

Week 10: *The Contrast Continues: David Spares Saul's Life*

Hook



Main Point: A godly person leaves judgment to the Lord.

Would you describe yourself as a good judge of character? Studies of first impressions have shown that people judge someone's character in less than a tenth of a second.¹ If people make such quick decisions about you, is there anything you can do to make a better first impression? Here are some tips:

1. Know your context – You would introduce yourself differently on a first date than in a job interview.
2. Adjust your attitude – Are you anxious, angry or sad? Be aware of what you're feeling and how that might impact the impression you make. Choose your attitude!
3. Get a good night's sleep – Sleep deprivation can cause you to appear differently; pale, bags under your eyes, and perhaps even the corners of your mouth might turn down. Studies suggest that short-changing your sleep might make others perceive you as less attractive, less intelligent, more depressed and less healthy.
4. Be yourself – Worrying too much about saying and doing the right thing might cause you to look too strategic or insincere.²

Q: What tips would you give someone trying to make a good first impression?

Q: Describe a time when you made a quick judgment call about someone and were wrong.

Q: In what ways is the Lord a better judge than you are?

RECAP: In this section of our study (weeks 8–17), David was on the run from Saul. It's a long period in our study and in the text because it was a long period in David's life—eight years. The text will continue to contrast Saul and David, showing David's integrity and trust in the Lord and even respect for Saul as the Lord's anointed. Last week, we saw Saul do whatever he thought was right, but David sought the Lord's will and followed it. This week, we will see David refrain from killing Saul when he had the chance and Saul weep while admitting that David was more righteous than he.

It is during this time that David wrote most of the psalms that are labeled in relation to particular events in his life (Psalms 56, 34, 57, 142, 52, 63, 54). Other psalms may have been written during this time as well, but they are not specifically labeled as such. This season of David's life, particularly, taught him to lean on God as his refuge and fortress.

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Book

Main Point: A godly person leaves judgment to the Lord.

1 Samuel 24:1–7 and Psalm 13 [Read]

Talking Point 1: David spared Saul's life because Saul was the Lord's anointed.

Q: Why might David's men think it was God's will for him to kill Saul?

Q: Why did it matter to David that Saul was "the Lord's anointed"?

At the end of the last chapter, Saul was chasing David like a game of cat and mouse. The story sped up quickly in that last paragraph – David went here and Saul went after him; David went there and Saul followed (23:24–29), until a messenger came to urge Saul to go quickly to stop the Philistines from raiding the land, which seems to biblical scholars to be God's supernatural rescue of David.³ This chapter begins with Saul's finishing his battle and going right back to his pursuit of David (24:1). That temporary distraction didn't stop him in the long run. Saul took 3,000 "chosen men" to pursue David – five times as many men as David had (23:13). "Chosen men" were the best soldiers in an army. In Judges, the 700 left-handed "chosen men" were described like this: "Every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss" (Judges 20:16). Saul was not messing around.

Engedi means "spring of the kid goat" and is on the west coast of the Dead Sea. It is at the edge of the Judean desert, but Engedi itself is Israel's largest natural oasis, a "splash of life and color in the midst of an otherwise barren landscape."⁴ Much of the water around the Dead Sea is too salty to drink, but the springs of the Engedi oasis are fresh, providing water for animal life and lush vegetation. The combination of desert, mountains and springs makes it a beautiful area with breathtaking views. Even today, you can see beautiful waterfalls and pools, palm trees and mountain goats. The craggy rocks and mountains served as a great hiding place for David. Theologically, it's a picture of God's protection, provision and rest in the desert.⁵

The "Wildgoat's Rocks" were steep cliffs in that area, which made for a great hiding place but a precarious place to take 3,000 men. It may seem unusual for Saul to enter a cave in the area by himself without any kind of guard, but his men had likely done a sweep of the cave and not seen David's men because they were "in the innermost parts" (24:3). Saul was alone because he was "relieving himself," which wasn't just a quick emptying of his bladder, which he could have done anywhere, but actually emptying his bowels, for which he would want privacy. This would also explain how David could get close enough to cut off a part of his robe without his noticing.⁶

The hem of Saul's robe would have had distinctive fringe, designs and stitching marking him as the king, so there would have been no denying it when David showed it to him.

David would have proof that he could have killed Saul if he had chosen to do so. But afterward, David's heart "struck him." He regretted it, feeling that he shouldn't have done this against the Lord's anointed (24:4–6).⁷ The use of the word "heart" reminds us that David is a man after God's own heart, and that God looks at our inner person rather than our external qualities (16:7). David's men gave him logical advice based on the circumstances, but David's heart told him otherwise. It would have made sense from a military perspective, and most would think Saul deserved it. And David could have easily deduced that God was delivering Saul to him. But David's heart struck him because his heart was "after God's own heart." David trusted in the Lord's wisdom over human wisdom.

Even though Saul had shown no respect for God's anointed priests by slaughtering an entire city of them and their families, David showed respect for Saul as God's anointed. David himself had already been anointed king, yet he still referred to Saul as "the Lord's anointed." David was also God's anointed, and at this point the Holy Spirit was with David, *not* Saul. Yet David still respected God's anointing on Saul and his status as the current king. David knew he would eventually take over the throne, but this wasn't the way he was going to do it. He would wait and listen for God's voice and timing, another stark contrast with Saul, who continuously tried to take matters into his own hands.

There are times we all could justify sinful actions and even convince ourselves it's what God would want us to do. But a heart that knows God and truly seeks His will will be "struck" with the truth when a choice isn't right. This is why we need to abide in Christ daily, stay close to Him, study His Word and let it sink deep into our hearts – so we, too, will be able to discern God's will. Psalm 119 tells us that knowing God's Word makes us wiser than our enemies, and that storing His Word "in my heart" and seeking Him "with my whole heart" will help us not sin against Him (Psalm 119:9–11, 98–101).

Many times, David *felt* frustrated with his situation. He told us so in the Psalms: "How long, O Lord? ... How long shall my enemy be exalted over me?" (Psalm 13:1–2). David's situation was incredibly unfair; no one would have blamed him for wanting to end Saul's pursuit of him. Yet, David *chose to* wait on the Lord and His timing. Even as David asked God how long, he ended the psalm with trust in God's steadfast love for him (Psalm 13:5). Other psalms encourage us to wait for the Lord and hope in His Word, for "with the Lord there is steadfast love" (Psalm 130:5, 7). As David eventually wrote when he composed songs for Israel's worship, "I waited patiently for the Lord, he inclined to me and heard my cry" (40:1).

Q: Describe a time when you were about to do something, but your heart "struck you" that it was wrong. How did you know that was from God? What was the result?

Q: How can we trust in the Lord when our situations are frustrating, when we feel like David, crying out, "How long, O Lord?" What does it look like to wait on the Lord?

1 Samuel 24:8–15 and Romans 12:17–21 [Read]

Talking Point 2: David let God judge between him and Saul.

Q: What does it say about David that he called Saul “my lord” and “my father”?

Q: How did David demonstrate his trust in the Lord again in this passage?

David showed great respect to Saul in this passage by calling him “my lord the king” and bowing to give homage. He called him “my father,” emphasizing their familial bonds through his marriage to Saul’s daughter and friendship covenant with Saul’s son. He showed Saul the piece of his robe to prove that he wasn’t seeking his harm, no matter what his advisors might tell him (24:9–11). David went further and made a new promise, yet not a covenant, to Saul; it was not dependent on Saul in any way. David committed before the Lord not to lay a hand on Saul, no matter what might happen (24:12–13).⁸

When reading this story, we may not always stop and think about it, but what is truly poignant about this scene is just how vulnerable David made himself to Saul in this moment. Saul had chased him all over the country. He had narrowly escaped only by the grace of God. And now David had walked right out in front of Saul, even bowing to the ground. David completely trusted that God would be the one to judge between them. If David really were God’s anointed and the future king, God would protect him.⁹

David had not given up on convincing Saul to stop chasing him. He still pleaded his innocence (24:9–11; 15). He argued that Saul’s hunting him was silly, like using all the power of his great army to chase a single flea (24:14; 26:20). “Dead dog” was a common Hebrew idiom used to denote a contemptible, worthless thing. David promised he would not put out his hand against Saul. He still thought they could make peace, that he could return to the palace with Michal and Jonathan, working side-by-side under Saul until the time came for David to take over the throne peacefully from him.¹⁰

But if not, David committed that no violence toward Saul would come from his hand. Saul might still choose to strike David, but David would not raise his hand against Saul. He would let the Lord judge between them (24:12). David trusted in the Lord’s will for his life so much that he didn’t need to take matters into his own hands. David was leaving room for God’s wrath, choosing to live at peace even with his enemy, and trusting that God would sort it all out (Romans 12:18). He was treating Saul with a kindness Saul didn’t deserve and choosing to overcome evil with good (Romans 12:20–21). David wasn’t sure how Saul would respond, but he chose to do what is right, regardless. This is what it looks like to live at peace with all people “as far as it depends on you” (Romans 12:18).

Q: Why is it hard to let go of the need to defend yourself, get revenge, or work things out for yourself and instead let God judge between you and another person or group?

Q: How would doing that affect your inner person? The other people? The situation?

1 Samuel 24:16–22 [Read]

Talking Point 3: Saul wept and admitted that David was more righteous than he.

Q: How did Saul’s attitude change? What caused the change?

David’s speech worked, and Saul was also “struck” in his heart. Not only did he admit his guilt, but his entire demeanor changed. He called David “my son” and wept before him. Gone was the pride and anger, and in its place was a broken, contrite heart that finally admitted its sin. If the story had ended here, Saul’s relationship with David and God would have been redeemed by his repentance. There is no reason to think his confession and repentance were not authentic, but like his reconciliation to David in verse 19:7, it was temporary. He would chase David again only two chapters later (26:1–2).¹¹

Saul admitted to David that David was more righteous than he because David repaid his evil for good, the same language Paul used in Romans 12 that we read above. Saul also confessed that David would surely be king, something Jonathan had said Saul already knew but wouldn’t admit (23:17). Still thinking of himself, Saul asked him to swear not to cut off Saul’s offspring when David came to the throne (24:21). David made that promise to Saul just as he had to Jonathan earlier (20:14–15).¹²

But the last line lets us know that even though Saul repented, things did not go back to the way they were before (24:22). David did not return to the palace, to his place as general. He made a promise to Saul, but Saul did not invite him back into the family as he had with the last reconciliation (19:7). David and his men returned to the stronghold. He was still on the run, commanding his own rebel army, not the army of the king. This small detail points to the fact that though David would preserve Saul’s name and his offspring in the land, things would never go back to the way they were before. David forgave Saul and showed him honor, but he did not trust Saul.¹³

Q: How can you know when it’s OK to forgive, but not continue the relationship as before? Give examples of situations from which we need to walk away.

Q: In what specific situations right now is God calling you to forgive?

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Took

Main Point: A godly person leaves judgment to the Lord.

Perhaps you've been holding on to a hurt; someone has wronged you, and you carry the burden daily. How do you begin to forgive? What does forgiveness do and not do for you? Dr. Tony Evans, Pastor of Oak Cliff Bible Fellowship in Dallas, shares his thoughts on forgiveness:

Forgiveness is not pretending like the wound didn't happen or that it didn't really hurt. That's called lying. If it happened, it happened, and if it hurt, it hurt. Forgiveness does not mean just brushing off the offense as if it were nothing. So forgiveness does not start with a feeling. Instead, it is a decision of your will to no longer charge the offense to the offender's account. It is the decision to release the other person from a debt in spite of how you feel.¹⁴

Q: What role do feelings play in the act of forgiving?

Q: In what ways does forgiving someone who has wronged you improve your life?

Q: What is the difference between forgiveness and reconciliation?

Q: Is there someone whom you need to forgive? If forgiveness is a choice, what's preventing you from forgiving that person today?

CHALLENGES

THINK: Why is it hard to be kind to someone who has been awful to you? Why does God call us to do that? How can being the bigger person, returning good for evil, change our own hearts even if it doesn't change the other person? How can it change our circumstances and our lives? How can it change the world around us?

PRAY for God to show you areas in which He is calling you to be the bigger person, to reach out to someone in love even though that person has been unkind to you. Pray for those who mistreat you and are unkind to you. Pray not just for them to change and be nicer to you, but also pray for their good.

ACT: Return good for evil. Reach out to someone who has done evil to you in the past or even is doing evil to you now. Ask God to reveal how you can bless him or her, how you can return good for evil, then do it.

NEXT TIME in *The Life of David*: Next week, we'll see David as he continues to live in the wilderness, but not exactly on the run. He will encounter an evil man named Nabal and his beautiful and intelligent wife, Abigail, who will make a wise negotiation with David behind her husband's back. We'll also see David move on from any hope of returning to Saul's house, marrying Abigail and another wife after Saul gives Michal to another husband.

¹ <https://www.inc.com/jessica-stillman/people-judge-your-character-in-01-seconds-according-to-science.html#:~:text=Studies%20of%20first%20impressions%20have%20determined%20that%20people,t he%20full%20piece%29%20recapping%20research%20in%20the%20area>

² <https://time.com/5374799/best-first-impression-experts/>

³ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

⁴ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

⁵ John H. Walton, Victor H. Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, *The IVP Bible Background Commentary* (Downers Grove, IL: Intervarsity Press, 2000).

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⁸ Robert Alter, *The David Story: A Translation with Commentary of 1 and 2 Samuel* (London: W. W. Norton & Co., 1999).

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¹¹ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹² *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹³ *The ESV Study Bible* (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2008).

¹⁴ <https://tonyevans.org/blog/first-step-toward-forgiveness>