

How To Have A Good Heart

Rich Nathan

July 22-23, 2006

1 and 2 Samuel: A Heart After God Series

1 Samuel 13-15

The theme of this series is found in 1 Samuel 13.14,

SLIDE

...The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart.

You know the Bible spends a great deal of time focusing upon our heart condition. In fact, there are over 700 verses in the Bible about your heart. Now, the biblical focus on our hearts is not the same as a cardiologist's focus on your heart. When a cardiologist checks you out to see if you've got a murmur or a leaking valve, or if there is fluid accumulation in your lungs, they are examining the physical organ that we today call "the heart." So when a cardiologist is examining to see if you have a good heart by giving you a stress test, or an EKG, or blood tests, they are simply concerned with the physical organ that pumps blood through your body.

But when the Bible speaks about your heart in over 700 verses, it says virtually nothing about that muscle in your chest that may or may not be pumping well. In the Bible, the heart is the governing center of your self. It is the source of your inner life. The Bible often uses the heart to be a description of what you are really like; your real person; your inner person; what you are like at the core. We read verses like 1 Sam. 16.7,

SLIDE

...The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

The Bible gives counsel like Prov. 4.23,

SLIDE

Pr 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

It commands us in Deuteronomy 6.5,

SLIDE

Dt 6:5 Love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength.

The Psalmist cries out to God saying in Psalm 86.11,

SLIDE

Ps 86:11 Teach me your way, LORD, that I may rely on your faithfulness; give me an undivided heart, that I may fear your name.

And David further prays in Psalms 51.10,

SLIDE

Ps 51:10 Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.

We are told only if this prayer is answered will we ever see God (Mt. 5.8)

SLIDE

Mt 5:8 **Blessed are the pure in heart, for they will see God.**

So when the Bible says in 1 Sam. 16.7,

SLIDE

1Sa 16:7 ...The LORD does not look at the things human beings look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart."

It is saying that God is not concerned, as other people are, with what you have, what you own, what you look like, what you drive, what you know and who you know. The outward things that impress other people about you don't impress God.

- Did you see the new Jag that Steve is driving; he must be doing well at his new job.
- Michelle looks fantastic; two kids and she is still competing in the Columbus Marathon. She looks great.
- Shauna's house is amazing. It has to be at least 4000-4500 square feet. Did you see those countertops? Do you know what those countertops alone go for? There must be at least \$15,000-20,000 alone in countertops!

What are we talking about when we speak about the heart? Let me make this real simple for you. If *People Magazine*, or *US*, or *Self*, or the "Life Section" of the *Columbus Dispatch* has an article about it, there is a virtual certainty that there is nothing in there about God's chief concern, which is the heart. If the word "bling" is in the article, or "tricked out," or "abs," or "shoes," or if the article tells you how to land the guy, or 15 secrets about almost anything, there is virtual certainty that it is not about God's concern, which is the heart.

If you are reading something about Paris Hilton, or Lindsay Lohan, or Anna Nicole Smith, or Bobby Brown, or Tomkat, or Naomi Campbell, or you are watching it on a reality TV show, there is a virtual certainty that it is not about

God's concern, which is the heart. If it attracts the world's admiration, or if people are buzzing about it; if Paparazzi are following and shooting pictures; if it is on a list of what's hot and what's not; if you can put a dollar figure on it, or weigh it, there is a virtual certainty that it is not about God's concern, which is the heart.

As we continue in this summer series that I'm calling Developing a Heart for God, today I'm going to look at someone who did not develop a heart for God, someone whose heart was bad, someone whose heart was hardened and calloused. I've called today's talk, "How To Have A Good Heart." Let's pray.

Many years ago, CS Lewis, my favorite Christian author made this observation about Christian chastity, that is sexual purity, in his wonderful book called *Mere Christianity*. And I'm going to substitute the word "a good heart" for Christian chastity. Listen to what Lewis says:

SLIDE

Many people are deterred from seriously attempting [trying to have a good heart] because they think (before trying) that it is impossible. But when a thing has to be attempted, one must never think about the possibility or impossibility. Faced with an optional question in an examination paper, one considers whether one can do it or not: faced with a compulsory question, one must do the best one can. You may get some marks for a very imperfect answer: you will certainly get none for leaving the question alone. Not only in examinations, but in war, in mountain climbing, in learning to skate, or swim, or ride a bicycle, even in fastening a stiff collar with cold fingers, people quite often do what seemed impossible before they did it. It is wonderful what you can do when you have to. We may, indeed, be sure that [having a good heart] – like perfect charity – will not be attained by any human efforts. You must ask for God's help. Even when you have done so, it may seem to you for a long time that no help, or less help than you need, is being given. Never mind. After each failure, ask forgiveness, pick yourself up, and try again. This process of [trying to have a good heart] cures us of our illusions about ourselves and teaches us to depend on God. We learn, on the one hand, that we cannot trust ourselves even in our best moments, and on the other, that we need not despair even in our worst, for our failures are forgiven. The only fatal thing is to sit down content with anything less than perfection.

Having a good heart, having a clean heart, a pure heart, a soft heart, a forgiving, grudge-free, bitterness-free heart is not an optional question on an exam. It is a mandatory question. And not attempting to have a good heart will certainly earn you a failing grade. Without a pure heart, Jesus says, we will not see God ever. Without a clean heart, we will not be embraced by God in his eternal kingdom. When our hearts are bad and we don't deal with our hearts through prompt repentance and forgiveness, we lose sleep, we lose our self-esteem, we live with shame. When your heart becomes calloused, when your heart becomes dull and weighted down with all the things in this world, you lose your sensitivity to the

voice of God. You lose the feeling of God's nearness. You lose your confidence that God hears or cares about your prayers. You dread the future. When your heart is bad, you fear that God is out to get you.

Having a good heart is not an optional part of living a good life, or dying a good death. It is the essential part; it is the mandatory part of living a good life and dying a good death.

So, how do we get a good heart – not in the cardiologist sense, but in the biblical sense? How do we get a good heart?

Here is the first principle:

SLIDE

A good heart is formed when you value what your heart is like above all else.

Prov. 4.23 says this:

SLIDE

Pr 4:23 Above all else, guard your heart, for everything you do flows from it.

Let me share with you a story of one of history's truly tragic figures. He was the first king of Israel. He was the first king of God's chosen people. He could have gone down in history as greater than George Washington, our first President; greater than Neil Armstrong, the first man on the moon; greater than virtually any other first. Instead, King Saul became a warning lesson for the tragic neglect of one's heart.

Saul was a man who would have appeared in *People Magazine*, if it were published in 1000 BC. Paparazzi would have snapped his pictures. He would have been quoted on every news show and Internet blog. He was tall. He was apparently very good looking. He was charismatic. He was a great military tactician.

But he was an empty box. Saul was a picture of outward success and inner emptiness. Look at 1 Sam. 10.10-11,

SLIDE

1Sa 10:10 When he and his servant arrived at Gibeah, a procession of prophets met him; the Spirit of God came on him in power, and he joined in their prophesying.

1Sa 10:11 When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, "What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?"

We find here that Saul was anointed, that is Saul had God's Spirit on him. Saul was able to prophesy and speak God's Word with power. He was gifted outwardly. But he was never transformed inwardly. He could prophesy for God, but he never learned how to submit to God. He was an empty box.

And when Saul was appointed the first King of Israel by Samuel, it says in 1 Sam. 10.23,

SLIDE

1Sa 10:23 They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others.

Again, Saul had the presence of the Spirit of God on his life. He was also physically impressive. He was tall. He was strong. He had all the qualities that people look for in a leader. There was just one thing he lacked. He didn't have a good heart.

Can any of you identify with King Saul – that you have outward success, but inner emptiness? Do any of you at all feel today like an empty box? You look like you have it all. You have the job, the degrees, the toys. Maybe you even have what looks like the perfect family. Anyone looking at you from the outside would say that you are doing great. But inside you know that there is something missing. Inside of you there is a vacuum. There is this gnawing sense, this ache in your soul, in which you are regularly feeling that there has to be something more. And all the things you look for to fill that gnawing ache in your soul, they never end up satisfying you. Do any of you feel like you are outwardly successful and inwardly empty?

Let me ask you a personal question. When you think about your life, what gives you value as a man or a woman? How can you be summed up? Does it all amount to a bunch of outward trappings – what you look like – are you fat or thin, tall or short, in great shape, or in terrible shape, whether you are bald or have a full head of hair, are you pretty or not so pretty? When you think about what sums up your life, is it all outward – what you own, what you know, what you do, what you've accomplished, and what can be written on a resume, what ministries you participate in, what your hobbies are? When you think about your life is it all about things other people can see?

Or when you think about your life do you say: You know, the most important thing about me is the part of me that no one else can see, other than God – my heart. What makes me, *me*, is my heart. It is not all the accomplishments. It is not all the recognitions, all the praise. It is my heart.

Is that where you are? Do you value your heart? Do you focus upon your heart? Do you regularly ask yourself: Is my heart soft towards people in pain? Am I kind to those who are excluded? Do I care about the powerless, the poor, children and widows? Do you ask yourself about the condition of your heart? Do

you examine your heart and ask: Is my heart grudge free? Am I carrying around a bunch of junk, or am I grudge free, bitterness free, lust free, rationalization free? Or is my heart just a bedlam of wounds from past hurts and past poor choices?

Do you focus on your heart? Do you ever ask yourself: Is my heart responsive to God's Word and God's Spirit? Can you say with any degree of confidence: I make my aim to have a good heart?

A good heart is formed when you value what your heart is like above all else.

SLIDE

A good heart is formed when you are content to remain in the place that God has called you.

SLIDE – 1 Sam. 13.5-14

^{1Sa 13:5} The Philistines assembled to fight Israel, with three thousand³ chariots, six thousand charioteers, and soldiers as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

They went up and camped at Mikmash, east of Beth Aven.

^{1Sa 13:6} When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard pressed, they hid in caves and thickets, among the rocks, and in pits and cisterns.

^{1Sa 13:7} Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead.

Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops with him were quaking with fear.

^{1Sa 13:8} He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter.

^{1Sa 13:9} So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering.

^{1Sa 13:10} Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him.

^{1Sa 13:11} "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash.

^{1Sa 13:12} I thought, 'Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD's favor.' So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering."

^{1Sa 13:13} "You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time.

^{1Sa 13:14} But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command."

What's the big deal about Saul disobeying the Prophet Samuel's command to wait for Samuel before offering the sacrifices? What was the big deal?

To understand what the big deal was, you need to understand that ancient Israel was a theocracy. Ancient Israel was not a Republic or a Democracy where individuals got to vote on what the law was. Israel didn't have petition drives in which moral issues would be placed on a November ballot for an up or down vote. Ancient Israel was not a libertarian society in which everyone essentially got to do what was right in their own eyes.

Ancient Israel was a theocracy. That meant the Lord God, who revealed himself by the name Yahweh, was the King of Israel. God's Word was the law of the land. And it was the Prophet who announced the Word of God. Everyone, including the King, was subject to the Word of God. This made Israel unique among the nations. The nations that surrounded ancient Israel, the kings were considered divine. Egyptian Pharaoh's word was law. But Israel never deified their kings. The king was a servant of God, along with every other human being. He was required to submit himself in obedience to the Word of God.

So, Saul was disobedient. He stepped out from under the Word of God. He acted independently, as if God's Word didn't mean anything. And just as importantly, Saul violated the Old Testament separation between the role of king and the role of priest. Saul, the King, took on the priest's role of offering priestly sacrifices to God. Here is the principle that Saul violated:

SLIDE

A good heart is formed when you are content to remain in the place God has called you.

And Saul wasn't content with just being king. He also wanted to serve as God's priest. Going back to very ancient times, God in the Hebrew Bible separated political authority and religious authority. This was a principle that has enormous implications. The separation of political authority and religious authority certainly doesn't mean that the king is free to do what he wishes utterly apart from God's law. The king was subjected to the Word of God just like everyone else.

The separation of political and religious authority also didn't mean that the religious authorities could not speak prophetically to the king and call the king to account. Many prophets spoke prophetically to the king and underlined for the king the places where the king was moving away from God's will and God's law. Nevertheless, the Bible is very clear about the need to separate religious power from earthly political power. The Bible recognizes that it is a very dangerous combination to have someone who has earthly political power and can command armies also claiming to speak in the name of the Lord.

It's here, by the way, that Christianity significantly differs from Islam. But Islam, at its core, is a political religion. And Mohammed was not only a religious leader, but he was also a political leader. And this is also why when the grand Ayatollahs speak today they don't just speak as religious leaders. They speak as

a political leaders giving political and military direction, using the state's power apparatus to communicate the will of God. This was the problem of the medieval popes – combining political power and religious power.

But the Bible says no to this mixing of political and religious power. Saul the king – You may not also be a priest. You see the Bible understands the corruption of men and women. Indeed, in the Bible there is only one person who can be entrusted with the role of both priest and king; his name is Jesus Christ. Only Jesus, who is free from the corruption of sin, only Jesus, who is free from selfish ambition, only Jesus, who always uses power in order to serve and not to be served, only Jesus is safe as King of Kings to enter the role of Priest. And as Priest, he was both the sacrifice and the offerer of the sacrifice.

So one of the principles that we can draw out of 1 Sam 13 is the need for us to always be careful about this line between religious power and political power. We Christians always ought to be suspicious and guarded when a political figure claims to speak in the name of God, or when a religious figure – a pastor, a para-church leader, begins to exercise political power.

It doesn't mean there is no dialogue between the two. It doesn't mean that Christianity has no political implications, or that pastors and spiritual leaders can't advise politicians or call attention to certain political issues. It just means that we need to be careful that the two spheres don't get mixed up together. Because we corrupt, sinful human beings are not safe with power.

Let me apply this in a slightly different way to those of us who don't wield religious or political authority. Years ago Oswald Chambers in one of the most popular and profitable devotional books ever written called *My Utmost For His Highest* (which I would encourage many of you to pick up in our bookstore, if you've never read it before), wrote:

SLIDE

God puts his saints where they will glorify him and we are no judges at all of where that is.

See, our job, friends, is to submit to the Lordship of Christ, not just in one or two areas, but in every area of our lives including our career choices, including our accepting of job promotions, including our acceptance or non-acceptance of job transfers. So many folks live independently of God's leading as if we have the independent authority to determine where, when and how we're going to exercise our particular talents.

What Saul didn't understand and what we need to understand is that we must submit ourselves to the Lordship of Christ over all things, including our career choices. God may make you a king or a pastor, or he might make you a barista at Starbucks, or a custodian in a school. You may be an investment broker, or

you may be a broke investor. But a good heart is formed when we are content in the place that God has called us.

I am not saying that it is wrong to want to find a new job, or to desire to make more money. But the focus of your job pursuit ought to be, “Lord, where can I glorify you the most? What will be the best place for me to serve you in? What’s happening to the one thing that you care about the most, dear God, my heart?”

I’ve seen over and over again that God puts a person at a job where they are serving him. They and their family are growing and flourishing. Their hearts are being transformed. But the person, like King Saul, becomes discontented with this place of service. They start saying to themselves: I could be making more in this other job. I could have a higher position. Sometimes they are driven by the envy of what other people have, or the recognition that other people are getting.

Focus on your heart. Ask yourself in your current job, is this a place in which God is forming my heart with all the ups and downs and pressures of my current job, does God want to do something in my heart? If my heart is being transformed, then why should I be discontented?

Here is the third principle:

SLIDE

A good heart is formed when you learn to obey God even if God is not working on your schedule. We read in 1 Sam. 13.11,

SLIDE - 1 Sam 13.11-12

¹Sa 13:11 “What have you done?” asked Samuel. Saul replied, “When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Mikmash.

¹Sa 13:12 I thought, ‘Now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the LORD’s favor.’ So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.”

Obey even if God is not working on your schedule.

Why was Saul so severely condemned by the prophet Samuel? Along with disregarding God’s Word and usurping the role of priest, Saul was condemned because he held the view that I cannot wait for the Lord to act on my behalf, I must make things happen by myself. Saul had this tremendous character failing of always taking things into his own hands when things looked like they wouldn’t work out according to the promise of God. Saul is a prototype in scripture of relying on the arm of the flesh – my own plans, my own control, my own understanding, my own activity, rather relying on God.

Control freaks, take warning from the life of Saul.

You know, trust in God is a big thing for the Lord. Trust is a huge issue for God. He really, really counts trust in him to be important. Hebrews 11:6 says,

SLIDE

Heb 11:6 And without faith it is impossible to please God, because anyone who comes to him must believe that he exists and that he rewards those who earnestly seek him.

God wants you to believe with all your heart that he is good and wishes to be good to you. God wants you to believe with all your heart that he is not a thief, that he does not want to rip off your life, that God's plans for your life are absolutely best and God's will is designed ultimately to bless you and not to curse you. God wants you to believe with all your heart that if you obey him, God will hold up his end of the bargain concerning you.

It may not turn out to be the way you envisioned your life to be; it may not be your dream for your life; but God will fulfill his plan and dream for your life, if you obey him. God will form your heart and give you a good heart. He wants people who can be put in pressurized situations, who can be unhappy, who can be, in fact, miserable and yet who will wait on God rather than try to make something happen themselves by disobeying the Word of God.

In so many areas of life, we feel pressured to make something happen because God does not seem to be working according to our schedules. I see it in churches all the time. The church is in decline. We seem to be losing momentum. Let's not wait for God to stir people by the power of the Holy Spirit. Let's not pray or fast, or re-examine our hearts. Let's do another building campaign. Let's do another revival meeting. Let's yell and whoop and pretend something is happening when nothing is happening. Let's get people jazzed in this new activity or program. Let's make something happen even though it is not Spirit led.

Let me apply this just a bit more. Is your heart good enough that you are able to trust God's timing in your life? Or do you typically feel that you have to make something happen on your own? It is a huge test of your hearts, single people, to wait on God's timing regarding bringing someone along who shares your Christian commitment, who shares your Christian values, who shares your calling. It is a huge test when you are 30 years old or you are 35 years old to simply wait. Your biological clock is ticking. Your desire for companionship is sometimes overwhelming. I've talked with women who have very honestly said: "I have kept myself sexually pure and the fact is no one wants to date me, even Christian men. I'm beginning to wonder whether I've been a fool for not compromising."

I have received letters and have had conversations with people who know that I'm Jewish and a believer in Jesus. They've said to me: "Well, I'm dating a Jewish man (I'm dating a Jewish woman), and I just wonder how we can work this out in terms of marriage." I always ask the same question: "Well, what is the nature of your relationship to Jesus?"

"Oh, I'm a Christian. I believe in Jesus."

"Does your belief in Jesus include submission to his will?" With a little less certainty, "yes."

My follow up question is always: "Well, what do you think that Jesus' will is for your life?"

"Well, I don't know about that, but Alan is really fun and very bright. We get along great."

It often takes a long looping conversation before the person even realizes that there is a heart test going on. There is an issue of trusting in God and God's provision here. Christ commands you to not marry outside the Christian faith. What are you doing dating a non-Christian? Do you really think you can play near the edge of the cliff and not fall off? Can we really disobey Christ on something so fundamental as dating and marriage and still have good hearts?

Perhaps you are struggling with your job. Do you trust God enough to open up another job for you or to give you contentment or perseverance in your present job? Or do you have to make something happen in an illegal, or illicit way – through lying on a resume, or bending certain kinds of statements, making an opening for yourself where God does not seem to be making an opening for you. Do you have to compromise your standards? Do you have to take a job that you have at least a shadow over your conscience about? Working for a person who will require you to be involved in unethical business, or who will require you to be involved in questionable behavior. Or will you trust God that if you are obedient, he can make a way for you in your present situation?

A good heart is formed when you obey, even if God is not working on your schedule.

Let's continue on with the story of Saul because God keeps testing King Saul's heart. We read in 1 Sam. 15:1-11,

SLIDE

1Sa 15:1 Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD

1Sa 15:2 This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt.

1Sa 15:3 Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy ¹ all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.' ”

1Sa 15:4 So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah.

1Sa 15:5 Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine.

1Sa 15:6 Then he said to the Kenites, “Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt.” So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites.

1Sa 15:7 Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt.

1Sa 15:8 He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword.

1Sa 15:9 But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves ² and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

1Sa 15:10 Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel:

1Sa 15:11 “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

It is clear that the issue here, again, regarding Saul's heart is obedience. In v. 1 Samuel says:

SLIDE

1Sa 15:1 Samuel said to Saul, “I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD

And then in v. 9 that you see that the sin Saul committed was his unwillingness to destroy completely the Amalekites. We read in v. 9,

SLIDE

1Sa 15:9 But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves ² and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.

There was this unwillingness. The issue was one of the will. And if you look up the Hebrew word “unwillingness” it always suggests disobedience.

And then, of course, the Lord tells us that the issue was one of obedience when he says to Samuel in v. 11,

SLIDE

1Sa 15:11 “I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.” Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night.

Friends, I believe that you and I have our hearts regularly tested by the Lord in the area of obedience. Will you say yes to Jesus even if you don't know how things can turn out positively by you saying yes? “Will you trust me on this,” the Lord is asking? “Will you follow me and fully obey me, even though you can't see right now, and can't understand how obeying me will turn out well for you.”

Here is the principle for a good heart:

SLIDE

A good heart is formed when you obey God even if you can't see how things can turn out positively.

The Christian life often requires us to move forward, sometimes to run forward in obedience, even when we are forced to run blind. Jesus Christ sometimes will demand from you something that feels illogical, or counter-cultural or unsafe. It is not the best career move. It is not what an investment advisor would tell you to do. Just becoming a Christian in the 21st century is counter-cultural. But the Bible is filled with examples of people who had to step out blindly in obedience to God and then they got to see this extraordinary result. The Bible is filled with stories of people who were put in absolutely impossible situations and who saw wonderful things happen and who must have had the tape playing over and over again in their minds: No way! You can't do that. The situation will never work out for you. But situations did work out because they obeyed God.

Joseph, you are a Jewish slave. No way could you become second in command of all Egypt and save an entire nation and your own people. You can't do that.

Moses, no way can you part the Red Sea. You're going to drown.

David, you are a teenage shepherd. You can't kill the giant Goliath with just a few pebbles.

Jonah, the Ninevites are crazy. They'll kill you. You can't preach to them and expect them to move into repentance.

Friend, however you see yourself, God desires to accomplish amazing things through your life simply through your obedience to Christ. Simply by saying yes to Jesus, God will be able to do amazing things through you. Your health problems are not the issue. Your age is not the issue. Your income is not the issue. Your education is not the issue. There is one issue that matters chiefly to God – your heart before God. In the secret place of your heart, the place where no one else but God can see, are you obeying God?

Well, I just don't see how it would be paid for. I don't see how we're going to get the resource for this particular project. I don't see why God would have me drain my bank account and have me give that money away to some activity of the kingdom. That would leave me vulnerable. I don't see how this could work out positively. I can't see why being faithful to tithe will be a big deal to God.

I don't see how I could possibly be used to launch this ministry. God, you keep saying over and over to me again that that's what you want. You keep telling me to lead a group. You keep telling me to make my musical gifts known to the worship leader even though I'm an African-American and this is largely a Caucasian church. God, you keep speaking to me over and over again that you want something launched to care for boys who have no dads, who have no male role models. You want me to be a mentor.

You just can't see how things will turn out positively.

You have no idea of the positive outcomes that could occur simply by one simple statement to God: yes. You've heard it said – it is a real truth – that the only ability God looks for is availability.

I read to you in the past the story of a Sunday School teacher in the 19th century who felt like God spoke to him and said: Make sure that every single boy in your teenage Sunday School class knows me. So he made it his business to visit each boy in his home or workplace. He found one of his students working in his uncle's shoe store. He went back into a storeroom and knelt down with him. That boy received Christ. The boy's name was Dwight Moody.

D.L. Moody became a great evangelist. At one of his meetings a man named Wilbur Chapman came to Christ. And he became a great evangelist and pastor in the late 19th century. And during one of Wilbur Chapman's meetings in Chicago, a baseball player came to his meeting and got saved. The baseball player's name was Billy Sunday. He became a great evangelist. And at one of his meetings in the early 20th century a man by the name of Mordecai Hamm came to Christ. He became a national evangelist.

One day Mordecai Hamm in the 1930's was holding some meetings. Some men gathered in a North Carolina field and prayed: God, do something in this evangelistic meeting tonight that will touch the world from this town, from this little

place, from this farm field. Do something, God, that will reach the world for Christ. That evening at that meeting a teenage boy walked forward and gave his life to Christ. That boy's name was Billy Graham.

Because that one Sunday school teacher back in 1850's said yes to Jesus Christ, I will go and talk with every child in my Sunday School class, I am available to you. Millions and millions of people have found Christ.

On the flip side,

SLIDE

A good heart is formed when you obey even if you don't see the negative consequences.

Follow God even if you can't see why obeying God is such a big deal. You say: Well, what's the big deal if Saul killed all the Amalekites or not? In fact, it seems rather cruel to me. I don't know why the Lord required this of Saul. It actually seems to me that Saul was being more merciful than God. And the Lord was reprimanding him for being kind.

Friend, we have no idea what the consequences are for disobeying the Lord. Only the Lord can see the future. I'm unhappy in my marriage. We haven't been getting along in years. What's the big deal if I leave this marriage? Even if to do so technically violates God's will in the moment. We can't see the impact on our sons and our daughters, on our witness to the world around us. We can't even judge the impact of our disobedience on ourselves. Only God knows the awful consequences that can result from allowing even a small sin to be unchecked in our lives.

What's so bad about having a little unchecked bitterness? What's so bad about having a little unchecked pride? How can a little unchecked spending habit become a major problem? A good heart is formed when you obey God even if you cannot see the negative consequences.

Do you know that about 500 years after this event in 1 Sam. 15 one of the descendents of Agag, this king that Saul didn't want to put to death, one of his descendents came to a position of dangerous power. The man's name was Haman. And Haman, the descendent of the Amalekites and Agag threatened, like Hitler, to destroy all of the Jewish people. You can read the story of Haman in the book of Esther.

But my point is that from the perspective of Saul, he had no ability whatever to look 500 years down line and see the consequences that would be brought upon untold thousands of Jewish people from his single act of disobedience. I want to tell you, friend, that you and I have no ability whatever to predict the consequences of any one of our sins.

Listen up now. You and I have the choice of whether or not we're going to sin. But we have no choice, and no power over the consequences of our sin. We continually deceive ourselves into believing when I sin, I control the consequences. We cannot.

I often express this in terms of a person whose standing by the side of a pond with a rock in his hand. That person is weighing whether to throw the rock into the pond or not. That's a choice. But having decided to throw the rock into the pond, how big the ripples are not determined by the person. How far the ripple effect of your sins go is totally out of your hands and is totally given into the hands of God. When you choose to have sex outside of the boundaries of marriage, when you choose to not forgive, when you choose to lie, when you choose to give into temptation, the consequences are out of your hand. Obedience is a big deal to God because only he can see the consequences.

You say: "Rich, can't I always ask God to forgive me?"

Absolutely. We can always ask God to forgive us.

"Well, why can't I just sin then and escape the consequences?"

One of the consequences of sin and the deliberate choice to sin is that our hearts become harder and harder. You cannot sin and at the same time choose to remain soft to God. When we sin a little part of us dies, a little part of us gets calloused and hardened. I don't know and you don't know when our sin will make us so calloused and hardened that we entirely lose our intimacy and connection with God all together.

A good heart is formed when you obey, even if you can't see the consequences.

Nothing, not your accomplishments, not your ministry, not your degrees, or possessions, not what you know or who you know – nothing is more important than your heart. Make it your aim in life to have a good heart.

How To Have A Good Heart

Rich Nathan

July 22-23, 2006

1 and 2 Samuel: A Heart After God Series

1 Samuel 13-15

I. Focus Upon A Good Heart (Prov. 4.23; Ps. 51.10; Mt. 5.8)

II. Forming A Good Heart

A. A Good Heart Is Formed When You Value What Your Heart Is Like Above All Else. (Prov. 4.23; 1 Sam. 10.10, 11, 23)

B. A Good Heart Is Formed When You Are Content In The Place God Has Called You. (1 Sam. 13.5-14)

C. A Good Heart Is Formed When You Learn To Obey, Even If God Is Not Working On Your Schedule. (1 Sam. 13.11)

D. A Good Heart Is Formed When You Obey God, Even If You Can't See How Things Can Turn Out Positively. (1 Sam. 15.1-11)

E. A Good Heart Is Formed When You Obey God Even If You Can't See Why Things Will Turn Out Negatively. (1 Sam. 15)