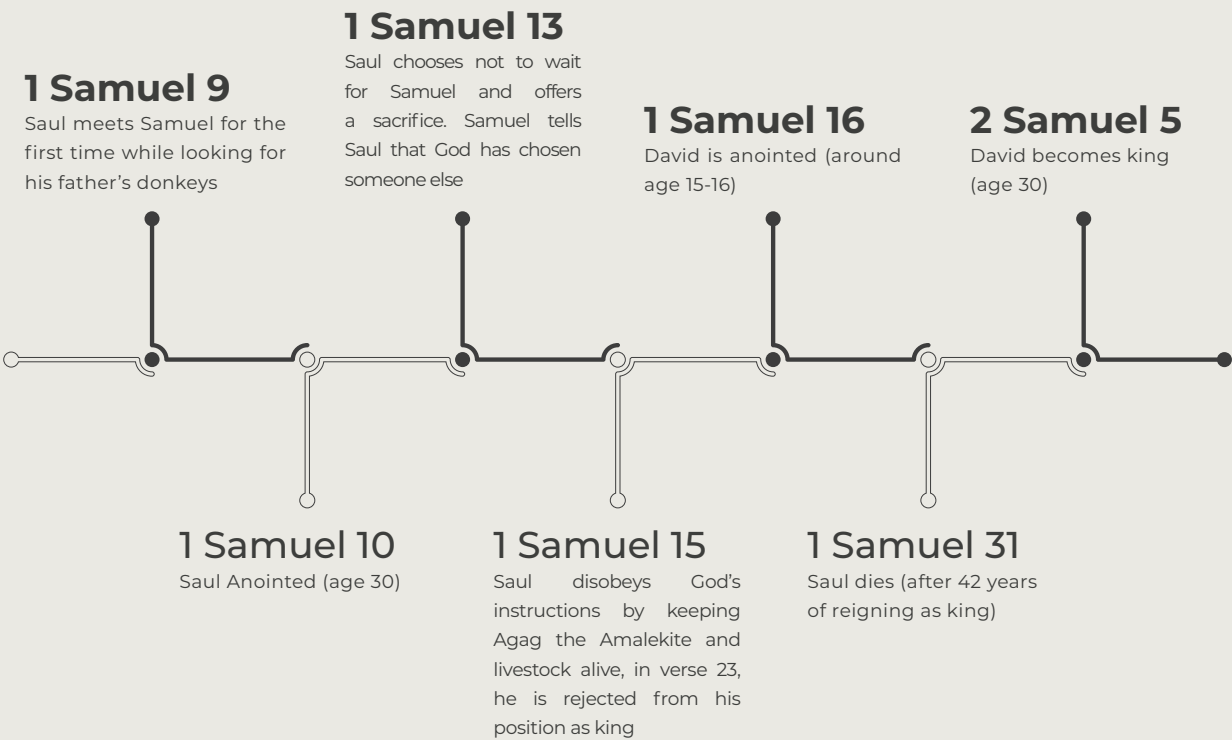


# digdeeper



## AT A GLANCE

*Below is the Biblical timeline for both Saul and David*



## HOT TAKE

In today's world, every standard of success we use to measure our lives would label Christ a failure.



## EXPLORE FURTHER

At the age of 30, Christ was unmarried, had no formal education, no home, and no savings. He didn't meet the cultural expectations of masculinity. He had a core group of friends, but even they often misunderstood him and, in the end, betrayed him. Christ was a nomad, meek and humble at heart, spending time with outcasts and social pariahs. He owned almost nothing by worldly standards, nor was he outwardly striking (Isaiah 53:2). By modern definitions, there was little in Christ's life that would be considered "successful." If our metrics deem Christ's life a failure, should we reevaluate the standards we strive to meet?





# conclusion

Saul and David were significant kings in Israel's history, yet their leadership was vastly different. A key reason for this difference lies in the character developed during their preparatory stages. In our impatience, we often want to bypass the time it takes to become the people who can steward the gifts God intends for us. However, the truth is that God's pace is intentional.

A vivid example is the period between the Old and New Testaments, known as the Intertestamental Period. This period spanned about 400 years, during which no new revelations or prophets emerged as the Israelites had been accustomed to in the Old Testament. Scholars refer to these years as the "silent years," but although God may have been silent, God was not inactive.

One of the most significant developments during this time was the rise of the Roman Empire. Among many things, Rome built an extensive network of roads throughout the empire—roads that would later be essential for the spread of the Gospel. What seemed like 400 years of silence was, in fact, a necessary time of preparation for the fulfillment of God's plan.

In our own lives, we may feel frustrated when things seem to move slowly, but these seasons of waiting are often integral to what God is preparing us for. Honor the process and trust that God is working, even when it feels slow. Allow God to shape your character so that you are ready to handle what God has in store.

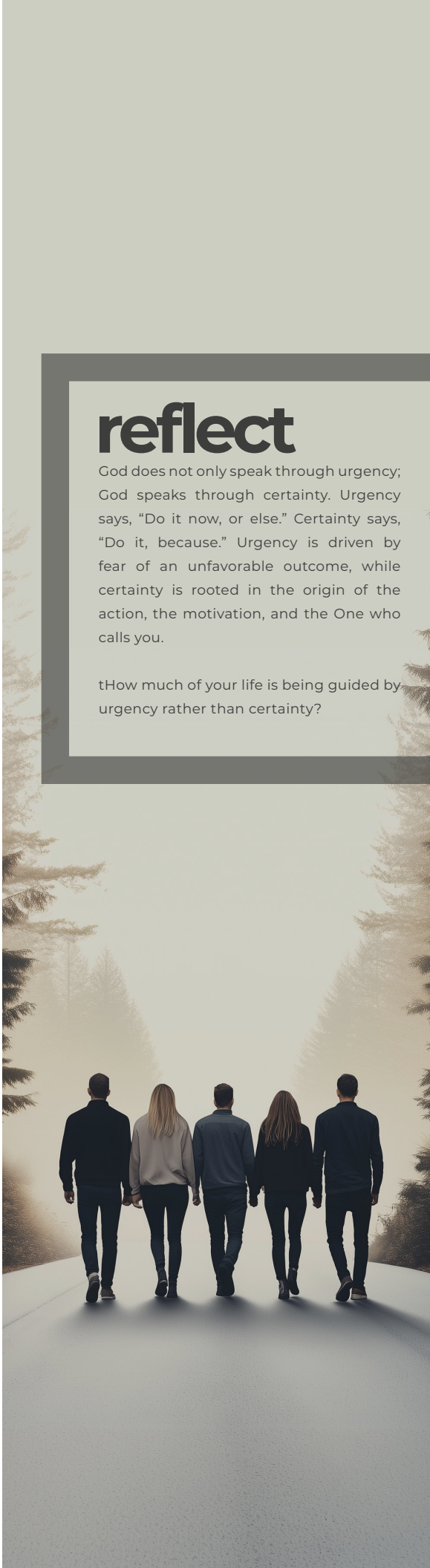
## reflect

God does not only speak through urgency; God speaks through certainty. Urgency says, "Do it now, or else." Certainty says, "Do it, because." Urgency is driven by fear of an unfavorable outcome, while certainty is rooted in the origin of the action, the motivation, and the One who calls you.

tHow much of your life is being guided by urgency rather than certainty?

## challenge

Create a list of your life goals, hopes, and desires. Be thorough and thoughtful. Spend time in prayer, submitting these goals to God. Ask God to reveal whether your plans align with God's will for your life and grant you the patience to move at the best pace.





# whose armor are you wearing?



As individuals, we are shaped by our experiences, ideas, beliefs, and values. However, one often-overlooked aspect of our identity is our community. The people we surround ourselves with can profoundly influence key areas of our lives, including our worldview and, most importantly, what we believe about ourselves. In our Christian journey, it is crucial to have people who see us through heaven's eyes—those who can uplift and guide us toward God's path.

In this study, we will explore a time when David chose to ignore the limiting voices around him and moved forward boldly in battle, honoring his identity and calling from God.

Read: **1 SAMUEL 16:6-13**  
**1 SAMUEL 17:1-40**



## FOR DISCUSSION

- **HOW** did God respond to Samuel when he attempted to anoint Eliab as the new king?
- **ACCORDING** to the text, what do we learn about David's relationship with his father, brothers, and overall family dynamics?
- **HOW** did Saul respond to David's desire to fight Goliath?
- **WHAT** was David's response to Saul, and what was the source of his confidence?

## REFLECTION

1 Samuel 9:2 describes Saul as a striking young man, standing head and shoulders above everyone else. By all outward standards, he seemed like the ideal leader. Later, when Samuel went to anoint a new king, he was initially captivated by Eliab's similarly impressive appearance. But God intervened, reminding Samuel that while humans judge by outward appearances, God looks at the heart.

As Samuel assessed Jesse's sons, an interesting family dynamic unfolded. David, the youngest, wasn't even considered initially—he wasn't part of the lineup. It wasn't until Samuel had passed over all seven of Jesse's other sons that David was mentioned. He was out tending sheep, far from the discussions of kingship.

Even after being anointed, David remained in a lowly position. 1 Samuel 17:14-18 shows that he continued serving his brothers, bringing provisions like roasted grain, bread, and cheese to their unit commander. David's role in his family seemed unchanged. He was still seen as the shepherd boy, the one who served.

The tension within David's family is palpable in his relationship with his brother, Eliab. When David inquired about Goliath, Eliab responded with anger and scorn. It's possible that Eliab, the oldest, resented David for being anointed instead of him. Yet, despite the lack of recognition from his own family, David stayed true to his identity—rooted not in external validation but in his deep, personal relationship with God.

David's age likely added to Saul's disbelief when David offered to fight Goliath. Saul's initial response was dismissive: "You can't." But David shared stories of God's deliverance from the lion and the bear, demonstrating his unwavering faith. Even then, Saul tried to impose his methods, offering David his armor as if to say, "You can only succeed my way." But David declined, knowing his strength came not from conventional means but from trusting God's power. Armed only with his sling and five smooth stones, he went to face Goliath.

If David had allowed the voices around him to define him, he would have forfeited the opportunity to fulfill his calling and achieve victory.

In what ways have you allowed the voices and ideas of others to hold you back from experiencing all that God has planned for you?



# digdeeper



## HOT TAKE

Pride is recognized as one of the seven deadly sins, but the church's narrow interpretation of it can sometimes hinder our pursuit of excellence. Pride is often seen as acknowledging the good within us, while humility is mistakenly equated with diminishing ourselves. These perspectives can harm our relationship with striving for greatness.



## EXPLORE FURTHER

In much of the secular world, people are encouraged to "reach for the stars" and pursue their highest goals. We see individuals striving for exceptional achievements in physical, intellectual, musical, or artistic fields. However, within Christianity, we are often taught that such pursuits are vain and that true humility requires us to avoid these ambitions.

Notice, however, that David did not shy away from acknowledging his capabilities. When he approached Saul, declaring that he could defeat Goliath, he confidently listed his past achievements, such as killing a lion and a bear. What's remarkable about David is that he credited these victories to God. Our fear of pride can sometimes lead us to play small, not realizing that true excellence glorifies God.

An insightful quote by Marianne Williamson captures this concept beautifully:

***"...We ask ourselves, 'Who am I to be brilliant, gorgeous, talented, fabulous?' Actually, who are you not to be? You are a child of God. Your playing small does not serve the world. There is nothing enlightened about shrinking so that other people won't feel insecure around you. We are all meant to shine, as children do. We were born to make manifest the glory of God that is within us. It is not just in some of us; it is in everyone. And as we let our own light shine, we unconsciously give other people permission to do the same. As we are liberated from our own fear, our presence automatically liberates others."***

Excellence is an act of stewardship! When our hearts are aligned with God, God is glorified as we thrive.





# conclusion

We have significant control over what we allow into our narratives and who we permit to co-author our lives. In David's case, if he had let Samuel write his story, he wouldn't have been chosen, as his appearance didn't fit Samuel's expectations of a king. If he had allowed his father, Jesse, to co-author his story, David would have been overlooked—dismissed as the youngest and deemed unworthy of consideration. If he had let his eldest brother, Eliab, write his story, it would have been clouded by jealousy and resentment. Eliab's words could have silenced him, and he might never have faced Goliath. If David had let Saul write his story, he might have doubted his ability to defeat the giant, believing he needed to wear someone else's armor to succeed.

But David didn't let anyone who didn't see him through heaven's eyes dictate his story. He kept the pen in God's hands and trusted in the power of God to enable him to do great and mighty things.

So, who are you allowing to co-author your story? Whose armor are you wearing? What influences or voices have you given more power over your identity than God? Like David, you are not defined or validated by your external appearances, your family, your upbringing, or how others perceive you. You are not governed by others' perceptions, whether good or bad, nor should you minimize yourself to keep others comfortable.

It serves no purpose to burden yourself with trying to fit into the "armor" of others' expectations, beliefs, or limitations—especially when they themselves are unwilling to face the battles you're fighting. The Goliath in your life can be defeated, and just as David was anointed to be king, God has chosen you to accomplish remarkable things. But if you let people who cannot see God's vision for you shape your story, you will always be smaller and do less than you were created to do.

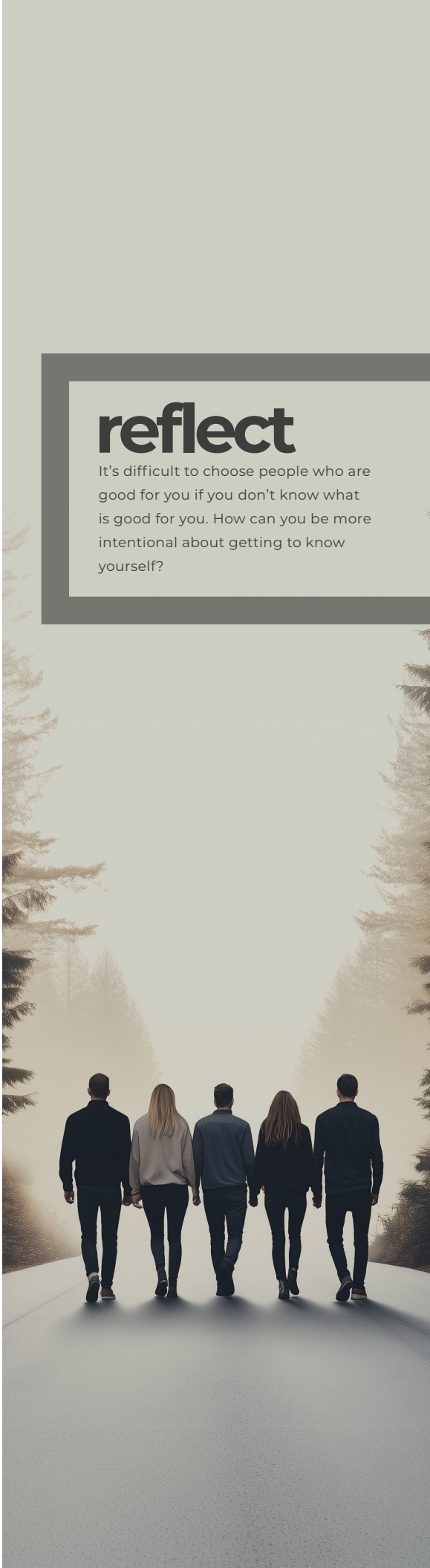
## reflect

It's difficult to choose people who are good for you if you don't know what is good for you. How can you be more intentional about getting to know yourself?

## challenge

Spend some time in personal reflection and journaling, answering these questions:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I love to do?
3. Who do I want to be? (Include a list of characteristics such as kind, funny, generous, curious, empathetic, etc.)
4. Who do I believe I was created to be? (Rather than focusing on a career, identify the ways you feel called to make a positive impact in the world and in your community.)
5. What or who in my life is hindering me from becoming who I believe I am meant to be?
6. How do I step forward in faith and allow God to co-author my story?





Both Saul and David displayed deeply rooted flaws and moral failures in their leadership. Yet, David is still regarded as a man after God's own heart. How could this be? How can someone with such moral failings be called a man after God's own heart? In Week 4, we studied Saul's heart and his greatest acts of defiance.

This week, we will focus on David's heart as we examine his engagement with Bathsheba, one of his most destructive decisions.

Read: **2 SAMUEL 11:12:24**  
**ACTS 13:22**

# Saul vs. David pt. 2: man after God's heart?





## FOR DISCUSSION

- **ANALYZE** the various failures and wrongdoings of David in his dealings with Bathsheba, and identify the individuals negatively impacted by his choices.
- **SUMMARIZE** some of Saul's most significant transgressions (refer to Week 4 for details).
- **EVALUATE** whose actions were more questionable and damaging: Saul's as a king, or David's as a king.
- **DESPITE** David's seemingly more severe actions compared to Saul's, why is David still regarded as a man after God's own heart, while Saul is not?

## REFLECTION

After many years of leading well, winning battles, and establishing Israel's name, David seemed to have grown too comfortable in his role as king, perhaps forgetting his roots. His first misstep with Bathsheba was his lack of commitment to his people. Why was David at home indulging in comfort instead of leading his troops in battle? A grave misuse of power followed this lapse. When David saw Bathsheba and was pleased, there was no mutual interest indicated; David desired her, and she complied. As king, David's desires were nearly impossible to oppose, especially for a woman like Bathsheba in that cultural context. Bathsheba likely had no power to resist the king's demands.

Another failure on David's part can be seen in the people he surrounded himself with. Perhaps due to the political hierarchy, they complied with his immoral desires and even helped cover up his sins. No one held him accountable. When David realized his mistake, he tried to conceal it by involving Uriah, Bathsheba's husband. His attempt to use Uriah suggests there was no willing involvement on Bathsheba's part. If the affair had been mutual or if she had seduced him, David could have punished her instead. Instead, he sought to cover up his actions, revealing that he knew what he had done was wrong. David tried to get Uriah to sleep with his wife to conceal her unplanned pregnancy, but Uriah displayed the honor that David should have had, refusing to indulge in comfort while his nation was at war. Rather than being moved by Uriah's integrity, David plotted his murder, smiling and feasting with him while secretly planning his death. After Uriah's death, David married Bathsheba, and the child was born. Tragically, the child later died as a consequence of David's actions. Bathsheba was once again plunged into grief, mourning the loss of both her husband and her child, all because David misused his power.

It is significant to note that David did not repent until the prophet Nathan confronted him. This means that nearly a year, or perhaps more, had passed during which David ignored the weight of his sin. This behavior does not align with what we would expect from a man after God's own heart, yet this is how David is remembered.

In contrast, when Saul was rejected as king, his initial failures seemed less severe: he didn't wait for Samuel to offer a sacrifice, and when instructed to destroy the Amalekites, he spared King Agag and kept some of the best livestock. When we compare the wrongdoings of David and Saul, Saul's sins appear minor. So, how is it that David still retains the title of a man after God's own heart?

The answer is found in the posture of repentance. Though David committed grievous sins against God and others, when confronted, he repented with a sincere heart and mind. As discussed in Week 4, when Saul's sins were exposed, he justified them and only showed remorse when his position was threatened.

The difference between Saul and David is akin to the contrast between Judas and Peter—both betrayed Christ, but while Judas' hardened heart prevented him from seeking forgiveness, Peter acknowledged his flaws and sought God's grace with humility.

Both David and Saul were sinners who caused great harm to others, but only David is known for his genuine repentance. In 1 Samuel 15:22, when Saul tried to justify his harmful actions, Samuel reminded him, "To obey is better than sacrifice." In stark contrast, David's repentance is reflected in Psalm 51:17, where he says, "My sacrifice, O God, is a broken spirit; a broken and contrite heart you, God, will not despise." David was considered a friend of God and a man after God's own heart, not because he was sinless, but because he was repentant and sought forgiveness.

David was repentant, while Saul was not. This key distinction is why, despite David's bloodied hands and his heart darkened by sin, he was still regarded as a man after God's own heart.





# digdeeper



## HOT TAKE

Call it by its rightful name: an abuse of power. Many Bible stories are taught through a watered-down and even dismissive lens, often obscuring the true events that took place. This is particularly evident in how we interpret stories involving women. Often, we gloss over harsh realities, and sometimes even justify them. This raises a critical question: if we learn to ignore or justify injustice in the Bible—the central text of our faith and, in many ways, our lives—does that tendency carry over into real life? Are we priming ourselves to remain silent in the face of present injustice?



## EXPLORE FURTHER

For example, we often praise Abraham's story while glossing over the fact that he abandoned and exiled his child Ishmael and his mother Hagar. By doing so, are we implicitly endorsing the idea that God's promises can be attained at any cost, even if it harms others? We excuse Abraham's actions because Isaac was the promised son, but that justifies his actions.

We often overlook the fact that Esther was brought to the palace against her will, along with many other women who were forced to sleep with the king. If he wasn't pleased, they spent the rest of their lives trapped in the palace. We tend to ignore Esther's suffering because she eventually became queen. By downplaying the fact that Esther and the other women were essentially victims of sex trafficking, are we implying that abuse is acceptable when it comes from a position of power or justified if it leads to status?

Similarly, we sometimes blame Bathsheba for being in the wrong place at the wrong time, even suggesting that she was at fault for flaunting her body. We forget, or intentionally ignore, that David not only chose to lust over her body rather than honoring God but also abused his position of power to act on his lust. In addition, he was supposed to be at war and may have been the last person she expected to see. By excusing his actions, are we reinforcing the dangerous notion that women are at fault if they are abused—that she shouldn't have dressed that way or been in that place? Are we teaching ourselves to avoid holding abusers accountable and instead to victim-blame?

There are countless other stories in the Bible where both women and men are mistreated, yet we often find ways to overlook or justify these actions. Perhaps the way we've been taught to engage with Scripture has created a harmful dissonance when it comes to recognizing injustice in the world around us. It's far more honest to name the sins of biblical characters for what they are. Doing so can help us be more courageous in confronting injustice in our own lives. It may be uncomfortable, but we must lean into that discomfort and refuse to be silent in the face of wrongdoing.





# conclusion

We can find immense grace and hope in David's story and his relationship with God despite his significant failures. While God does not condone sin, He makes allowances for our humanity, which is inherently flawed. Psalm 103:14 reminds us, "For He knows how we are formed, He remembers that we are dust." In 1 Samuel 13, when God sought a person like David, God wasn't looking for someone sinless or without flaws. God knew David would sin, just as Saul did. What matters most to God is how we respond to our sin. Do we justify it, hide it and ignore it? Or do we, with a contrite heart, take responsibility for it?

No part of you, not even your worst actions, disqualifies you from being loved or chosen by God. The only way to distance yourself from God is to refuse to acknowledge your sinfulness. Find solace in that reality. Yes, sin is harmful, and as human beings, we all carry shortcomings and selfishness. But where sin abounds, grace abounds even more!

Perhaps the greatest evidence of grace in David and Bathsheba's story is the birth of their son Solomon, who became the wisest man to ever live and the king responsible for building the temple, God's home on earth.

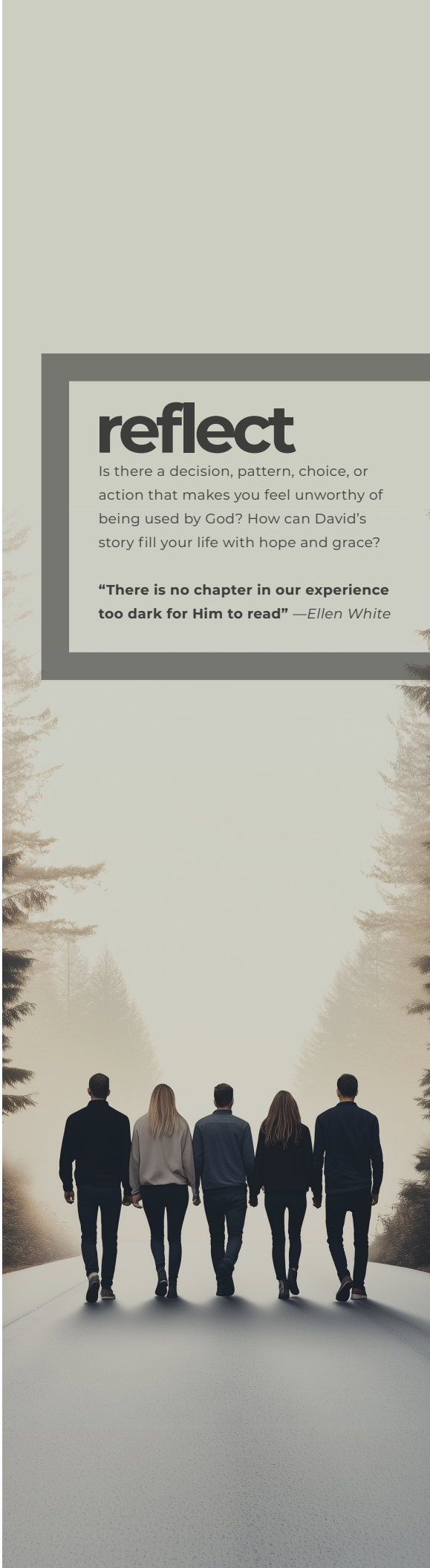
## reflect

Is there a decision, pattern, choice, or action that makes you feel unworthy of being used by God? How can David's story fill your life with hope and grace?

**"There is no chapter in our experience too dark for Him to read"** —Ellen White

## challenge

Read and meditate on David's psalm of repentance, Psalm 51.





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