

## **Week 5: *The Contrast of Saul & David—Bravery and Humility***

### **Hook**



**Main Point: A godly leader is brave and humble, not jealous, fearful, or prideful.**

The 1992 U.S. Olympic basketball team became known as the “Dream Team,” composed of such players as Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Charles Barkley, and Larry Bird. The Olympic Gold-winning team defeated their opponents by an average of 44 points per game.<sup>1</sup> Break into small groups, choose one of the categories listed below and build your very own dream team. Your selections are not limited by time; feel free to include players from the past.

Categories to choose from: football, basketball, baseball, reality show cast, board of a Christian non-profit

**Q: Explain your “Dream Team” choices.**

**Q: What potential problems do you anticipate with your dream team?**

**Q: How does someone put ego aside to be a great teammate?**

**Transition:** Today’s lesson will examine Saul’s growing jealousy of David and the king’s efforts to neutralize his competition.

**RECAP:** In the first section of our study (weeks 1–4), we saw how God’s qualifications for a great king are different from what the world often looks for. A godly king is one who

trusts in the Lord and follows Him. We saw how Saul failed in leading Israel because he operated out of fear and lack of trust in the Lord. God rejected him as king and chose David instead, emphasizing that the Lord looks at the inner person, not external appearances. Then we saw David defeat Goliath by his great trust in the Lord.

## **Week 5: *The Contrast of Saul & David – Bravery and Humility***

### **Book**

**Main Point: A godly leader is brave and humble, not jealous, fearful, or prideful.**

#### **1 Samuel 18:1–9 [Read]**

**Talking Point 1:** David was brave, but Saul was jealous and ungrateful.

**Q: How does Jonathan giving David his armor compare to when Saul tried to give David his armor in the battle with Goliath (previous chapter)?**

**Q: How does Saul’s jealousy connect to what the people had wanted in a king?**

So far in the story, we have seen David chosen by God and anointed by Samuel as king, but not yet actually step into that role (16:1–13). We have seen David play the lyre for Saul to soothe his spirit and become his armor-bearer (16:14–23). Then we saw him defeat the giant Philistine no one else had even dared to fight (17:1–54). Saul did not yet know God had chosen David to be king, but, reading the story, we do. Though we may see David’s rise to power as ordained by God, Saul had a different point of view.

When David defeated Goliath, he immediately became the nation’s hero. Saul was wise to put David over his army (18:5). Using the national hero in his service brought glory to Saul. David’s success was Saul’s success. Putting David in charge of his army made good use of David and kept him close but subservient. Saul could use him to his own advantage but keep him under control.

Saul’s son, Jonathan, heir to his throne, also showed David great honor by giving him his robe and his armor, a contrast to when Saul tried to give David his armor before fighting Goliath. When David tried Saul’s armor, David refused, saying he wasn’t used to it. Yet he received Jonathan’s gift, ready to take on the role of general, the role previously held by Jonathan. Jonathan’s act wasn’t an indication of giving his position as heir to the throne to David, but it does foreshadow the fact that David would one day take his place as the next king. For Jonathan, it was an act that bound them in covenant friendship, not anything competitive or conflicting. In Jonathan’s view, he and David would work together as brothers-in-law, serving the king.<sup>2</sup>

We must also remember the reward Saul had promised to whoever defeated Goliath – great riches, marriage to his daughter, and making his father’s house “free” (17:25). This doesn’t mean the Israelites were enslaved. “Free” meant releasing his father’s family from having to pay taxes to the king, send sons to his army, or any of the other typical obligations all families had to the king (8:11–18).<sup>3</sup> At this point, Saul had given David great riches and the highest position in his army, absolved his family of obligations, brought him to live permanently in the palace (18:2) and promised his daughter in marriage (18:17). David was certainly on the rise, but all of it was under Saul’s authority

as king, not in competition with him. David was loyal to Saul and served him well, going wherever Saul sent him (18:5). He did not try to usurp Saul's authority (18:18). Yet Saul became "very angry" and jealous when he heard what the people were saying about David (18:8).

The poetry of the song the women sang is unusual, as it combines two different types of parallelism. The numbers used are synthetic parallelism – the second line adds to the first, increasing the number. This was very common in Hebrew poetry and meant "Saul and David have killed thousands and even more!" But the use of different names in each line would have been very unusual and adds a different layer of meaning – antithetic parallelism, where the second line contrasts with the first.<sup>4</sup>

Saul interpreted it correctly, as a not-so-subtle comparison between himself and David. In the ancient Near East, the glory of battles typically went to the king, regardless of who the general was, because the king was the ultimate leader. The general might also be praised, but only in submission and service to the king. But in this song, the people were attributing more honor and glory to David. David was not trying to usurp Saul's authority, but the people saw him as stronger and more powerful than Saul, and Saul thought the people would ask for him as king (18:8). The people had wanted a king who would go out and win battles for them. It was the main thing they were looking for (8:5). Saul feared that they would see David as more capable of that.

Saul's angry jealousy begins here, and it only grows throughout the story. But what was the root of Saul's jealousy? Again, it comes back to a lack of trust in the Lord. If Saul had trusted the Lord, he wouldn't have been jealous of David. He would have trusted God to keep him as king if it were His will. Or, if he had trusted the Lord that David should become king, he wouldn't have been jealous either. He would have submitted to that as God's will. Either way, it comes down to not seeking the Lord's will. His jealousy was about holding on to his own status and power, not about following what God wanted.

**Q: How can trusting God's will for our lives keep us from being jealous of what others have?**

**Q: Describe times when you have been jealous. What was the root of your jealousy?**

**Q: Describe any times when you have submitted to the Lord's will even if it wasn't what you thought you wanted. How did things turn out?**

### **1 Samuel 18:10–16 [Read]**

**Talking Point 2:** David had the Holy Spirit, but Saul was tormented by an evil spirit.

**Q: How does this passage compare to the story of the evil spirit in chapter 16?**

In this passage, we see Saul being tormented by a harmful spirit again. The language of "rushed upon Saul" intentionally contrasts with the way the Holy Spirit had rushed upon

Saul earlier in his life (10:10) and had rushed upon David (16:13). Chapter 16 tells us that whenever Saul was tormented, David would play music and Saul would be refreshed and well, and the harmful spirit would depart (16:23). But in this story, David played the lyre, and Saul was not refreshed. He hurled a spear at David instead – twice. We don't see it as clearly in the English translation, but in the original Hebrew sentence structure, there is a clear parallelism between what was in David's hand (lyre) and what was in Saul's hand (spear). David was making music to try to soothe Saul while Saul was attacking him. Saul didn't even try to let the music soothe the evil spirit. Instead, he gave in to his evil desires to get rid of David.

The text again focuses on Saul's fear. He wasn't just angry or jealous, he was afraid of David. Even more significant is why – “because the Lord was with him” (18:12). If you loved God, why would you be afraid of someone with the Lord's Spirit? This was not a healthy, godly fear of the Lord. Saul wasn't concerned about God's will for his life or His plan for the throne of Israel; he was only worried what it meant for himself. If Saul had possessed a godly fear of the Lord, he would have relinquished his throne to David in peace when he recognized that the Lord had left him and was with David. Instead, Saul tried to kill him. And when that didn't work, he sent David into battle. But instead of dying in battle, David had great success, and Saul “stood in fearful awe of him” (18:15). Again, this is the wrong kind of awe. Saul wasn't recognizing God's presence in David's life, in awe of what God was doing. Saul was terrified that the throne would be taken away from him. It was all about himself.<sup>5</sup>

Twice the text reminds us that the Lord was with David. David let the Holy Spirit lead him “on level ground” (Psalm 143:10). This was how David “had success in all his undertakings” (18:14). But Saul gave in to his evil desires, trying to get rid of David but failing repeatedly. The contrast between the two is clear, and the message to us is also clear – trust in the Lord and His will for your life. When the Lord is with you and you are walking in His ways and His purposes, you will have success. When you try to make success for yourself in ways He has not ordained, you will be frustrated, angry and jealous. Things will not turn out the way you hoped.

**Q: How can you know the Holy Spirit is with you? What impact does the Holy Spirit have on your life?**

**Q: When are we most tempted to give into our selfish, evil desires? How can we resist that temptation and trust in the Lord?**

**1 Samuel 18:17–30 [Read]**

**Talking Point 3:** David was humble, but Saul was prideful.

**Q: What was Saul hoping would happen when he sent David into battle and when he sent him out to collect the bride-price of 100 Philistine foreskins?**

As we saw earlier, one of the rewards promised to the person who killed Goliath was the king's daughter's hand in marriage. This passage describes how Saul originally offered his oldest daughter, Merab, as that reward, but David responded that he was too insignificant to marry the king's daughter. So Saul gave her to another man. This showed David's humility. Even though he had earned the right to marry Saul's daughter, he did not deem himself worthy. This also shows us that his heart was pure and not evil like his brother Eliab had accused him of. He was not interested in fighting Goliath just for the rewards (17:28).

The text also tells us that in offering Merab, Saul asked David to go out to battle for him, hoping he would die at the hand of the Philistines, and Saul would be rid of him without being blamed for his death (18:17). In Saul's second offer of a daughter to David, he tried the same thing, hoping he would die trying to obtain the bride-price (18:25), the amount the groom had to pay to the bride's father to marry her. But David admitted he was too poor to pay whatever bride-price a king would demand (18:23). Saul used that to come up with a plan for David to "pay" a bride-price that wouldn't cost him any actual money but would likely get him killed. Foreskins remind us of the covenant. The Philistines had foreskins because they were not circumcised like the Israelites. But David was successful because the Lord was with him, and Saul's fear of him only grew.

David had every right to be proud of his accomplishments, but he showed great humility. He didn't demand to marry Saul's daughter even though he could have claimed that killing Goliath had already paid the bride-price. Though he knew he had already been chosen to be the next king, he waited for the Lord's timing. David knew that God saves "a humble people, but the haughty eyes bring you down" (Psalm 18:27). David wrote that psalm much later, at the end of his life, reflecting on how God had saved him from all his enemies, including Saul. God brought Saul down and saved David because Saul was prideful, focused on his own power, while David was humble, seeking God's will and His glory. Saul was focused on building his own platform, while David wanted to build the kingdom of God.

**Q: Describe a Christian leader that you've known in your life. In what ways did humility make that person a better leader?**

**Q: In what areas of your life are you tempted to be prideful? How can you bring glory to God instead of yourself in those areas?**

## **Week 5: The Contrast of Saul & David – Bravery and Humility**

### **Took**

**Main Point: A godly leader is brave and humble, not jealous, fearful or prideful.**

Shaquille O’Neal was in his rookie year when the 1992 U.S. Olympic Basketball Committee formed the Dream Team; O’Neal didn’t make the team but would prove to have an impressive career. Despite the Dream Team snub, the center made the NBA All-Star team seven times, ranks as the number-7 NBA all-time scorer, and is a three-time NBA Finals MVP.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to being known as one of the greatest basketball players in history, O’Neal was highly publicized for his feuds with two teammates: Penny Hardaway and Kobe Bryant. He counts a poor relationship with these two players among his biggest regrets in life:

*“Big mistake in the Penny relationship. Big mistake in the Kobe relationship.... I was arrogant, I was dumb, but sometimes when you do a lot of stuff you don’t wanna work at stuff. Those [are] the only three major regrets that I have.”<sup>7</sup>*

Proverbs 16:18–19 shares wisdom concerning pride:

- <sup>18</sup> Pride goes before destruction,  
and a haughty spirit before a fall.  
<sup>19</sup> It is better to be of a lowly spirit with the poor  
than to divide the spoil with the proud.

Pride is a road that leads to destruction. According to the passage, avoiding the trap of pride is worth suffering economically; it’s better to be poor and humble than rich and proud.

**Q: How does American culture view pride?**

**Q: What foolish decisions have pride encouraged King Saul to make up to this point in I Samuel?**

**Q: In what ways has pride impacted your life? How do you learn to cultivate a spirit of humility in your life?**

## CHALLENGES

**THINK:** We know that in the new covenant the Holy Spirit is always with us, dwelling inside us, but how can you be sure you are *walking* by His Spirit? How can you know you are in His will? In what ways are you struggling to trust God's plan for your life? Why is it hard to trust Him when things don't look as though they are going well?

**PRAY** for God to give you the bravery to step into whatever He has in store for you. Pray to trust in Him the way David did and follow wherever He may lead. Ask God to grow humility in you and help you to live in a way that reflects it.

**ACT:** Encourage each other. Choose one person in your church, neighborhood, small group or other community who really exemplifies the qualities of humility, bravery and/or trust in the Lord. Write that person a note of encouragement thanking him or her for the great example he or she has modeled to you of walking by the Spirit and trusting God's will.

**NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*:** For the next few weeks, we'll continue to look at the period of time David was living in Saul's house as his general, his son's best friend, and his son-in-law. We'll see how David's popularity and success grew as Saul's diminished and how Saul reacted to all of it. Next week, we'll see more contrasts between Saul and David. David remained innocent even while Saul was murderous and manipulative toward him.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://olympics.com/en/topics/this-is-the-dream-team>

<sup>2</sup> Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

<sup>3</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

This is why Saul's asked who David's father was after he killed Goliath, so he could honor his promise to his father's house. Some scholars make much of this section, saying that if Saul didn't know

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who David's father was, then that must mean the passage about David playing lyre for him and being his armorbearer (16:14–23) must be out of order or two conflicting accounts of David's journey to the palace. But an answer to all of that is really simple. Yes, David played music for Saul and traveled back and forth between the palace and his father's house in chapter 16, but Saul didn't take the time or effort to find out who David's father was. He was just a servant to Saul; he didn't concern himself with that. But then, when he defeated Goliath, he needed to know who his father was to fulfill his promise to the victor.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

<sup>5</sup> *ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2001).

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.nba.com/lakers/news/150904shaqweekaccomplishments>

<sup>7</sup> <https://fadeawayworld.net/nba-media/shaquille-oneal-admits-his-arrogance-destroyed-his-relationships-with-kobe-bryant-and-penny-hardaway-i-was-arrogant-i-was-dumb-but-sometimes-when-you-do-a-lot-of-stuff-you-dont-wanna-work-at-stuff>