

We've been in this series, Unlikely Leaders, and we've looked at Gideon, at Ruth, and now we'll look at David. King David is a big name in the Christian faith. He wrote 75 of the Psalms that we know today. His life makes up a big portion of our Old Testament, and his descendants ultimately lead to Jesus Christ... David is a BIG DEAL in scripture. And yet, he almost never showed up on the scene in the first place. In fact, he's sort of God's pinch hitter for king Saul. God calls an "audible!" if you will. But before we get there...

This is a series about leadership. For a lot of us, we hear the word "Leader" and we immediately CHECKOUT. We were never the leader on the kickball field growing up, never the best in class, never led anything. We don't identify with that word, so we naturally think the word "leader" is referring to someone else. Someone smarter, taller, more organized, more attractive... So there's that: A disassociation with the word itself.

But this word "leadership" carries some significant stigma with it too. Some of us have been around leaders that have abused their position. We've had bosses that let their ego make their business decisions. We've seen guys like Martin Shkreli, the young entrepreneur buying rights to an AIDS medicine and jacking the price up 5000%. For the women here, we've had entire structures within the church leadership that had ignored you and your gifts for leadership. Good grief, just look at our history in Boston with our Catholic priests. We're no strangers to poor leadership. (My family just watched SPOTLIGHT... It was a shocking, uncomfortable expose on that whole thing. Terrible leadership. Corrupt, abusive, scared.)

And so, for many of us, we want to stay as far away as possible from that word. We've never seen it done well. We've never been taught how to grow into it, and so we CHECKOUT when we hear someone talking about it. "Leadership? Nope! Not for me."

But here's the thing: All throughout Scripture, we see men (AND WOMEN) in these incredible, unlikely, counter-cultural roles... Positions that flew in the face of their societal norms. Normal, everyday people, like you and me, forever preserved in the Bible because of their faithfulness. Not their skill. Not their natural abilities.

- Who would put a stuttering murderer in charge of a nation? God would. And He did: Moses.
- Who would call a cowardly evangelist to bring a message of destruction to a violent nation? God would: Jonah.
- Who would choose uneducated, ordinary men and women to spread His most precious message? God would: ME! (And Peter & John in the book of Acts)
- Who would have an exiled, disfigured old man describe for us what eternity might look like? God would: Apostle John in the book of Revelations.

All throughout Scripture, the least likely people are chosen to do extraordinary things.

Today, for next 20 minutes, I'm asking you to SUSPEND YOUR DISBELIEF. Allow yourself the room to daydream for a moment here.

- What if God had something extraordinary planned for you life?
- What if you were COMPLETELY UNPREPARED for what God has coming next?
- What if life surprised you in the next few weeks?

We'll be in 1 Samuel today. The 9th book within the Bible (which "bible" simply means "books" from Biblia in Latin. A collection of books.) The guy that this book is named after is this OT figure named Samuel. He was a bit of a miracle child himself, born to a supposedly barren mother. "SURPRISE!" Samuel is a priest, he's also the last Judge, because after Samuel, Israel is led by kings (which we'll talk about today). Another fun fact, Samuel is the only GHOST we meet in the Bible. I'm telling you guys, there's some CRAZY stuff in this book! 1 Samuel 28, Saul meets with a witch and conjures Samuel's ghost back and they have a crazy conversation

where Samuel lays a smack-down on Saul. K, enough about Samuel, the ghost, priest, judge and happy accident. Samuel is important, but this sermon is actually about DAVID & SAUL.

In the course of Israel's history, somewhere around 1 Samuel 8, maybe 3000 years ago, the Israelites started wanting a KING. They had had judges so far, but now the judges weren't doing a great job and the elders met with Samuel to discuss all of this.

1 SAMUEL 8:5-9

5 "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

6 Samuel was displeased with their request and went to the Lord for guidance. 7 "Do everything they say to you," the Lord replied, "for they are rejecting me, not you. They don't want me to be their king any longer. 8 Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. 9 Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them."

So Samuel warns them about what having a KING will mean... Violence and war will be introduced. That their daughters will be forced to cook for the new armies, and that the king will take away the best food from their vineyards and olive groves...

1 SAMUEL 8:19-22

19 But the people refused to listen to Samuel's warning. "Even so, we still want a king," they said. 20 "We want to be like the nations around us. Our king will judge us and lead us into battle."

21 So Samuel repeated to the Lord what the people had said, 22 and the Lord replied, "Do as they say, and give them a king." Then Samuel agreed and sent the people home.

The very next chapter, Saul is introduced. He's described as "the most handsome man in Israel, head and shoulders taller than anyone else in the land." And the Lord makes it very clear that this young man, Saul, is who He is choosing to become the ruler... the new king. Samuel approaches Saul to tell him about all of this, and Saul is sort of in disbelief, "Me?! A king?" but Samuel wines and dines him, then anoints him with oil.

Saul is sent on his way, and over the next day or so, amazing things take place in his life, all to AFFIRM what Samuel had been saying to him. It begins to sink in for Saul... "I'm chosen to be king."

Samuel calls a big gathering together, like a big block-party, (or I like to picture it like a Burning Man Festival, thousands and thousands of people gathered in a desert... who knows!)

1 SAMUEL 10: 24-25

24 Then Samuel said to all the people, "This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!"

And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

25 Then Samuel told the people what the rights and duties of a king were. He wrote them down on a scroll and placed it before the Lord. Then Samuel sent the people home again.

So things are OK for a minute. Israel has their king. "Mazel-Tov!" But things become violent pretty quickly, just as the Lord had warned them about. It's literally the next chapter when Saul starts rallying men into an army, and not just a few here and there... 330,000 men joined his army in the very next chapter.

Over the next 5 chapters, there's this odd dance of violence and war with worshiping the Lord and celebration. It's hard for us to wrap our minds around this seeming dichotomy. But we need to remember that these were barbaric times... Times of survival. When tribes would war and entire civilizations would be wiped out. And God was determined to protect His people.

It seems that Saul has been following God's orders up to this point. Until we get to chapter 15...

In 1 Samuel 15, everything changes for Saul. Israel is threatened by the Amalekites, and God commands Saul to lead a siege against the Amalekite nation:

THIS IS SAMUEL SPEAKING ON BEHALF OF GOD: 3 Now go and completely destroy the entire Amalekite nation—men, women, children, babies, cattle, sheep, goats, camels, and donkeys.

Again, this is hard for us to even wrap our minds around, but this was a different time and God was revealing different parts of Himself to His people. (This is a side-note, but whenever I read stories like this, I HAVE to go back to the person of Jesus... To remember that He redefined everything we know of God's character and heart for us. Thank God we don't serve a God that commands us to slaughter entire nations of people, Amen?)

So let's see what Saul does with this command:

7 Then Saul slaughtered the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, east of Egypt. 8 He captured Agag, the Amalekite king, but completely destroyed everyone else. 9 Saul and his men spared Agag's life and kept the best of the sheep and goats, the cattle, the fat calves, and the lambs—everything, in fact, that appealed to them. They destroyed only what was worthless or of poor quality.

10 Then the Lord said to Samuel, 11 "I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command." Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the Lord all night.

12 Early the next morning Samuel went to find Saul. Someone told him, "Saul went to the town of Carmel to set up a monument to himself; then he went on to Gilgal."

13 When Samuel finally found him, Saul greeted him cheerfully. "May the Lord bless you," he said. "I have carried out the Lord's command!"

In this one moment of disobedience, Saul falls out of favor with the Lord. Entirely. And the chapter ends with the author stating, "And the Lord was sorry he had ever made Saul king of Israel."

The next chapter, Saul sets out to find Israel's new king.

David enters the story... David was the youngest of 8 sons. Back in that day, that basically meant you were not very smart, and not very LUCKY to be the 8th son. There was very little expected of him. He had 7 older brothers that would inherit everything, get attention from the parents... David was a tagalong. The 8th son never leads anything. He has no one younger than him in the family. He always follows. This was true 3000 years ago in Bethlehem, and it's basically still true today. We all know younger siblings that take longer to talk because their older siblings do all the talking for them!

So this was David's life. He was responsible for a small flock of sheep. He was given a sling and a Lyre, a small harp-like instrument. He would spend days and days out on the mountainside, all alone. Lonely but using his time to sing songs to the Lord and to practice his aim with his slingshot. At night sometimes, he'd sing by the fire and his loneliness would get the better of him. He'd get wrapped up in thinking, "This is it. This is what I'll be doing for my entire life." He was the 8th son. He was lonely. He'd be a shepherd for his entire life. This was David's reality.

Until one day, when Samuel showed up at his house. One of David's brothers ran out to the fields to find David and bring him back to the house. Samuel had met all 7 older brothers, but hadn't met David yet. You see, Samuel was looking for Israel's next king, and he felt as though God had led him here. When Samuel saw David, he knew in his heart that this was who God wanted as king. An "unlikely leader" if there ever was one... the youngest of 8 sons.

“Kneel down, David,” Samuel said to him. And Samuel pours oil over David’s head, and with his mind racing, David realized that this was what men do to designate royalty... David realized he was being made king. But not yet. Anointed to be king, but the throne was still occupied. Saul was still in control! A promise for David’s future, but a long road ahead.

God’s blessing had left Saul and God chose David to be the next king in line. But in the physical realm, nothing changed. Saul was still king for YEARS and YEARS and YEARS... Something had significantly shifted in the spiritual realm, but Saul was still king. David was still a simple shepherd, and returned to his flock.

Well eventually Saul brings David into his inner circle. David had some great military victories (oh you know... killing Goliath with a slingshot... (all those hours of practice in the fields payed off!)) and Saul wanted him around after that. 1 SAMUEL 18:5 Whatever Saul asked David to do, David did it successfully. So Saul made him a commander over the men of war, an appointment that was welcomed by the people and Saul’s officers alike.

The people loved Saul, but they loved David too! And over time, the people began to love David MORE than Saul. They would sing songs about how great David was.

And Saul’s jealousy and fear of David overthrowing him began to torment him. He became paranoid. He would have these mental breakdown/anxiety attack type of things, and he would ask David to come play music for him, because it was the only way he could calm down. And David would. And Saul would calm down.

But eventually, the paranoia boiled over into Saul straight-up trying to kill David. Every once in a while, when David would come in to play music for Saul, and when David wasn’t looking, Saul would THROW A SPEAR AT HIM, trying to kill him... Saul began throwing spears at David. And this happened more than once! I mean, I’ve never thrown a spear at someone, but I think about it ALL THE TIME, but I’ve never done it... Saul is being PRETTY OVERT in trying to kill David.

Here’s the crazy thing: David kept coming back and kept serving Saul as king. If someone threw a spear at me? I’d probably stay far away from them. Even when people throw metaphorical spears at us, like insults or mean comments on Facebook or bad reviews at work, we tend to return the favor...

David should have known that when someone throws a spear at you, you pick the spear up, turn it around, and throw it back at them. Right? You need to prove yourself as a man, David! You’re courageous. You stand for what is right. You’re tough. All of these things prove that you are a STRONG candidate for kingship. Showing you’ll be a strong king... But a king just like Saul... Not a king with a heart for God...

But unlike anyone else in spear-throwing history, David did not throw Saul’s spears back at him. Nor did he make any spears of his own and throw them. Something was different about David. All he did was dodge the spears. This is the beginning of David’s character revealing itself.

As we look at King Saul, and his big ego, self-centeredness, we must be honest about the Saul within each of us. Saul represents the unbroken, self-guided man.. The “pick-myself-up-by-my-bootstraps, self-made man.” This is what Father Richard Rohr would call “The False Self.” Finding his identity in his kingship, and the worship and adoration of his minions. Threads of which, when we’re honest, live inside each of us.

We have a seed of that “Saul-ness” within each of us. And there is only one way to get rid of him. Which we can learn from David.

David the shepherd could have grown up to be King Saul II, if he had finally gotten fed up with Saul’s spears and eventually thrown one back at him, killing him and taking the throne... But David would’ve been feeding his inner Saul. And God wouldn’t have that.

So God cut away the Saul inside David's heart. (Which, by the way, looks years and years, and it almost killed David as the patient.)

And how did God remove David's inner Saul? What were the "scalpel and tweezers" He used to do the operation? God used King Saul.

It's ironic that King Saul sought to destroy David, but, in the process, that he ultimately HELPED David become a better man. The circumstances that Saul put David in actually HELPED David become more dependent on God, it tore apart his False Self, he was broken and utterly reliant on God... Exactly what God wanted in His next king.

You see, after some of these spear-throwing episodes, King Saul flat-out orders his men to kill David. So David did the only thing he could do... He left quietly. He could've exposed Saul for the coward he was, he could've stood out in public and rallied a crowd against Saul... But he didn't. He simply got up and left town.

And he spent the next season of his life in caves. Knowing God's promise for his future, but looking at a desperate and miserable present day, David lived in caves. Long nights alone. Years of wrestling with doubt. Praying to God for days on end... Singing His praises. Writing songs on every possible emotion he felt...

As Saul's men hunted him, David lived in caves.

Over the next chapters of the story, it's amazing... There are multiple opportunities for David to kill Saul, but he restrains himself. David has Saul in vulnerable positions, but David leaves him be and allows Saul to continue hunting for him.

This doesn't seem to be a very good story of how a king ascends to the throne. We don't like stories that have the hero living in a cave. But God does.

But over those 8 years, God was doing something magnificent in David... God was growing David's character in the caves.

That's a spiritual growth path NONE OF US would sign up for! I can see the infomercial now... "Are you feeling spiritually stuck? Does your heart reek of Saul-ness? Call now and reserve your spot in A CAVE FOR THE NEXT 8 YEARS!"

And yet... Look at the results: David, a broken, humble, repentant man emerges. The soon-to-be King, with not an ounce of Saul within him. His character refined. God had his king. He was ready.

His character was formed in the cave.

It makes me wonder, for us today... "What cave does God have you in right now?" What circumstances, outside of your control, have you hiding in a cave, your future looking bleak, long anxious nights, you being stretched in every imaginable way...?

Maybe God is up to something...

Maybe God is using your present reality to kill the Saul within you.

Maybe God is crafting your character within the cave.

Those of you that know David's story know that having high-character doesn't mean you live free from sin... Far from it.

David's life was riddled with sin. Some of the most scandalous sin in all of Scripture. Adultery, leading to pregnancy, leading to first-degree murder. That's Soap Opera stuff right there.

So if high-character doesn't mean sinless, what does it mean?

It means "recognition and recovery-rate."

This is what mature, Christian spirituality looks like: RECOGNITION and RECOVERY-RATE.

- How quickly do you recognize the sin in your life?

- Start out recognizing it a few days after, and then it becomes hours and minutes, realizing you've messed up.

- The eventually you get to a point where you're seeing the sin in advance, and avoiding those circumstances altogether.

- How quickly do you recover from your misstep?

- How quickly do you turn back to God and say, "WHEW! I don't know what I was doing over there, but we're back!"

- I believe there's a SECOND VICTORY the Enemy can have when we sin and get discouraged and then OUR WHOLE DAY IS DERAILED... A second victory.

- And quick recovery-rate steals that second victory from the Enemy.

In this, we see the greatest difference between Saul and David.

Saul lived in a constant state of justifying his actions, even when they were sinful.

David lived in a constant state of repentance.

In Saul, there was disobedience followed by pride,

In David, there was disobedience followed by humility.

And God knew the difference.

Here's why this matters in this conversation about "leadership." Good, healthy, Godly leadership is found at the intersection of CHARACTER and COMPETENCY. Real quick, let's break out another XY axis, just for old-time's sake:

Here's a chart from low – high character and low – high competency.

- If you have low-character and low-competency, you're irrelevant. No harm, no good.

- If you have high-character and low-competency, you're limited in the good you're able to bring into the Kingdom. You're a faithful person, but you've never invested in yourself to grow. You have the potential of being a great leader, you just need to grow in your competency a little bit.

- If you have high-character and high competency, you're exactly where God wants you. This is where David lived. Through the dark seasons in the cave, his character grew strong and honoring to the Lord. This is where God wants us. This is the sweet spot for everyone in the Church. Healthy hearts and strong, healthy hands.

- But, there's a 4th quadrant. And certainly the most dangerous in the Church. These are people with high-competency and low-character. These are the talented, eloquent, experienced, attractive, great teachers, great singers, socially intelligent... That have no backbone. No moral footing. No foundation.

- These are the people that we quite often put on stage as soon as they walk through the door. Especially in worship leading... "OH you can sing?! Here's a whole church. Lead us spiritually!" Dangerous stuff. This is why we end up with stories like we did in SPOTLIGHT. This is where we get these stories of famous, mega-church pastors failing publicly in terrible ways.

So as you look at this... Where are you up here? Where do you find yourself in this chat?

- Do you need a season of investing in your character?
- Are you in a dangerous position?
- Do you have a hunger to grow in your competencies?
- Are you close to the Lord but feel limited in what you're able to do for the Kingdom?

Understanding where you are is the first step. But equally important is taking the next step forward into a season of INTENTIONAL GROWTH.

Harbor, if we are called to be a community that Helps people find their way back to God, we MUST pay attention to this stuff.

What if we're on the precipice of a new season, and God is simply waiting for us to be honest about where we are, and intentional about where we're headed?

Saul lived his life constantly struggling against God's plan.
David lived in complete submission to it.

David showed the people of Israel what it looked like to lead well. To be faithful in the midst of opposition. To use years of doubt and struggle or worry as opportunity to grow... To exercise his faith and grow his character. David showed us what it meant to be a good king.

And, of course, his entire life pointed forward to one of his descendants... The True King. The Perfect and Final King.

A King that would live His life under scrutiny. A King that had moments of internal torment, moments of temptation, moments of testing and revealing His character.

A King whose true kingship was revealed to us, not in the crown He wore or the castle He lived in, but in the EMPTY cave He left behind.

Our King, Jesus.

Perfect example, uniting all of us, and drawing us forward to a brighter tomorrow.

Let's pray...