SESSION 6

Obedience

Because Saul failed to follow God's instructions, the Lord rejected him as king.

1 Samuel 15:7-23

7 Then Saul struck down the **Amalekites** (A) from Havilah
all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt. 8 He **captured**
King Agag (B) of Amalek alive, but he completely destroyed all
the rest of the people with the sword. 9 Saul and the troops
spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, goats, cattle, and
choice animals, (C) as well as the young rams and the best of
everything else. They were not willing to destroy them, but
they did destroy all the worthless and unwanted things.
10 Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel, 11 "**I regret** (D)
that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from following
me and has not carried out **my instructions**." (E) So Samuel
became **angry** (F) and cried out to the Lord all night. 12 Early
in the morning Samuel got up to confront Saul, but it was
reported to Samuel, "Saul went to Carmel where he set up **a**
monument for himself. (G) Then he turned around and went
down to Gilgal." 13 When Samuel came to him, Saul said, "May
the Lord bless you. I have carried out the Lord's instructions."
14 Samuel replied, "Then **what is this sound of sheep,**
goats, and cattle I hear?" (H) 15 Saul answered, "The troops
brought them from the Amalekites and spared the best sheep,
goats, and cattle in order to **offer a sacrifice** (I) to the Lord
your God, but the rest we destroyed." 16 "Stop!" exclaimed
Samuel. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night."
"Tell me," he replied. 17 Samuel continued, "Although you
once considered yourself unimportant, haven't you become
the leader of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king
over Israel 18 and then sent you on a mission and said, 'Go and
completely destroy the sinful Amalekites. Fight against them
until you have annihilated them.' 19 So why didn't you obey
the Lord? Why did you **rush on the plunder** (J) and do what
was evil in the Lord's sight?" 20 "But I did obey the Lord!" Saul
answered. "I went on the mission the Lord gave me: I brought
back King Agag of Amalek, and I completely destroyed the
Amalekites. 21 The troops took sheep, goats, and cattle from
the plunder—the best of what was set apart for destruction—to
sacrifice to the Lord your God at Gilgal." 22 Then Samuel said:
Does the Lord take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the Lord? Look: **to obey is better than**
sacrifice, (K) to pay attention is better than the fat of rams.
23 For rebellion is like the sin of **divination**, (L) and defiance
is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the
word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.

Exploring Key Words

A A marauding people who attacked Israel soon after the exodus. Because of this, God vowed to "blot out . . . Amalek." (Ex. 17:8-14).

B Saul's motivation for sparing the Amalekite king is unclear, but this act betrays Saul's lack of obedience to God and His commands.

C Saul and his troops were fine with killing the weak animals, but they were not willing to destroy animals that might hold value.

D The same Hebrew word also describes God's response to humanity's sin before the flood (Gen. 6:7). It's a strong emotion akin to grief.

E Through Samuel, God had explained His expectations clearly (1 Sam. 15:3), but Saul chose to obey only part of God's directions.

F "Grieved" (KJV). The Hebrew wording implies a burning flame. Saul had once burned in anger against God's enemies (1 Sam. 11:4-7). Now he was the cause of such anger and grief.

G Saul was more concerned with building a legacy than with honoring God.

H Saul had been on the move, the spoils from the battle traveled with him. This made it easy for Samuel to call him out.

I First, Saul blamed the soldiers (vv. 15,21). Then, he tried to justify his actions by saying the animals had been saved for a sacrifice to God.

J "Fly upon the spoil" (KJV); "pounce on the spoil" (ESV)

K God called for sacrifices, but these acts were never more valuable than obedience.

L "Witchcraft" (KJV). God equated rebellion against His commands to a sin requiring death according to the law of Moses.

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NOTES

Partial Obedience (1 Sam. 15:7-11)

- God had given Saul specific instructions to destroy the Amalekites and all their possessions (vv. 1-6). But Saul only fulfilled part of God's command. He spared the life of the Amalekite king, Agag, and kept some of the best livestock.
- As a result of this partial obedience, God told Samuel that He regretted making Saul king over Israel. Samuel also grieved Saul's lack of complete obedience.

Making Excuses (1 Sam. 15:12-15)

- Samuel went out to confront Saul, but the king had left to set up a monument for himself at Carmel. Eventually, Samuel tracked Saul down at Gilgal.
- While Saul believed he had obeyed God's commands, Samuel pointed out the livestock that had been spared. Shifting blame to his troops, Saul justified his actions by claiming the animals had been saved for sacrifices to God.

Humble Submission (1 Sam. 15:16-19)

- In rebuking Saul, Samuel emphasized that God had raised him up from obscurity to become the king over Israel.
- The Lord had provided clear instructions, but Saul had chosen to disobey God. His actions were evil in the Lord's sight.

Final Judgment (1 Sam. 15:20-23)

- Saul continued to claim that he had obeyed God and insisted the animals were set aside for sacrifice.
- Samuel countered that sacrifice means nothing to God without an obedient heart. Saul had rejected the Lord's commands, so God rejected him as king.

Summary Statements

Because Saul failed to follow God's instructions, the Lord rejected him as king.

- God expects His people to obey His commands completely.
- We must resist the temptation to justify our actions when we disobey God's commands.
- We should demonstrate humility by submitting to God's plans.
- We should focus on complete obedience to God so we can avoid His judgment in our lives.

Memory Verse

1 Samuel 15:22

Key Doctrine

God

God is all powerful and all knowing; and His perfect knowledge extends to all things, past, present, and future, including the future decisions of His free creatures. (See Psalm 139:1-6; Proverbs 15:3.)

For additional commentary, see the Leader Guide or Adult Commentary, available for purchase at **goExploreTheBible.com.**

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ENGAGE

Can you think of situations or projects that require following step-by-step instructions? What happens when those steps aren't followed? (***PSG, p. 55***)

- Cooking shows are all the rage and come in many forms. Some are competitions between bakers. Others offer step-by-step how-to instructions.
- Can you imagine someone deciding against preheating the oven or thinking that baking soda and baking powder were the same thing? The result could be a disaster.

Bonus: Would you consider yourself a rule follower? Why or why not?

EXPLORE

PARTIAL OBEDIENCE (1 SAM. 15:7-11)

Bonus: What are some things that people might regret?

- The Lord had instructed Saul to destroy the Amalekites for the way they had opposed the Israelites when they came out of Egypt (Ex. 17:14-16; 1 Sam. 15:2-3). This was a divine directive.
- Saul's actions fell short of complete obedience. He let Amalek's king, Agag, live and spared the best of the animals. Saying the Israelites were "not willing" to slay the animals meant this was an intentional choice.
- God told Samuel that He regretted making Saul king. The only other time the Lord expressed regret in the Old Testament was in Noah's day (Gen. 6:6-7). This was the second time Saul had disobeyed God (see 1 Sam. 13).

What motivated Saul and the Israelites to get rid of only the worthless and unwanted things? How do you think they justified that choice in their minds? (***PSG, p. 58***)

MAKING EXCUSES (1 SAM. 15:12-15)

Bonus: When have you justified something you know you should not have done? How did that work out for you?

- Setting up a monument meant Saul was taking credit for the victory over Amalek. When Samuel finally found him, the king greeted the priest as if nothing was wrong. Saul seemed to have no awareness of his rebellion.
- In all his travels, Saul brought the spoils from the battle with him. The sounds of the animals made it easy for Samuel to call out Saul's disobedience. The king quickly blamed his soldiers for sparing the livestock.

What excuses do people use to justify their disobedience to God? (***PSG, p. 59***)

HUMBLE SUBMISSION (1 SAM. 15:16-19)

Bonus: How can humility protect us from falling away from God?

- Samuel cut Saul's explanations short. He shared God's message by pointing to Saul's history. Once, he had been humble as a leader, and the Lord had exalted him.
- Now, he had rebelled against God's mission. Instead of obeying, he gathered plunder he was supposed to destroy. He had committed a gross evil in God's sight.

What do these verses teach about the importance of complete obedience? (***PSG, p. 60***)

FINAL JUDGMENT (1 SAM. 15:20-23)

Bonus: What are some things that really matter to God? Why do you think those things are important to Him?

- Saul continued to maintain his innocence. Four times in verse 20, he focused on how he believed he had obeyed God. And he again blamed his troops and emphasized that the animals were set aside for sacrifices.
- Samuel responded by highlighting how obedience is better than sacrifice in God's eyes. In contrast, rebellion is akin to "divination" (witchcraft) and idolatry. Because of Saul's sin, God would give the kingdom to someone else.

Why did God impose such a harsh punishment against Saul? (***PSG, p. 62***)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss ways believers can discern God's will in a particular situation.

How can we know when God has given us something to do? (***PSG, p. 63***)

Challenge adults to examine their lives for areas of incomplete obedience to God.

What changes do you need to make so you are following fully? (***PSG, p. 63***)

FURTHER DISCUSSION

Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week's study.

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BONUS IDEAS

BIBLE SKILL (PSG, P. 62)

Reflect on and apply the memory verse for this session.

> The memory verse for this session, 1 Samuel 15:22, teaches a critical lesson for living the Christian life. Read it aloud several times in the Bible translation of your choosing. Then, try to quote it from memory. Read it again several more times and then complete the memorization of the verse. ***How would you rate your daily obedience to God as opposed to religious activities that you engage in? Why is obedience more important that religious motions?***

Direct attention to the Bible Skill activity on page 62 of the PSG. Encourage adults to work together in groups of three or four to memorize 1 Samuel 15:22 as directed in the Bible Skill activity. After a few minutes, lead the group in quoting the verse together. Suggest they continue to read and reflect on the verse this week until they have finished memorizing it.

OBJECT LESSON: TRASH CAN

Place a small trash can in the center of the group. Give each adult two slips of paper. Guide them to draw an image of something they have removed from their lives because it hindered their spiritual growth. Instruct them to tear up that piece of paper and toss it in the trash can.

Encourage them to reflect on other things that need to be removed and to draw a symbol of that item on the second slip of paper. Guide them to keep that slip of paper to use as a prayer prompt this week.

Say: *Sometimes, little things grow over time and end up pushing us off track with God.* Remind adults that Samuel recalled how Saul had started out so well before arrogance derailed his reign and his life. Emphasize the importance of examining our lives regularly for attitudes and actions that keep us from complete obedience toward God.

DIG DEEPER

WHAT GOD EXPECTS

King Saul blatantly disobeyed God's instructions to completely destroy the Amalekites. However, he justified his actions: The choice animals were spared for sacrifices to God. Through Samuel, God explained why this is not acceptable (1 Sam. 15:22-23). The truth God declares here is also beautifully reflected in the prophet Micah's words.

In Micah 6:8, God testified in a kind of "covenant lawsuit" against the Israelites. He indicted them for a lack of faithfulness. In His argument, the Lord reminded the people of what He required of them: justice, faithfulness, and humility. This is where Saul fell short in 1 Samuel 15. He thought going through the motions was sufficient, but God expects complete obedience.

In fact, throughout Scripture, God was never fully pleased with external religion, such as sacrifices. These acts of worship were pointless unless they flowed from a heart of gratitude and faith!

The characteristics described in Micah 6:8 epitomize the heart God desired for His people. Animal sacrifices and grain offerings had their place, but they had to be motivated by a heart of worship. Then and now, the Lord's desire for His people focuses on doing what is just and right, living with faithfulness toward Him and other believers, and humbly following His guidance and direction.

Yes, God desires our praise and worship, but those are not substitutes for obedience to His commands. When we disconnect our actions from the true heart of worship, we fall into the same trap that caused Saul's collapse. When faced with a choice between performing religious rituals and obeying God's words, He expects obedience every single time.

We can learn a lot from the example of Saul and from the words of Micah. We can get a better understanding of what it means to pursue a life marked by heartfelt praise and worship that's rooted in our obedience to the Lord's directions for our lives.

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