



Honest to God

David: Profiles of an Authentic Life

Session 2 – Authentic Obedience

What motivates us to obey—or for that matter, to disobey? We can think of many explanations but it comes down to the same thing. We are followers, going after fulfillment. What we get depends on who we follow. As Bob Dylan famously sang, you're gonna have to serve somebody.

Before David comes on the scene, we meet another man who had the opportunity to be mighty for God. Saul's story goes so far wrong that we tend to forget he started out well enough. Saul was gifted with strength, influence and good looks. He had the Lord's guidance and Samuel's support. What went wrong? Unlike David, Saul chose *and kept choosing* to follow his own heart.

Goals for this Session:

- Discover what pleases God most.
- Consider the pitfalls of trying to please others.
- To examine how we respond when confronted with our own sin.
- To pray honest prayers that lead to authentic obedience and life change.

Ice Breaker

Everyone feels it at one time or another. Call it peer pressure, the pull of mainstream thinking, or what's trending on social media. Give some examples (either positive or negative) of how we are influenced to go with the flow.

Day One – The Big Picture

Read **1 Samuel 15:1-35** to get the overall picture. Follow the story line carefully but without getting bogged down in details.

1. What is the central topic? State the main point of this passage in a sentence or two.
2. What insight does this chapter give you into God's ways and our relationship to Him?
3. The Bible shapes our core beliefs about God and our conduct toward others. Share one takeaway lesson from this chapter and how you can apply it to your life.

Day Two – Saul’s Disobedience

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-9

The Amalekites were sworn enemies of Israel, going all the way back to the exodus from Egypt when they brutally attacked Israel and the Lord promised to judge them (see Exodus 17:8-16). The time had come for the Lord to keep His promise.

1. Saul was given a command from the Lord to utterly destroy the Amalekites. Though severe, God’s instruction to spare no life and take no spoil was clear. This particular military action was not to be for any purpose other than fulfilling God’s decree that Amalek’s sin would not go unpunished.
 - a. How did Saul’s actions line up with the command he was given?
 - b. Give some thought to the instructions Samuel gave Saul (vs. 1-3). What would you say was the most important part? Why?
2. What factors appear to be influencing Saul’s thinking and actions?
 - a. Vs. 6-7:
 - b. Vs. 8-9:
3. “To the victor go the spoils” was a fundamental rule of ancient warfare. Armies were freely allowed to plunder their enemies and defeated kings were paraded as live trophies for public display. So why was it wrong in this instance?
 - a. In what way did Saul distort the mission and disgrace himself before God?
4. This was not the first time Samuel caught Saul in a serious act of disobedience to God. Two years into his reign, Saul selected and trained 3,000 men for Israel’s first professional army. He led 2,000 and assigned 1,000 to serve under his son Jonathan’s command. At that time, Israel was dominated by their Philistine neighbors. Jonathan boldly attacked and defeated a garrison of Philistines, effectively waking the sleeping giant. News spread quickly (with credit for victory going to Saul) and war was declared. Read the rest of the episode and note what stands out to you, particularly in the conversation between Saul and Samuel.

1 Samuel 13:5-15

5. We notice a consistent pattern in Saul that set him up for failure in obeying the Lord. He tended to let circumstances control the choices he made. He was overly concerned about what people thought of him. Being human, we can relate and learn from Saul's example.
 - a. What tends to trip you up in obeying the Lord?

 - b. What is one valuable lesson you've learned about obedience?

Memory Verse

Write the verse and let it be part of your prayers every day. Ask the Holy Spirit to work it into your heart and mind.

What is more pleasing to the Lord: burnt offerings and sacrifices or obedience to His voice? Listen! Obedience is better than sacrifice, and submission is better than offering the fat of rams.
1 Samuel 15:22 NLT

Think it over . . .

When am I most likely to get quiet before the Lord and listen? Am I quick in my prayers to speak before letting God speak to me? How does He speak to me?

Day Three – Saul's Excuses

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-23

This part of the story marks a crucial point in Saul's life and gives us a sobering glimpse of sin's blinding effect.

1. What did God tell Samuel regarding Saul? What does this reveal about God's character?
 - a. Here, the Lord "regrets" making Saul king. This does not mean God thought His decision was a mistake (see 1 Samuel 15:29). It expresses God's sorrow over Saul's sin and the consequences he will bear. How can we avoid causing God sorrow over our choices?

Romans 2:4

Ephesians 4:30-31

2. Saul began his reign as a modest, humble man (1 Samuel 9:21).
But by the time Samuel catches up with him, Saul has already made a detour to Carmel to erect a monument in his own honor.
What does this show us about Saul's heart?

**“One enemy in the heart
is stronger than ten
thousand in the field.”**

A.B. Simpson

Saul resists Samuel's effort to help him see his sin (vs. 13-21). Briefly describe how he:

- a. Defends himself –
 - b. Blames others –
 - c. Justifies his actions –
3. Consider Saul's excuses and see if they sound familiar. What can we do to avoid making the same mistakes as Saul? Make your answer practical and specific.
- a. I *did* obey... Saul bent the rules to suit himself and still wanted to call it obedience.
 - b. I didn't do the right thing, but it's not my fault.
 - c. Maybe I was wrong, but my intentions were right.
4. Because we are naturally inclined to self-deceive (Jeremiah 17:9) when confronted with our disobedience, our response is crucial. Note the warnings and promises in the following verses. What would an honest response look like? What would be the best outcome?

Proverbs 28:13-14

1 John 1:8-9

Memory Verse

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1 Samuel 15:22 NLT

Think it over . . .

What makes my offerings to God an act of true worship? Have I been going through the motions?
In what way?

Day Four – Saul’s Rebellion

Read 1 Samuel 15:24-35

When Samuel’s strong rebuke begins to sink in, Saul admits, “I have sinned.” In a later episode, David will utter the same words in a similar situation but with a very different outcome. For Saul, it was all about saving face.

1. Saul admits his sin and even tells Samuel that his motive was to gain favor with the people. For a moment, it appears that Saul is beginning to see his own blind spot. But what does he ask Samuel (twice) to do for him? What was most important to Saul?
 - a. Put yourself in Samuel’s shoes. He agonized and prayed all night before confronting Saul with his sin. What would you do in a similar situation? What can we learn from Samuel?
 - b. Put yourself in Saul’s shoes. He issues a quick apology and wants to go on as if nothing happened. What would you do in a similar situation? What can we learn from Saul?

Saul tried to wave away the sting of Samuel’s rebuke and get on with the religious rituals that made him feel good about himself.

2. Because we all have blind spots, we need godly friends who have permission to speak truth into our life (Hebrews 3:13). Friends, like Samuel was to Saul, who care enough to keep us clear-eyed about our own heart.
 - a. How can we prepare ourselves to be open to correction when we’re in need of it?

Proverbs 27:5-6

Psalm 119:57-60
 - b. When have you been helped by the “faithful wound” of a friend? Briefly share what the Lord taught you through it.

Saul was a serial apologizer but he didn’t grieve for having grieved God. Godly sorrow is more than admitting mistakes or regretting the consequences of our sin (2 Corinthians 7:9-10). It goes to the heart. Godly sorrow is actually a very healthy indication that we are growing in authentic obedience.

3. God's Word shows us our blind spots and godly sorrow stirs us to action. How can we cooperate with God to accomplish real change? What growth and blessings will be ours as a lasting result?

James 1:22-25

Luke 6:46-49

4. Authentic obedience is a natural response to knowing God's love for us. If we view obedience more as a demand, it will be a drudge when it gets difficult. But when we remember that God's kindness leads us to repentance (Romans 2:4) it causes us to respond with a grateful heart that trusts Him and seeks to follow His good plan.
 - a. Have you ever obeyed God and regretted it? Why or why not?
 - b. Have you ever disobeyed God and regretted it? Why or why not?

Memory Verse

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1 Samuel 15:22 NLT

Think it over . . .

Where has God shown me to obey, but I've been offering sacrifices instead?

Day Five – Saul's Example

1 Samuel 15:27-28

As Samuel turned around to go away, Saul seized the edge of his robe, and it tore. So Samuel said to him, "The Lord has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today, and has given it to a neighbor of yours, who is better than you."

Saul and David had some things in common. Neither one of them aspired to be a king. Both men were raised out of obscurity and had a unique opportunity to be mighty for God. Samuel was a spiritual mentor and a wise friend to both. But their lives took very different paths.

1. Saul was so intent on protecting his image that he gave no thought to his character. By contrast, Psalm 141:4-5 gives us a glimpse of what made David a man after God's heart. What was David most intent on protecting?

2. Some characters in the Bible, especially familiar ones, seem larger than life to us. We forget they were real people, living in real time—they weren't reading a script. Consider the toll that Saul's habitual disobedience would have taken on Samuel.
 - a. In your observation, was Saul aware that his disobedience to God was actually damaging his relationships with others, and with Samuel in particular? Why or why not?
 - b. If you could have given Saul a word of advice before he and Samuel ended up going their separate ways, what would it be?
 - c. Can you think of someone in your life who has been like a Samuel for you? In what way?

Memory Verse

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1 Samuel 15:22 NLT

Think it over . . .

What will I lay before the Lord today, in authentic obedience to His will?

After His Heart

"The eyes of the Lord search the whole earth in order to strengthen those whose hearts are fully committed to Him." 2 Chronicles 16:9 NLT

"God found in David a man who would stand in the gap, a man whose heart was fully committed to Him. Will He find that in you?"
Greg Laurie

For you personally, what has been the most important discovery or insight from this study?

How will you put living it into practice in the days ahead?

Prayer Requests
