

Memory Verse

“For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself.” (Galatians 6:3)

Knowledge of God’s Will [God’s Word]	Knowledge of God [God’s Divine Nature]	Good Works [Behavior]
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. God appointed Saul as Israel’s first king. 2. The trials he faced revealed Saul to be self-seeking and full of pride. 	<p>God is sovereign. He should be feared and obeyed.</p>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Obey God by humbling our hearts. 2. Depend on God, and He will protect us.

Overview

Events and Spiritual Teachings

- A. Saul’s Early Reign
- B. Saul’s Deteriorating Faith
- C. The Results of Pride and Jealousy

Life Application

1. To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice
2. Depending on God

Memory Verse

Conclusion: We must put in the effort to humble our hearts, to seek after God, and to obey Him so that He can help us overcome the challenges in our lives.

Introduction

Over the past few weeks, we've learned about some of the judges of Israel. But during Samuel's time, the Israelites wanted a king, so that they could be more like other nations. Samuel was displeased with their demand, but God allowed it and told Samuel to anoint a king as the people desired. However, He also told Samuel to "solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them" (1 Sam 8:9).

Even with this warning, the Israelites still insisted on having a king, so Samuel anointed Saul the son of Kish, from the tribe of Benjamin. He was the first king of all the tribes of Israel (1 Sam 10:1), and although Samuel had anointed him previously, Saul was later publicly chosen by lot as evidence of God's will (vv. 17–24). Acts 13:21 says that Saul reigned over Israel for forty years.

A. Saul's Early Reign

When first describing Saul, the Bible records, "There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people" (1 Sam 9:2). But what was his character like? What kind of a person was he? Let's go over a few passages that tell us what Saul was like at the beginning of his reign.

1. A humble character (1 Sam 9:20–21; 10:15–16, 22)

Saul's first reaction to Samuel was that of disbelief. He believed his tribe was the smallest, and his family the least of the tribe of Benjamin, so he had no idea why Samuel called his family "the desire of Israel." Later, when Samuel and the Israelites cast lots to determine God's will, the Bible records that Saul was hiding among the equipment when he was finally chosen! We do not know the exact reason Saul was hiding – perhaps he was scared of the responsibility, had doubt in his abilities, or simply did not want to stand out – but in any case, his actions show a man who initially did not want to step forward.

2. A peaceful character (1 Sam 10:27; 11:12–13)

When Saul was first chosen to be king, there were several rebellious people who "despised him, and brought him no presents" (1 Sam 10:27). However, Saul's reaction was neither anger nor vengeance. He didn't abuse his new authority as king, but "held his peace." This attitude persisted even when he later proved himself by successfully defeating the Ammonites. His more zealous followers wanted to put these rebellious men to death, but Saul refused to listen to their suggestion. He instead said, "Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished salvation in Israel" (11:13).

3. A successful military leader (1 Sam 11:5–11; 14:47–48)

Although Saul was given an unexpected and heavy responsibility as king, he stepped up to fulfill his duty when Israel needed him. Let's read 1 Samuel 11:7–11. When Jabesh required help, Saul gathered men from all over Israel and defeated the Ammonites who threatened the city. This was only one of many victories for Saul, as his entire rule was dominated by war (1 Sam 14:52). The Bible records that Saul harassed his enemies and "delivered Israel from the hands of those who plundered them." But what made Saul a successful commander? Let's read 1 Samuel 14:37.

From here, we can see that Saul asked council of God before going into battle. He also corrected the people when they sinned against the Lord and worshipped God by building an altar (vv. 34–

35). Although he may have made a few mistakes, Saul still did his best to seek the Lord and serve Him as best he could, at least during the early years of his reign.

From these verses, we can see that Saul was far more successful as a leader when he sought God and tried to obey Him. However, during his later years, he gradually strayed from the Lord and began to act on his own.

B. Saul's Deteriorating Faith

Saul started his reign as a faithful king, but his relationship with God began to decline, to the point that he began to hunt down David out of jealousy. But this lack of faith was actually a gradual decline over time. What events signified Saul's deteriorating faith? Let's look over a few of them.

1. Saul sacrifices unlawfully (1 Sam 13:8–14)

His first major act of disobedience came when he overstepped his boundaries as king. Saul understood the importance of having God's presence with the Israelites in battle. However, at a time when his army was scattered, outnumbered, and fearful, Saul became impatient. His true character was revealed when under pressure. Let's read 1 Samuel 13:8–13. Although he may have been king, Saul was not a priest, so he broke God's laws in making this offering. Unfortunately, when Samuel confronted him, Saul tried to justify his actions and did not repent.

2. Saul makes a foolish oath (1 Sam 14:24–46)

Let's read 1 Samuel 14:24. This oath may seem heroic, but it was actually an impulsive and poorly thought-out oath with no regard for the consequences. Jonathan, who ate honey without knowing of this oath, criticized his father, saying, "My father has troubled the land. [...] How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies which they found! For now would there not have been a much greater slaughter among the Philistines?" (vv. 29–30). As Jonathan aptly pointed out, to make an army march and fight on an empty stomach was foolish.

Besides almost killing his own son, Saul's impulsive oath had the additional consequence of leading his army to sin against God. Let's read 1 Samuel 14:31–33. It is clear that Saul spoke without thinking about the consequences, indicating a lack of spiritual wisdom. Moreover, the content of his oath shows that he was not focusing on God during this battle, but on his own vengeance.

3. Saul disobeys God (1 Sam 15:1–3, 9–31)

God had commanded Saul to destroy Amalek completely, including their livestock and their king. Unfortunately, Saul did not obey God's instructions, but spared the best of the livestock along with King Agag. The Bible says, "Saul and the people [...] were unwilling to utterly destroy them" (1 Sam 15:9). They were unwilling to obey God's command. More importantly, Saul failed to guide the people on the correct spiritual path, as he feared their criticism more than he feared God (v. 24).

When Samuel saw what had happened, Saul claimed his own innocence instead of repenting (1 Sam 15:15). As a result, Samuel announced that Saul's kingdom would be torn from him because he no longer heeded God's word. Only when Samuel declared his kingdom torn from him did Saul take back his words and repent (vv. 24, 30). This was Saul's second major act of

disobedience, and it caused God to withdraw His Spirit from Saul (1 Sam 16:14).

4. Saul consults a witch (1 Sam 28:3–20)

Let's read 1 Samuel 28:3–8. In what is perhaps the ultimate act of disobedience, Saul turned to the occult in his desperate need for guidance. The Bible repeatedly warns against witchcraft and mediums, teaching us that God regards these Canaanite customs as abominations. Saul himself had banned such practices in Israel, yet he still pursued this course of action despite knowing it was wrong. He was desperate for help, regardless of what form it took. The spirit's appearance was, of course, a false sign as proven by its inaccurate prediction (Ishbosheth survived the battle), but Saul believed it nonetheless, a sure sign of his distance from God.

From these events, we can see that Saul's major weakness was his tendency to overstep his bounds. He may have begun as a humble man, but he soon became proud as Israel's first king. Instead of relying on God for help, he relied on himself and the strength of his armies. Instead of letting God strengthen his weaknesses, he grew to rely on his own decisions, and rather than keep his faith in God, he neglected God's sovereignty.

Unfortunately, his pride later affected his relationship with David as well. He became jealous of David's popularity and sought to kill him instead of accepting him as God's chosen successor. As a result, instead of building up the kingdom, he spent most of his time hunting down David. His pride and jealousy had serious consequences, including alienation from his own son and daughter, and from God.

C. The Results of Pride and Jealousy

If we look back at Saul's life, God gave him a new heart when he was first anointed, and he acted as both a courageous leader and a faithful commander for God's people. He was quick to give glory to God and to fix his mistakes. But as time passed, he became more impetuous, rash, quick to anger, and jealous for approval. He feared criticism and was even willing to put his son's life at risk for foolish reasons. Let's examine the consequences of his change in heart in closer detail.

1. His heart no longer had room for God

Let's read 1 Samuel 16:14. God's Spirit had once changed him so dramatically when he was anointed (1 Sam 10:9), but now Saul's pride and disobedience left no room for God in his heart. He had strayed so far from the Lord that a distressing spirit now troubled Saul, and he was unable to have peace. God's Spirit no longer dwelled with him.

2. Jealousy transformed his love to hatred

One of the most stunning and drastic consequences of Saul's changed heart was his attempted murder of David, whom he once loved (1 Sam 16:21). His pride and desire for approval led to jealousy (18:8–9). This jealousy later turned to hatred, and then to attempted murder, not once, but several times (18:11; 19:10, 15; 23:25; 26:2).

3. God no longer answered him

Let's read 1 Samuel 28:6. Saul had done the correct thing by inquiring of the Lord for instructions, but tragically, it was too late. He had already strayed too far, so the Lord no longer answered him. This incident serves as a warning for us never to stray so far from God that He rejects us.

Because of his pride, disobedience, and jealousy, Saul was ultimately rejected by God. In 1 Samuel 15:11, the Lord told Samuel, “I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not performed My commandments.” Saul had turned away from God, and he didn’t follow God’s commands. As a result, the Lord departed from him and didn’t answer even when he went to inquire of Him. In the end, upon being wounded in battle and seeing that his three sons had died, Saul fell on his sword and killed himself.

Check for Understanding

1. **How did Saul react to being anointed as king?** He kept the news to himself, and when it was proclaimed, he hid himself.
2. **How did Saul prove that he was able to deliver Israel from their enemies?** When the city of Jabesh called for help, Saul gathered the men of Israel and was victorious in battle against the Ammonites.
3. **What were the two key events in which Saul disobeyed God?** He sacrificed unlawfully, and he disobeyed God by sparing the best of the livestock and King Agag.
4. **Although Saul at first relied on God, how did this attitude change?** He began to rely on himself and the strength of his armies. Instead of letting God strengthen his weaknesses, he grew to rely on his own decisions, and rather than keep his faith in God, he neglected God’s sovereignty.
5. **What fundamental flaws caused God to reject Saul?** He turned away from God, and he didn’t follow God’s commands.

Life Application

1. To Obey Is Better than Sacrifice Understanding Disobedience

Saul came up with plenty of excuses for his disobedience, but Samuel told him bluntly, “You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God, which He commanded you” (1 Sam 13:13). No matter how we may try to justify ourselves, disobeying God is still a sin and a sign of rebellion against Him.

Let’s read 1 Samuel 15:22–23. Samuel’s words to Saul teach us something very important: that disobedience is as serious a sin as turning to witchcraft, and that the refusal to listen to God’s words is the same as idolatry. But why is this the case?

Disobedience is a serious sin, because it means that we do not value God or His place in our hearts. Instead of giving thanks, we have taken pride in what we think we have accomplished, and have decided that our way is better than God’s way. Therefore, disobedience is a sign of disrespect, for it shows that we don’t care what our Creator thinks of us. We no longer see Him as our sovereign God, as we have placed greater value on the ways of the world, which is a form of idolatry.

God has given us so much – He has given us food, clothing, a family who cares for us, and a place to sleep in safety. He has given us skills, abilities, and healthy bodies. But most important of all, He has given us a chance to obtain eternal life. If we truly understood this in our hearts, would we still disobey God? What are some reasons we disobey God in our lives today? Take a moment to reflect on the last time you disobeyed God, then complete the following sentences:

- “I once disobeyed God by...”
- “The reason I disobeyed God was because...”
- “To avoid making the same mistake in the future, I should...”

Example answer:

I once disobeyed God by... *refusing to listen to my parents and not cleaning up my room.*
The reason I disobeyed was because... *I was feeling selfish and lazy. I wanted to play games instead, and I believed that my parents made me clean up all the time just because they wanted me to suffer.*
To avoid making the same mistake in the future, I should... *remind myself that my parents are always trying to help me even if I disagree with what they say. To help remind myself, I should write down Ephesians 6:1–3 on a sticky note in my room and read it the next time I feel like rebelling against them.*

(Teachers: You may want to spend some time discussing how to avoid making the same mistakes in the future. It will help if you go to the root cause of their disobedience, such as selfishness, laziness, greed, lack of empathy, etc.)

Understanding Obedience

God often uses delays to test our obedience, patience, and dedication to His will. When Saul was under pressure, his true character was revealed when he took matters into his own hands and disobeyed God. We should learn from this and remember that obedience means waiting patiently for God. If we wait for God’s plan, we will discover entirely new purposes and directions in our lives – directions which we would never have expected to take had we acted on our own. Waiting for God is truly a trial that tests whether we trust Him to act on our behalf.

Of course, it’s easy to tell ourselves to wait, but much harder to actually do! Obeying God is not easy, which is why He has made so many promises to us if we do obey Him. But what stops us from being obedient? Can you think of reasons you have disobeyed God or your parents? *(Allow students to brainstorm. Examples: We think we know better; we’re lazy; we get impatient; etc.)* One of the main reasons we disobey is pride: we think that we know better than God, or that we are better than others.

Survey: Diagnosing the Pride in Our Hearts	Y	N
1. Are you extremely confident in your own abilities?		
2. Do you often think that your opinions are better?		
3. Do you often try to garner praise from others?		
4. Do you frequently seek attention?		
5. Do you often judge others?		
6. Do you often find fault in others?		
7. Do you justify your poor decisions and try to talk God out of the picture?		
8. Do you think other peoples’ opinions are more important than God’s?		
9. Do you tell yourself that you are praiseworthy?		
10. Do you avoid people who are better than you?		

Tally each “yes” and “no” that you filled in. Based on your total for each, do you have a prideful or a humble heart? If many of your answers are “yes,” then it is an important first step to recognize the problem. Pride often blinds us to our own sins and hardens our hearts towards God. But if we can see and admit that we are prideful, we can begin to take steps towards humbling our hearts. Remember, “God resists the proud, but gives grace to the humble” (1 Pet 5:5). So, if we have a prideful heart, how do we humble ourselves?

- Confess to God that you struggle with pride, and ask God for forgiveness
- Ask for the fullness of the Holy Spirit, so that the Spirit can transform your heart

- Practice putting the interests of others before your own; go out of your way to help others (Rom 12:15; Phil 2:3–4)

2. Depending on God

We learned today that one of the things that made Saul a good king at first was his reliance on God. He asked for guidance before battle, and he also tried to follow God’s will as best he could. Instead of relying on our own understanding, God wants us to go to Him for wisdom, strength, and guidance. When we fully rely on Him in this manner, it becomes easier to obey Him and surrender our lives to Him. As a result, the Lord has promised to guide, protect, and provide for us. Let’s read a testimony about a member who at first struggled to depend on God, but over time, learned how to rely on His power.

Testimony

Today I would like to testify of how obedience is greater than sacrifice. When I was seventeen, I entered a school to take a major national examination. I thought that I had a bright future ahead. All I needed was to do well in my national exams. As I did well in the one before, I never thought that this one was going to be difficult. I was wrong.

To my surprise, I did very badly in school, and my teachers informed my parents that I was not going to do well. During this time, I became miserable. Many negative thoughts began running through my head; things like, “If I do not do well in this exam, I have no other options in my future,” “I’m going to be a burden to my family,” and other similar thoughts.

It got to the point where I would cry every day. I would also get so anxious that I became incapable of doing anything at all. I couldn’t study, eat, or speak. Sometimes, I began to hyperventilate just thinking about how hopeless the situation was. My family often witnessed something small triggering my frustrations, to the point that I would experience a mental breakdown. I began having dark thoughts of dying, and thought that I was going crazy. I couldn’t handle myself emotionally. I often asked myself, “Where is God?”

These events affected my faith completely. I was at a loss. I began to question if God was real, and why I was going through all of this. I wanted to stop going to church because I had so many doubts in my heart as a result of this situation. I also felt that church was very time-consuming, leaving me with little time to study. However, from all of my RE lessons, I knew in my mind that God is real, and that I should obey Him and continue going to church. However, I thought to myself that I cannot continue going to church if I no longer believe in Him. Out of this seemingly dark situation, I gave God a chance. I decided to believe in His promises and see what would happen. A verse stuck out to me at the time:

“For I know the thoughts that I think toward you, says the LORD, thoughts of peace and not of evil, to give you a future and a hope.”

Jer 29:11

Since God wanted to give me a future and a hope, I decided to trust Him for the rest of the year before deciding whether or not to leave church. So how did I decide to show my trust in Him? I decided not to touch my studies on Sabbath Day. Sabbath Day is a day of rest, so I chose to obey this command completely.

Before I made this decision, I always felt guilty for not studying, even on Sabbath Day. All my classmates were way ahead of me, putting in the hours during the weekends, while I couldn't even enjoy my time in church. However, after making this decision, Sabbath became my favorite day. God had assigned me this time of rest so that I could be free of worry; later, I would be able to do what I needed to do for the week.

Slowly, I learned to trust and obey God. Through His word on the Sabbath, He gave me strength to carry me through the week. Each time I got anxious, I would put away my books and read the Bible to find more of God's promises to me. He would comfort me with His words. Some days were better than others. Some days were still very bad. But I always stuck to my decision to trust God no matter what.

I was finally liberated from the hopelessness I felt, and I knew that whether I did well or not, God would take care of me because He loves me. I've heard of people trying to find God by not going to church, or people trying to "survive at school" by not going to church and using that time to study. However, no one is able to experience the love and power of God by doing that. Because I didn't attempt to find God my own way and instead decided to obey God, I was able to understand this.

– Anonymous

Discussion

- What was the turning point in this student's life and faith?
- How did this student learn to trust in God?

From this testimony, we can see that there are a few key methods to relying on God, even when we are feeling distant from Him. They are:

- a. Seek out the Lord in prayer, and have an ongoing conversation with Him.
- b. Pour ourselves out to the Lord and tell Him all of our problems.
- c. Trust that when we draw closer to God, He will draw closer to us. He answers our prayers.

When we finally learn to depend on God, our lives will transform. We will become less anxious. We will feel greater peace and joy in our hearts, even when faced with trouble or conflict at home or at school. Our prayers will become more fruitful, and we will worry less. Most importantly, we will begin to see God's provision in every aspect of our lives, as well as His salvation for us.

Memory Verse

"For if anyone thinks himself to be something, when he is nothing, he deceives himself." (Galatians 6:3)

Meaning

Proud people want to be noticed. They crave attention, praise, or approval. However, this is a form of self-deception. God hates pride and arrogance because it makes us forget about God, and He reminds us often that we have not accomplished anything on our own. Everything that we have, have done, or will do, is because of His grace and mercy. On the other hand, the Bible teaches us that "[pride] goes before destruction, and a haughty spirit before a fall. Better to be of a humble spirit with the lowly, than to divide the spoil with the proud" (Prov 16:18–19).

Conclusion

Saul began as a humble man and an effective commander of Israel. However, as he started to face more troubling situations, his true heart was uncovered, and he was revealed to be self-seeking and prideful. Saul did not have a heart for God, nor did he cultivate his relationship with God, leading to a life of disobedience. Today, we must put in the effort to humble our hearts, to seek after God, and to obey Him so that He can help us overcome the challenges in our lives.

Lesson 7 Homework Assignment Answer Key

1. What is the memory verse teaching us about pride?
Pride is a form of self-deception. Everything that we have, have done, or will do, is because of the Lord's grace and mercy. Also, the Lord hates pride and arrogance because it makes us forget about Him.
2. "Behold, to _____ is better than _____, and to _____ than the _____ of _____." (1 Samuel 15:22b)
obey, sacrifice, heed, fat, rams
3. What are three characteristics of Saul during his early reign?
He was peaceful, humble, and a successful military leader.
4. What two major events were a sign of Saul's changed heart?
When he sacrificed unlawfully, and when he directly disobeyed God by sparing King Agag and preserving the best of the livestock plundered from the Ammonites.
5. What were the results of the pride and jealousy in Saul's heart?
His heart no longer had room for God. Jealousy transformed his love to hatred. God no longer answered him.
6. Why is disobeying God such a serious sin?
When we disobey God, it means that we do not value God or His place in our hearts. We no longer see Him as our sovereign God, as we have placed greater value on the ways of the world, which is a form of idolatry.
7. Considering today's lesson, do you consider yourself fully dependent on God? Why or why not?
Personal answers.