

Week 6: *The Contrast of Saul and David: Innocence and Integrity*

Hook



Main Point: A godly leader does what is right, even when others don't.

The average adult makes around 35,000 decisions every day.ⁱ Do you find decision-making easy? Teacher, challenge two of your LifeGroup members to a round of quick decision-making. Bring the first contestant to the front of the room and send the second contestant into the hallway. The goal of each participant is to make the following decisions honestly. Start a stopwatch and ask the first contestant the following questions one a time; participants cannot skip a question. Once the participant answers all questions, record the time, and repeat the process with the second contestant.

What will you eat for lunch?

What is your favorite television show?

Where would you like to vacation this year?

What will you eat for dinner?

What present would you like for your next birthday?

If you could eat only one dessert for the rest of your life, which would it be?

What time will you go to sleep tonight?

What's your favorite band or solo act?

Beach or mountains?

Name something you've recently purchased that you will not buy again.

Q: Have you ever experienced decision-making fatigue? What were the circumstances?

Q: How do you typically make decisions?

Q: What are some of the most difficult decisions you've made? Would you change them if you could go back?

Transition: Today's lesson is full of choices. Saul continues to choose jealousy; Saul's kids choose David over their dad, and David continues to choose integrity.

RECAP: In this section of our study (weeks 5–7), David was living in Saul's palace as part of his family. He had married Saul's daughter, Michal, and made a friendship covenant with Saul's son and heir, Jonathan. He also led Saul's army and played music to soothe Saul when he was being attacked by a harmful spirit. Last week, we saw the beginnings of Saul's murderous jealousy of David, because the people praised his success in battle more than Saul's. Saul tried to kill David with a spear twice while David was playing music for him, and when that failed, he sent him into a dangerous battle, hoping he would be killed, but not by Saul's hand. We saw the contrast between Saul and David: David was brave and humble, while Saul led out of fear and pride.

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1 Samuel 19:1–7 [Read]

Talking Point 1: David was innocent and had done nothing but help Saul.

Q: How did Jonathan convince his father not to kill David? What was his reasoning?

At this point in the story, we have seen Saul get furiously angry and jealous (18:8) and try to kill David twice (18:11). He then tried to orchestrate David's death by sending him into battle (18:17) and used his daughter Michal's love for David, hoping she would "be a snare for him" (18:21). Chapter 18 ends with the summary statement that every time the Philistines came out for battle "David had more success than all the servants of Saul, so that his name was highly esteemed" (18:30).

Chapter 19 opens with Saul making known to all his servants, including Jonathan, that he wanted David killed (19:1). Earlier, he had attacked David in a moment of rage while he was being attacked by a harmful spirit. Saul could have easily blamed it on the spirit; no one would have blamed him for his actions. But now, he was making an intentional public plan to have David killed.ⁱⁱ

We need to think about the politics of the situation as we read. Jonathan didn't speak out against Saul's plan immediately, in front of all of Saul's servants (19:1). Saul was already angry and out of control. If Jonathan had embarrassed him in front of his other officers, he may have lashed out against Jonathan, too. In the ancient world, kings often had no problem getting rid of a disloyal son/heir, and Saul was already displaying erratic behaviors. Instead, Jonathan warned David and told him to hide while he tried to reason with his father privately. And his plan worked. Saul listened to Jonathan and swore he would not put David to death.

When Jonathan talked to Saul, he focused on David's innocence. David had done nothing to deserve Saul's rage (19:4–5). The very thing that made Saul despise David (his success) actually brought good to Saul, not evil (19:4). Though Saul was jealous of his popularity, every time David had success in battle, it was a win for Saul as the king, too. Not only that, but David also risked his own life to save Israel, and Saul had rejoiced about it at the time (19:5). This specific detail – laying down *his life* for our *salvation* – points us ahead to what Jesus would do on the Cross in the new covenant (1 John 3:16). Even this early in his story, well before God promised David that the Messiah would come from his line (2 Samuel 7), David was a foreshadowing of Christ by his own actions.

At the end of this section, things were looking up. Things were back to “normal,” and Saul even swore an oath by Yahweh that he would not kill David (19:6). Other than Saul, Jonathan had the most to gain by getting rid of David; he was next in line to the throne. Yet Jonathan loved and respected David. Jonathan was crafty in the way he handled the situation, but he wasn't playing politics. He was truly a man of character and integrity, so he also stood in contrast to his father. Jonathan had a lot to lose by standing up to his father, but he chose to do what was right over what might benefit himself most.ⁱⁱⁱ

Q: Describe a time you stood up for what was right even though it was hard. How did it affect your life? How did it affect your spiritual life?

Q: Why is it worth it to maintain our integrity, even if we must sacrifice something?

1 Samuel 19:8–17 and Psalm 59 [Read]

Talking Point 2: Saul was tormented by a harmful spirit, but David trusted in the Lord.

Q: How does this passage compare to stories of the harmful spirit in Saul's life so far?

(See Lesson 3, Talking Point 2 and 1 Samuel 16:13-14 for further context)

Q: How do Michal's actions compare to Jonathan's? How might Saul have felt about his children helping his enemy?

Q: How do the lyrics of Psalm 59 connect to what was going on in David's life?

The last section ended on a positive note, but at verse 8, the story shifts with the “and,” a common literary device in Hebrew narrative. The narrative specifies there was war *again*. War had been going on between the Philistines and the Israelites since Joshua's day 400 years earlier. That first generation to enter the promised land was supposed to rid the land of the other people groups during the conquest. God's promise was that they would take the land and live there in peace with God as their king (Exodus 6:6–8).

Though they did take the land (Joshua 11:23), they didn't dispossess all the people groups who lived there of the land they occupied (Joshua 13:1), so war continued to break out between the Philistines and Israel. During Judges (more than 300 years), each time war broke out, God raised up a judge to defeat the enemy, and the land would be at peace for a time, maybe 20 years, maybe 40, maybe 80. But then the people would start worshipping false gods again; war would break out again; and they would cry out to God for deliverance again. This cycle happened over and over.

It is likely that the people hoped that if they had a king instead of just a judge, the king would finally defeat the other nations, and they would finally have peace in the promised land (1 Samuel 8:19-20). But Saul didn't deliver that. He was successful in some battles, but war kept coming. This points us again to the fact that Saul was not the king they really needed. He was not the one who would bring them peace in the land. David was the one who would finally have “rest from all his surrounding enemies” (2 Samuel 7:1). This passage foreshadows the time of David's rule – he struck the Philistines so hard that they fled before him (19:8).

Again, Saul was attacked by a harmful spirit. Again, David played music. Again, Saul attacked David. But this time, David fled. He knew it wasn't just the spirit making Saul crazy – Saul really did want to kill him. Saul sent men to David's house to guard him until Saul could kill him, but Michal, his wife, Saul's daughter, helped him escape. This use of the idol shows us that Saul's family did not worship God alone. It also would remind any Israelite of the story of Rachel using idols to deceive her father, Laban, when Jacob/Israel was escaping with his sons, the patriarchs of the tribes of Israel (Genesis 31:17–35).

Saul was blatantly trying to kill David now, and he was upset with his daughter for betraying him to his “enemy” (19:17). Again, politics and family loyalty come into play. Saul expected that Michal would be loyal to him over her husband. But she chose David, just as Jonathan had done. She didn't argue with Saul about David's innocence, yet it is also noticeable that she seemed unafraid of her father, even though standing up to him put her at great risk. This only reiterates Saul's weakness as a leader.

This is the first point in David's story to which we can tie the writing of one of his psalms in describing specific events in his life. The theme of Psalm 59 is that God is his fortress (vv. 1, 10, 16, 17) and his shield (v. 11). His enemies lay in wait to kill him, even though he had done no wrong (19:4). But God was his strength and his fortress. He could rely on God to keep him safe no matter what they tried to do to him.

Q: How is David's attitude in this psalm different from Saul's attitude about his fears? How does this point to David as a man after God's own heart?

David had every reason to fear. The most powerful men in the kingdom were lying in wait to kill him, by order of the king. And yet, he did not fear because he trusted in God to be his fortress. Yet again, Saul operated out of fear, but David operated out of trust.

Q: In what ways has God been a fortress for you? Share specific examples.

Q: How can remembering those times help you to trust God in the future?

Q: Why do worship songs, hymns and psalms put things into words in a unique way? How can we use psalms such as Psalm 59 in our worship and prayer life?

1 Samuel 19:18–24 [Read]

Talking Point 3: God's Spirit has ultimate control over all things, including His enemies.

Q: How many different people were overcome by the Holy Spirit in this story?

Q: What does it tell us about the Holy Spirit that He even overcame Saul at this point?

The tone of the story now shifts quite a bit, from physical military battles to spiritual ones. The imagery of Samuel "standing as head" over the company of prophets is military language for a garrison.^{iv} Just as David had commanded armies of soldiers, Samuel commanded an army of prophets. And in this story, the Holy Spirit came over everyone – the prophets, Saul's messengers, and even Saul himself. If there had been any doubt up to this point about who was in control, there was no longer.

The battle here was not for control of the land but one in which God proved to be David's fortress, literally. Saul kept sending men to try to take David, but each time the Holy Spirit came upon them. David fled to the prophet Samuel, who was surrounded by an "army" of prophets empowered by the Spirit (19:20). Saul sent a group of messengers, and they were overcome by the Spirit and prophesied (19:20). He sent a second group and then a third group, and they were also overcome by the Spirit (19:21). Finally, Saul himself went to Ramah, and the Spirit came upon him, too.^v The Spirit of God proved to be invincible. No attack could penetrate David's fortress.

Saul's stripping naked may seem strange to us, but scholars agree it was symbolic of Saul's being stripped of his role as king. God had rejected Saul as king, and Saul had rejected the word of the Lord (15:23). Yet now, he was condemned to be a mouthpiece of God's word whether he wanted to or not. His nakedness was a source of great shame, especially for a man of such high position. The question "Is Saul also among the prophets?" bookends this story with the beginning of Saul's career, when he was first anointed king (10:11). In the beginning, Saul had the potential to be a mouthpiece for God as king. But by this point, the answer to the question is "no." Saul might have been prophesying, but he was not a prophet. He was God's enemy, whom God had overtaken.^{vi}

Q: In what ways have you seen the Holy Spirit at work in your life when you felt under attack?

Q: With spiritual warfare, Paul commanded us to pray at all times in the Spirit and stand firm (Ephesians 6:10–18). How does prayer connect us to the power of the Spirit? How does standing firm connect to the image of God as our fortress?

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Took

Main Point: A godly leader does what is right, even when others don't.

The events of this lesson's passage remind us who is in ultimate control of all things. No one can thwart the Holy Spirit. No one can change His plans. David wrote that God was his fortress, and God proved that to be true. No matter what Saul threw at them, the Holy Spirit responded with power. This story should give us confidence that God will be our fortress, no matter what "flaming arrows" the Evil One throws at us. Our shield is our faith, our trust in God to be our fortress (Ephesians 6:16).

Teacher, lead your class in a season of prayer. Challenge participants to consider specific instances in which God has proven Himself to be a fortress in their lives. Invite them to thank God for being their fortress. Close the time of prayer with Psalm 59:16–17

But I will sing of your strength;
I will sing aloud of your steadfast love in the morning.
For you have been to me a fortress
and a refuge in the day of my distress.
O my Strength, I will sing praises to you,
for you, O God, are my fortress,
the God who shows me steadfast love.

CHALLENGES

THINK: Think about how hard it must have been for Michal and Jonathan to stand up to their very powerful father. Why did they choose to do it? Compare and contrast the way they each did it. In what ways is God calling you to stand up for what is right? What might you have to sacrifice to do so?

PRAY for God to empower you to walk in integrity. Pray that He will give you faith to trust Him and do what is right even when it's hard. Ask Him to show you which way to go, no matter what those around you are doing. Pray for the courage to do what is right.

ACT: Write a prayer. Since this is the first lesson in which we see David writing a psalm in response to what was going on in his life, we want to practice what that would be like. It doesn't have to be a song/psalm such as David wrote; just a prayer is fine (though if you want the added challenge of writing a psalm, go for it!). It doesn't have to be poetic or deeply theological. Just write from the heart. Reflect on whatever is going on in your life and what God

is teaching you through it. Then write a prayer that reflects that. Don't be perfectionistic about it. Just write as the Spirit leads. This is meant to be an enjoyable, life-giving experience.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we'll see things between Saul and David and Saul and Jonathan come to a head when Jonathan decisively takes David's side and helps him escape the palace. We will see a unique and beautiful godly friendship between David and Jonathan and reflect on the friendships in our lives.

ⁱ <https://www.inc.com/heidi-zak/adults-make-more-than-35000-decisions-per-day-here-are-4-ways-to-prevent-mental-burnout.html>

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

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^{iv} Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

^v Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).

^{vi} Robert D. Bergen, 1–2 Samuel, *The New American Commentary* (Nashville: B & H Academic, 1996).