

Not Alone: God's Relentless Pursuit
Samuel and Kings: God Calls His People

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May 31, 2026

This morning we are going to take communion in the middle of the sermon, so if you have not yet collected your cup and bread, there are stations around the worship center. Please go and bring those elements to your seats now.

The last four weeks have been fantastic as we launched our series on the Old Testament. As Gary Johnson said, we are doing a fly-over of the Old Testament from 35,000 feet. In fact, speaking of flyover, we are going to be offering a class called Walk Through the Old Testament on June 14. This is a creative flyover to help us learn and remember the main themes of the Bible. Lise Caldwell is going to be our guide. In fact, let's ask Lise to come back on stage for a moment and give us a little sample.

In the past four weeks we have been through Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges and Ruth. So that's where we have come from. Now, Lise, can you please pick up where we left off and, using the Walk Through the Bible motions, show us where we are going today? [View the online sermon to see the demonstration.]

During this series we are discovering that God relentlessly pursued His people. He is always present. We are never alone. Every week we are paying special attention to the LIFE that God has for us and we are using that word "LIFE" as an acrostic to help us notice four distinct observations as we look at the story of God as told in the Old Testament.

- L → Literal—What is the original meaning/message of the book?
- I → Incarnational—How is Jesus reflected in the book?
- F → Formational—How does the book apply to our lives?
- E → Eternal—How does the book point us to heaven and eternity?

Our text for today includes 1 & 2 Samuel, the first 11 chapters of 1 Kings, all of 1 Chronicles and 2 Chronicles 1-9. We are covering roughly 170 years of Israel's history over five books of the Bible.

Today we are looking at little at Samuel, mostly at Saul, and then taking a brief glance at David and Solomon. We'll trace the rise of Israel's monarchy as God responds to His people's desire for a king and establishes leadership meant to reflect His own rule. Through Saul, David, and Solomon, we'll see both the promise and danger of kingship: leadership flourishes when it is marked by humility and continual dependence on God, but it fractures when leaders rely on power, wisdom, or success apart from Him. Even Israel's greatest kings ultimately fall short, creating a longing for a better ruler.

LITERAL

For Samuel, Saul, David, and Solomon we'll review their vocation, virtues, and vices.

Let's begin with Samuel.

Samuel

At the end of the age of the Judges, a woman named Hannah prayed for a son. She made a bargain with God: if God would grant her a son, she would devote him to God's service. God granted her wish and she gave birth to a son (1 Samuel 1:24-28).

Samuel's Vocation

The word “vocation” is from the Latin word *vocare* meaning “to call.” Vocation is not only about a person’s job or career; it really has to do with who a person is, how they are uniquely designed to bear the image of God in the world.

- Vocation is “the place where your deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet” (Frederick Buechner).
- “Don’t ask yourself what the world needs. Ask yourself what makes you come alive, and go do that, because what the world needs is people who have come alive” (Howard Thurman).

Samuel was a prophet (1 Samuel 3:21). He was to hear and speak the word of God. When God called to Samuel in the middle of the night (1 Samuel 3), he spoke over him a vision for his life and gave Samuel his vocation. Three times the Lord called Samuel and three times Samuel went to his mentor Eli and said, “Here I am, you called me.”

Then Eli realized that the Lord was calling the boy. So Eli told Samuel, “Go and lie down, and if he calls you, say, ‘Speak, Lord, for your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place.

The Lord came and stood there, calling as at the other times, “Samuel! Samuel!”

Then Samuel said, “Speak, for your servant is listening.”

And the Lord said to Samuel: “See, I am about to do something in Israel that will make the ears of everyone who hears about it tingle ...

The Lord was with Samuel as he grew up, and he let none of Samuel’s words fall to the ground. And all Israel from Dan to Beersheba recognized that Samuel was attested as a prophet of the Lord. The Lord continued to appear at Shiloh, and there he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. (1 Samuel 3:8-11, 19-21)

Samuel was not alone. When God called, Samuel listened.

Samuel's Virtues

Samuel was attentive to God’s voice (“Speak, for your servant is listening.”)

Samuel's Vices

Samuel failed to establish faithful leadership.

But his sons did not follow his ways. They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice.

So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵They said to him, “You are old, and your sons do not follow your ways; now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.”

But when they said, “Give us a king to lead us...” (1 Samuel 8:3-6)

It grieved Samuel that the people wanted a king, but it was because he had failed to cultivate godliness in the next generation of leaders that the people are asking for a man to lead them.

Saul

King Saul's Vocation

1. Deliverer: "You shall reign over the people of the Lord and you will deliver them from the hand of their surrounding enemies" (1 Samuel 9:16).
2. God's anointed leader: "Has not the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?" (1 Samuel 10:1).

King Saul's Virtues

1. Humility

When he was selected as King his response was meek: who am I? "Am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel?" (1 Samuel 9:21). Then, rather than promoting himself when he was chosen, he actually hid. "They found him hidden among the supplies" (1 Samuel 10:22).

2. Courage

Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, "Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you."

But Nahash the Ammonite replied, "I will make a treaty with you only on the condition that I gouge out the right eye of every one of you and so bring disgrace on all Israel."

The elders of Jabesh said to him, "Give us seven days so we can send messengers throughout Israel; if no one comes to rescue us, we will surrender to you."

When the messengers came to Gibeah of Saul and reported these terms to the people, they all wept aloud. Just then Saul was returning from the fields, behind his oxen, and he asked, "What is wrong with everyone? Why are they weeping?" Then they repeated to him what the men of Jabesh had said.

When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger. He took a pair of oxen, cut them into pieces, and sent the pieces by messengers throughout Israel, proclaiming, "This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel." Then the terror of the Lord fell on the people, and they came out together as one. (1 Samuel 11:1-7)

3. Mercy

When Saul had been selected as king, some people mocked him and they spread an evil report. After Saul wins the battle over the Ammonites, the story continues. "The people then said to Samuel, 'Who was it that asked, "Shall Saul reign over us?" Turn these men over to us so that we may put them to death.' But Saul said, 'No one will be put to death today, for this day the Lord has rescued Israel'" (1 Samuel 11:12-13).

At the beginning of his life and leadership, Saul got off to a strong start. But power corrupted and his vices overcome his virtues. Sadly, Saul's legacy is not in how he began, but how he finished.

King Saul's Vices

Let's look at a story from 1 Samuel 15 that lays out most Saul's vices.

1. Partial Obedience

He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. (1 Samuel 15:8-9)

2. Pride

Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the Lord all that night.

Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal." (1 Samuel 15:10-12)

3. Flattery and Deception

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The Lord bless you! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."

But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" (1 Samuel 15:13-14)

4. Blaming

Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." (1 Samuel 15:15)

5. Self-Deception

"Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the Lord said to me last night."

"Tell me," Saul replied.

Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; wage war against them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?"

"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from

the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord your God at Gilgal.” (1 Samuel 15:16-21)

6. Image Management

But Samuel replied:

“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
as much as in obeying the Lord?
To obey is better than sacrifice,
and to heed is better than the fat of rams.
For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.
Because you have rejected the word of the Lord,
he has rejected you as king.”

Then Saul said to Samuel, “I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them.” (1 Samuel 15:22-24)

7. A spirit of religion

Saul replied, “I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel.” (1 Samuel 15:30)

Contrast this to what Paul writes,

“... now I am happy, not because you were made sorry, but because your sorrow led you to repentance. For you became sorrowful as God intended Godly sorrow brings repentance that leads to salvation and leaves no regret, but worldly sorrow brings death. See what this godly sorrow has produced in you: what earnestness, what eagerness to clear yourselves, what indignation, what alarm, what longing, what concern, what readiness to see justice done. (1 Corinthians 7:9-11)

When Saul “repented” he wanted to be honored. But godly repentance brings one low: indignation, alarm, readiness to see justice done. Repentance means we are ready to bear the consequences.

Paul calls this having a form of godliness but denying its power (2 Timothy 3:5). Saul went through the religious motions, attempting to use God for his own purposes and it led to his demise.

I met with a friend the other day whose life came toppling down because he was caught in sin. Do you know his response? He said in tears, “I have been carrying this burden, but now I am free. I am so glad I have been caught. I am ready for any consequence. I just don’t want to be in bondage any longer.” All the shame he had carried for most of his life was lifted. This is a spirit of repentance and it’s powerful because it is infused with God’s grace!

No self-deception. No self-protection. Repentance and readiness to see things set right!

Perhaps self-deception is Saul’s greatest vice. Because he is self-deceived, he simply fails to see the truth.

When Samuel held a mirror up to Saul, in the words of Jack Nicholson to Tom Cruise in “*A Few Good Men*,” he couldn’t handle the truth!

Saul's story reminds me of the story of Snow White. The wicked queen had a magic mirror that could only speak truth, it could not flatter and it could not be manipulated. When the queen asked the iconic question, "*Mirror, mirror, on the wall, who's the fairest of them all?*" The Mirror replied, "*My Queen, you are the fairest here, but Snow White is a thousand times more fair.*"

These words haunted the queen and she spent the remainder of the story trying to kill the one who was the rightful heir to the throne. Jealousy, fear, insecurity and image management got the best of her.

Shortly after Saul's failure in 1 Samuel 15, David killed Goliath and became a hero to the people. Saul sent him out as a warrior on special missions and he was highly successful. The people loved him and they sang, "Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands." As with the wicked queen who was not an heir to the throne, the throne was taken from Saul. He was gripped with insecurity and jealousy, and it ate him alive.

Saul justified himself, blamed others, protected his own image and clung to power.

In the end, rather than facing his enemies with courage, Saul took his own life.

As we learned with Walk Through the Bible, Saul had no heart. His sin led him away from God. David's sin led him toward God.

David

On the other hand, David had a whole heart. His sin led him toward God.

King David's Vocation

- Shepherd

"There remains yet the youngest, but behold, he is keeping the sheep" (1 Samuel 16:11).

"He chose David his servant and took him from the sheep pens; from tending the sheep he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob" (Psalm 78:70-71).

- Warrior

"Your servant has struck down both lions and bears" (1 Samuel 17:36).

"Saul set him over the men of war" (1 Samuel 18:5).

- Worship Leader

"David son of Jesse, the man exalted by the Most High... the hero of Israel's songs..." (2 Samuel 23:1).

"The sweet psalmist of Israel" (2 Samuel 23:1 ESV).

- King

“Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and from that day on the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David” (1 Samuel 16:13).

“You shall shepherd my people Israel, and you shall become their ruler” (2 Samuel 5:2).

King David's Virtues

- Man after God's heart

“But the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Do not consider his appearance or his height, for I have rejected him. The Lord does not look at the things people look at. People look at the outward appearance, but the Lord looks at the heart’” (1 Samuel 16:7).

- Courageous

“The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion... will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine” (1 Samuel 17:37).

- Loyal

- To Jonathan

“Jonathan became one in spirit with David” (1 Samuel 18:1).

- To Saul

“I will not put out my hand against my lord, for he is the Lord's anointed” (1 Samuel 24:10).

- To the house of Saul

“Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness?” (2 Samuel 9:1)

- Depends on God

“David inquired of the Lord” (1 Samuel 23:2).

King David's Vices

- Lust

“David saw from the roof a woman bathing” (2 Samuel 11:2).

“David sent messengers and took her” (2 Samuel 11:4).

He saw. He desired. He took what was not his.

- Murder

“Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest” (2 Samuel 11:15).

- Absence as a father

“His father had never rebuked him” (1 Kings 1:6, talking about David in reference to his son Adonijah).

And yet, what set David apart from Saul was that when he was confronted, his heart was soft. The story of Nathaniel the prophet confronting David is potent. David confessed and repented in sackcloth and ashes. He fasted and mourned and was heart-broken. Psalm 51 captures the powerful reality that God’s mercy is poured out and his compassion blotted out David’s sins.

Solomon

Out of the ashes of adultery, a son was born of Bathsheba after she became David’s wife. This son, Solomon, became the third in the line of kings. He had a divided heart.

King Solomon’s Vocation

1. Build a Temple
2. Usher in a peaceful kingdom

King Solomon’s Virtues

1. Wisdom
2. Peace
3. Influence

King Solomon’s Vices

1. Turned to other gods
2. Married foreign women
3. Failed as a father (and God divided the Kingdom)

INCARNATIONAL

Incarnate is referring to God incarnate, God in the flesh. How does this story point us to Jesus Christ the King?

1. “And the boy Samuel continued to grow in stature and in favor with the Lord and with people” (1 Samuel 2:26). This is exactly what was spoken of Jesus in Luke 2:52 when he was 12 years old.
2. Jesus was born in Bethlehem the town of David, “because they were in the house and line of David” (Luke 2:4).
3. If Goliath won against David, the entire army would win. But if Israel produced a warrior to defeat Goliath, then the entire Israelite army would win. The victory was imputed. When Jesus died on the cross, he went to battle and won a victory that we could not win on our behalf and it was imputed to us as righteousness.

4. The final work of King David was to get things ready for the temple to be built. He wrote songs and prepared materials, and then Solomon built the temple. Now, the temple is the place where the presence of God was most potent. It was the house of God.
5. Where was this temple built? On the same mountain where Abraham went to sacrifice Isaac. 2 Chronicles tells us that “Solomon began to build the temple of the Lord in Jerusalem on Mount Moriah.” This is stunning: here on this mountain where God provided a lamb for the sacrifice, the temple was built. The sacrificial system was organized and God’s presence was potent.

FORMATIONAL

Vocation

- What do you discover when you slow down long enough to echo the words of Samuel, “Speak Lord, your servant is listening?”
- Where is the place that your own deep gladness and the world’s deep hunger meet?
- What is it that when you do it you feel fully alive, as if the very energy of God is pulsing in your veins, something so powerful you can’t help but invite others into it?

Virtues

- Are there virtues that God is inviting you to cultivate?
 - Courage
 - Loyalty
 - Integrity
 - Mercy
 - A person after God’s heart

Vices

Take out the mirror and hold it up to your own life. Can you see clearly in the reflection what is there or are you self-deceived? When people shine a light on your own shortcomings, do you excuse them away, trying to manage an image that is not congruent with what is happening inside?

Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like” (James 1:23-24).

ETERNAL

Where do we find an eternal component in this story? When the people want a king, they are touching a longing for someone to come and save them. “Give us a king who can deliver us.” “Your house and your kingdom shall endure forever before me; your throne shall be established forever” (2 Samuel 7:16).

At the dedication of the Temple, Solomon said, “Will God really dwell on earth? The heavens, even the highest heaven, cannot contain you” (1 Kings 8:27).

This king came in the person of Jesus. There is a day when the King will come again. The hope for this King is woven through the story of all the kings of Israel and the Psalms of David are filled with worship to the King who was, who is, and who is to come.

And so today, we remember that God *still* calls His people. We are not alone. Forever and ever and ever we will be with the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.