

Women's Bible Study – Fall 2009

## What's in the Heart?

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*A Heart of Honor*

1 Samuel 21-24

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Our series is titled, "What's in the Heart?" This is a good question. In his Sermon on the Mount Jesus put heart issues—thoughts and attitudes—on the same plane as actions when he said adultery was not just a physical act but an emotional and intellectual act as well. What's in your heart? My husband and I have thought a lot about heart issues in the past couple of years as our children have grown. You know, when children are toddlers, your main parenting task is to teach them to obey. It is largely fruitless to have lengthy discussions with a 2-year-old about motives. No, our focus is on outward behavior--prompt, but largely external, obedience. And obedience is good. God requires obedience and even says that it is better than sacrifice. The Scriptures say that we show our love for God by doing his commands. Indeed, this is why parents must teach their children to obey them—so that they will then know how to obey God.

But the Bible also warns us about people whose lips say the right thing but their hearts are far from God (Is. 29:13). So more must be said. Because behavior always flows out of our hearts. And as children get older, we should focus more on the heart. Listen to Luke 6: "No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. . . The good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and the evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. For **out of the overflow of his heart** his mouth speaks." Author Paul Tripp illustrates this point: Imagine an apple tree in your yard that bears only rotten apples. What if you were to take a beautiful bag of Honeycrisps from the grocery store and carefully staple them to the tree in place of the rotten apples and then proclaim that you had solved the problem? That would be ludicrous. Why? Because we know that the problem is deep inside the tree. The tree is somehow rotten and is thus producing rotten apples. How often are we guilty of "fruit stapling" when we should be focused on our hearts, asking God to reveal what is there.

Today we're looking at David's relationship with Saul, and we'll see that, though he faltered from time to time, the visible fruit in David's life showed that he had a heart of honor. What is honor? My dictionary said it is "the quality of honesty and integrity." What's integrity? "the uncompromising adherence to moral and ethical standards." We're in I Samuel 21-24 today, a huge chunk of Scripture that encompasses a lot of narrative. I hope you've had a chance to read the story because I'll be summarizing quite a bit today.

Chapter 21 starts with David seemingly running further and further away from his destiny—to be king of Israel. Saul has proven himself outrageously jealous, to the point of attempted murder of David, his rival for the throne. David is forced to flee, though he has been reassured that he will indeed be king one day. But though he was outwardly moving away from positions of power, the work on his heart, the inward growth of his character, was progressing. God was using these times of testing to form David's heart for being king. I can think of several times in my life when I felt as if I was moving further away from, instead of closer toward, where I thought God wanted me to be. My husband and I have had times in our married life when we felt like we were "spinning our wheels"

and we asked God, “Why are we here, and what, exactly, are we supposed to be doing? This feels like a huge waste of time!” But now when we look back, we can see how God was preparing us for something else. The same thing was happening with David. But he gets off to **a rough start**.

David goes to Nob, a town called the “city of priests.” It probably became so after the Philistines took the ark from Shiloh back in chapter 4. David meets Ahimelech the high priest with two requests on his mind—food and a weapon. But he encounters obstacles. First, Ahimelech is wary of such an important person as David arriving alone and unarmed. So David makes up a story about being on a secret, hurried mission for the king to get Ahimelech to comply. But a second obstacle is that the only food around is the sacred showbread, or Bread of the Presence. Twelve loaves (one of each tribe) of this bread were placed in the temple each week, after which they were used to feed the priests. The bread was a symbol of God’s provision. It was against the law for anyone who was not a priest to eat it. But Ahimelech gives it to David once he has established that he is not ceremonially unclean. Was this wrong of David? Was it wrong of the priest? Jesus, in Matthew 12:3-4, condones this act. After all, the bread was to illustrate the principle of God’s provision; therefore, Jesus tells the Pharisees that supplying a hungry man’s need is a fulfillment of the law rather than a breaking of the law. Ahimelech also gives David Goliath’s sword. Watching all this, however, is Doeg, the Edomite foreigner, who worked for Saul.

Fed and armed, David runs next to “Achish, king of Gath” (21:10). Who hailed from Gath? Goliath. And here comes David, a famous Israelite warrior, running to the city of his nation’s greatest enemy, with Goliath’s own sword in his hand. What was he thinking? Perhaps he thought he could sort of rest anonymously there. After all, would Saul think to look for him there? Or perhaps he had become known as an enemy of Saul and hoped Achish would want to ally himself with David. Either way, David was deluded. The people recognized him and began repeating the song that must have sounded like a taunt to their ears: “Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” These were Philistine countrymen that this fugitive had struck down. David realizes he is in grave danger, and so he practices another deceit; he feigns madness. In later chapters we’ll see that David becomes an expert at deceiving Achish, but for now, Achish dismisses him with a humorous, “Do I lack madmen, that you have brought this fellow to behave as a madmen in my presence?” (21:15). And David narrowly escapes disaster.

I think David the fugitive is off to a rough start here—deceptions that put innocent people at risk, running to the enemy, letting drool run down his beard to get out of a jam—none of these actions seem like the fruit of an honorable heart.

After David’s rough start, though, he seems to regain his trust in God. And we will see this throughout David’s life. Spiritual floundering and failure, then confidence in God and success. He was, after all, a real person. But David is held up to us as a model in spite of many failures because after a failure, he always ran back to God. Where do you go after you’ve really messed up? Do you run to God? Do you go to the cross? Or do you run away from God, like Saul?

After the ill-advised foray into Philistine territory, David escapes to the cave of Adullam, where about 400 men join him, and we see **honor towards those who depended on him**. Look at 22:2: “And everyone who was in distress, and everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was bitter in soul, gathered to him. And he became captain over them. And there were with him about four hundred men.” These were people who had been mistreated by Saul’s regime. They were looking for an honorable leader and found one in David. David also is honorable in his care for his parents,

securing a place in Moab for them, he says, "till I know what God will do for me." Moab was the home of David's great-grandmother Ruth, so it made sense for him to seek asylum there for his parents.

Next see David's **honor towards those he has wronged**. David soon hears the horrific news of what has happened to everyone at Nob. Saul, through Doeg, has found out that Ahimelech aided David, and wrongly thinking this treason, Saul orders the deaths of all the priests—85 of them—along with the entire town of Nob—men, women, children, and animals. Only one person escapes—Abiathar, the son of Ahimelech. He flees to David and reports the horrifying news. Look at 22:22: "And David said to Abiathar, 'I knew on that day, when Doeg the Edomite was there, that he would surely tell Saul. I have occasioned the death of all the persons of your father's house.'" Even though the fault lies squarely on Saul's shoulders, David shows honor again by realizing his actions precipitated these events. He takes responsibility, as a good leader should. Speaking to Abiathar, he says: "Stay with me; do not be afraid, for he who seeks my life seeks your life. With me you shall be in safekeeping" (22:23).

Notice the huge contrast between Saul and David. David shows compassion and concern for the people, while Saul shows himself to be a true tyrant—waging war on his own people. And contemplate the slippery slope that Saul's self-pity put him on. He begins by being jealous of David's success in battle, then he attempts murder; now he's here—his mass murder of the town of Nob fulfills the prophecy against the house of Eli (2:31-36) which began with the deaths of Hophni and Phinehas and culminates in I Kings 2 when Solomon banishes Abiathar.

So now the king-elect and the priest-elect are co-fugitives, and Saul has lost not only God's favor as king but he's lost the high priest and the means of knowing God's will, for we see in 23:6 Abiathar escaped with the ephod. This was not the linen ephod worn by all priests but the ephod with the mysterious stones, the Urim and Thummim, that were used as a kind of divinely sanctioned method of casting lots to know the will of God.

In chapter 23, then, we see David's heart of **honor towards the people of Keilah**. Keilah was a town in the hills between Judah and Philistia, and raids by the enemy were common at harvest time: v. 1: "Now they told David, 'Behold, the Philistines are fighting against Keilah and are robbing the threshing floors.' Therefore David inquired of the Lord, 'Shall I go and attack these Philistines?' And the Lord said to David, 'Go and attack the Philistines and save Keilah.' But David's men said to him, 'Behold, we are afraid here in Judah; how much more than if we go to Keilah against the armies of the Philistines?' Then David inquired of the Lord again. And the Lord answered him, 'Arise, go down to Keilah, for I will give the Philistines into your hand.'" David and his men obey, and God does for them exactly what he said he would do. David saves the town. David didn't have to do this. He wasn't king yet. He could've said, "This town's battles are not my problem." Especially when they had no loyalty to him! But he shows honor by fighting to save them.

Saul, however, hears where David is and assumes v. 7: "God has given [David] into my hand." Notice again the contrast between David and Saul. David inquires of the Lord twice before risking his men on this mission. Saul, however, just assumes that because the circumstances seem right, that God has given David into his hands. David, however, asks God by using the ephod if Saul will come and if the people will give him over to Saul. The answer is yes, and, having learned his lesson through the slaughter at Nob, David flees to the Wilderness. 23:14 says, "And Saul sought him every day, but God did not give him into his hand."

We don't have an ephod, but we have God's Word, and we have the promise in James 1:5 that says God will give us wisdom if we ask for it. Abraham Lincoln wrote these David-like words during the Civil War: I have always taken counsel of [the Almighty], and referred to him my plans, and have never adopted a course of proceeding without being assured, as far as I could be, of his approbation. I should be the most presumptuous blockhead . . . if I for one day thought that I could discharge the duties which have come upon me since I came into this place, without the aid and enlightenment of One who is wiser and stronger than all others" (qtd. in Fresh Lessons from Former Leaders by Stephen Olford, p. 61).

Finally, notice David's **honor toward those who wronged him**. The narrative today climaxes with David at a place called Engedi, a large spring on the steep western shore of the Dead Sea. Amazingly, Saul takes 3,000 men to capture David there! But when God has his hand of protection on someone, even 3,000 men cannot do any harm. In fact, Saul is the vulnerable one. He goes into a cave to "use the facilities." Who should be hiding in that very cave, but David! Talk about a golden opportunity! But instead of using the opportunity to kill Saul, David merely cuts off a corner of Saul's royal robe, which he has, presumably, thrown over a rock. This is honorable almost beyond imagining.

Let's focus on 3 important points illustrated by this scene. First, *mere "opportunity" does not always indicate God's will*. David had the perfect opportunity. It probably looked like a providential one, a divinely appointed way to solve his problem. Even David's men thought so. Look at verse 4: "And the men of David said to him, 'Here is the day of which the Lord said to you, 'Behold, I will give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it shall seem good to you.'" But David stood firm against their earnest reasoning, because he recognized that "open doors" are not always what God wants for us. If God has forbidden some course of action in his Word, then no amount of coincidences should cause you to think he is orchestrating your life so that you should sin. And don't listen to girlfriends who are encouraging you to follow a path that in your better moments you know is wrong. If you're unhappy in your marriage, don't think you're supposed to leave your husband because an old flame just contacted you on Facebook. If you're on a strict budget, don't think you're supposed to overspend just because you found a great deal on something. The Christian life is often a difficult battle; don't assume the path of least resistance is the right one. Any interpretation of God's involvement in our circumstances must be filtered through the knowledge of the character of God and his revealed will in the Word.

Second, *victory over temptation is more likely when we have a high view of God*. Taking Saul's life was unthinkable to David because of reverence for the Lord and the Lord's anointed. Even after David only cut off a piece of Saul's robe, he was conscience stricken. Why? Because he had exercised power over Saul while Saul was still king. The king's robe held symbolic significance. David knew that he would one day wear royal robes, but he knew they would only be rightly his if he received them as a gift from God and not by grasping. He says in verse 6: "The Lord forbid that I should do this thing to my lord, the Lord's anointed, to put out my hand against him, seeing he is the Lord's anointed." David's high view of God expressed here echoes Joseph's when he flees from Potiphar's wife's sexual advances: "How could I sin and do this great wickedness against God?" (Gen. 39:9). When we understand who God is and what he requires, sin becomes abhorrent.

Third, *doing what's right often prompts others to admit their sin*. David let Saul know what he had done (and what he had NOT done), and he showed honor with his physical posture—he bowed—and his language: “my lord the king” (8). Let’s read in verse 11: David said, “See, my father, (Remember Saul was David’s father-in-law) see the corner of your robe in my hand. For by the fact that I cut off the corner of your robe and did not kill you, you may know and see that there is no wrong or treason in my hands. I have not sinned against you, though you hunt my life to take it. May the Lord judge between me and you, may the Lord avenge me against you, but my hand shall not be against you.” This prompts Saul to “lift up his voice and weep” (16). Look at verse 17: He said to David, “You are more righteous than I, for you have repaid me good, whereas I have repaid you evil. And you have declared this day how you have dealt well with me, in that you did not kill me when the Lord put me into your hands. For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safe? So may the Lord reward you with good for what you have done to me this day.” David’s honorable actions toward Saul cause Saul to feel real sorrow for what he’s done. And when he requests that David not wipe out his family after he becomes king, David displays honor again by promising this. We must remember that an opportunity to harm can also be an opportunity to heal. It certainly won’t always be this way—sometimes we’ll be mocked or belittled for doing what’s right, but often the desire to get revenge is so strong in people that it is disarming when someone chooses not to retaliate for a wrong suffered. Rom. 12:21 commands us to “overcome evil with good.” That means it’s possible to overcome evil with good! Prov. 16:32 says, “He who rules his spirit is better than he who takes a city.”

The way we treat someone who has wronged us is an application that lies at the very heart of the gospel, isn’t it? Once we all were enemies of God’s. By our sin we wronged him more than anyone could wrong another person. His Son had to die because of it. But he extended grace to us.

The “Bible ABC Book” that I memorized as a preschooler had this verse for the letter H: Jer. 17:9: “The heart is deceitful and desperately wicked; who can know it?” (KJV). That’s our beginning condition. There is nothing good in our hearts apart from Christ’s redemptive power. But when He calls us and rescues us he replaces our hearts of stone and gives us hearts of flesh. (Ez. 11:19). Look at this stone. It is hard. I can’t make an impression on it. I can drop it, drive over it, even hammer it, and it will remain unscathed. Saul’s heart, in the end, proved to be like this stone. David’s heart, however, was a heart of tender flesh. It wasn’t perfect. It still sinned, but the events that are recorded in these chapters made an impression. His heart was soft, so that God could mold it and change it. And though he failed sometimes, the fruit of his relationship with Saul showed a heart of honor.

For our closing prayer, I’d like to read excerpts of psalms that David wrote during the events of these chapters. Please pray with me:

I will bless the Lord at all times; his praise shall continually be in my mouth. My soul makes its boast in the Lord; let the humble hear and be glad. . . I sought the Lord, and he answered me and delivered me from all my fears. . . This poor man cried, and the Lord heard him and saved him out of all his troubles. The angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear him, and delivers them. Oh, taste and see that the Lord is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him! The eyes of the Lord are toward the righteous and his ears toward their cry. The face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to cut off the memory of them from the earth. When the righteous cry for help, the Lord hears and delivers them out of all their troubles. The Lord is near to the brokenhearted and saves the crushed in spirit. (from Ps. 34)

See the man who would not make God his refuge, but trusted in the abundance of his riches and sought refuge in his own destruction! But I trust in the steadfast love of God forever and ever. (from Ps. 52)

When I am afraid, I put my trust in you. In God, whose word I praise, in God I trust; I shall not be afraid. What can flesh do to me? (from Ps. 56)

I cry to you, O Lord; I say, "You are my refuge, my portion in the land of the living." (from Ps. 142)

Be exalted, O God, above the heavens! Let your glory be over all the earth! (from Ps. 57)

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