

DISCOVERY QUESTIONS

Anatomy of a Failed Life
“Pressure Points” Series
March 11/12, 2017

Main Idea

There is no substitute for faith expressing itself through obedience in our relationship with God.

Discovery Questions

1. Is there anything you’ve bought that made you proud of your ability to successfully “bargain” down the price? How did you negotiate the deal? In general, how good of a “bargainer” would you say you are?

Our current series is about the life of David. But there’s no way to talk about David without talking about Saul. In the last few passages that talk about Saul, he has been portrayed almost as a villain, a “foil” to David and God’s desire to work through David. But to dismiss Saul as just a villain is a grave mistake. Saul was a real person who, like any real person, was a complex individual. Like David, Saul started out with a lot of promise in his life. And like David, Saul did make some good choices that led to early victories. But pretty soon in his life, some of Saul’s character deficiencies led him into a downward spiral that ultimately caused him to become an “enemy” of God (1 Samuel 28:16) that led to a very horrific death and ignoble end (1 Samuel 31).

For today’s Discovery Questions, we’ll go a bit backwards in the book of 1 Samuel, to 1 Samuel 15 in order to see the incident that caused the biggest rift between Saul and God, leading to God’s ultimate rejection of Saul as King over Israel. We’ll then see how we can avoid making Saul’s mistake in our own lives.

2. Read 1 Samuel 15:1-23. What is Saul’s reaction to his own disobedience in this passage? What is God’s reaction to Saul’s disobedience (as shown through His own words and the words of the prophet Samuel)?

Regarding Saul’s behavior in this passage, one author wrote:

“Saul’s sin was a common one for religious people. He simply followed his own opinions and will. He departed a little from what the Lord revealed. He offered sacrifices to God, and he thought God should be satisfied with that. Yet he sacrificed something the Lord had said He did not want. This is not faith, this is religion. Religion does not care what God really wants; religion gives God what it wants to give, and expects God to accept anything. When it came to obedience, Saul would obey parts of what the Lord revealed, and he thought God should be satisfied with that.”

In light of this, answer the following questions.

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3.
 - a. React to the above quote. Where have you seen people try to substitute “religion” and religious practices for a genuine relationship with God; one that involves obedience to Him and His will?
 - b. What do you think motivates people to do this? Why do you think so many people find “religion” more attractive than a genuine relationship with God that seeks to do what God asks?

4.
 - a. Has there ever been a time in your life when you tried to make up for disobedience to God in one area of your life by resorting to “religious” practices, or offering to God something that he didn’t ask for? How did that turn out?
 - b. In general, are you ever tempted to try and “bargain” with God, thinking that if you do certain things, then God will owe you special favors? What do you think motivates that behavior?
 - c. Is there an area in your life right now where you might be trying to bargain with God—thinking He owes you something in exchange for something you’re doing for him? Or is there an area where you’re trying to mask an area of disobedience by resorting to “religious” practices, offering to God something He hasn’t asked for? What would it take for you to simply be obedient in that area of your life for no other reason than because God asked for it? What keeps you from doing that?

5. One of the contrasts between Saul’s life and David’s is that when Saul is confronted with his sin, he insists he is doing what’s right (see 1 Samuel 15:20), while when David is confronted with his sin he admits his wrongdoing immediately (see 2 Samuel 12:13). When you are confronted with wrongdoing, who are you more like—David or Saul? How can you become more like David in this area of your life?

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Leader Guide

1. Is there anything you've bought that made you proud of your ability to successfully "bargain" down the price? How did you negotiate the deal? In general, how good of a "bargainer" would you say you are?

This is a "lighter" question designed to get the conversation going. Spend about 5-7 minutes on this question.

Our current series is about the life of David. But there's no way to talk about David without talking about Saul. In the last few passages that talk about Saul, he has been portrayed almost as a villain, a "foil" to David and God's desire to work through David. But to dismiss Saul as just a villain is a grave mistake. Saul was a real person who, like any real person, was a complex individual. Like David, Saul started out with a lot of promise in his life. And like David, Saul did make some good choices that led to early victories. But pretty soon in his life, some of Saul's character deficiencies led him into a downward spiral that ultimately caused him to become an "enemy" of God (1 Samuel 28:16) that led to a very horrific death and ignoble end (1 Samuel 31).

For today's Discovery Questions, we'll go a bit backwards in the book of 1 Samuel, to 1 Samuel 15 in order to see the incident that caused the biggest rift between Saul and God, leading to God's ultimate rejection of Saul as King over Israel. We'll then see how we can avoid making Saul's mistake in our own lives.

2. Read 1 Samuel 15:1-23. What is Saul's reaction to his own disobedience in this passage? What is God's reaction to Saul's disobedience (as shown through His own words and the words of the prophet Samuel)?

This passage occurs several years into Saul's reign. (David has not yet come on the scene. He appears for the first time in the next chapter.) At this point in Saul's reign, he has had some successes, and also some failures. As chapter 15 opens, God gives Saul a very clear command: It is time for the Israelites to go to war against the Amalekites and completely obliterate them. (The Amalekites had done evil to the Israelites for centuries, and God has continually spared them. Since they never repented of their evil, it was time for them to experience God's judgment.) Saul obeys God's command in part; he goes to war against the Amalekites, but doesn't follow God's command completely – sparing their King and some of their livestock (1 Samuel 15:7-9).

Saul's reaction to his own disobedience in this passage is interesting to say the least. Although Saul does admit he didn't do what God wanted—he spared the sheep and the King of the Amalekites (1 Samuel 15:15, 20-21), he also insists that he did nothing wrong (1 Samuel 15:13, 20-21). Saul somehow seems to think that because he has offered to sacrifice some of the spoils of war that that makes everything OK in God's eyes; that God somehow can be "bought" or appeased with something that He never asked for.

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God's reaction is clear: He is displeased. God sees Saul's actions for what they are, simple disobedience (1 Samuel 15:10-11, 17-19, 22-23). Because of this, God decides that Saul can no longer be king of Israel (1 Samuel 15:10, 23).

Spend 8-10 minutes on this question in its entirety.

3. **a. React to the above quote. Where have you seen people try to substitute “religion” and religious practices for a genuine relationship with God; one that involves obedience to Him and His will?**
- b. What do you think motivates people to do this? Why do you think so many people find “religion” more attractive than a genuine relationship with God that seeks to do what God asks?**

For part “a,” people do things like this all the time—they refuse to give what God wants, thinking they can make up for it by doing other things which may be good, but not ultimately what God asked for. For example, a boyfriend and girlfriend sleeping with each other outside of marriage, who “make up” for their disobedience by joining a Bible study, thinking that maybe God will be pleased with that action, and forget about their disobedience. Or a husband or wife who neglects their spouse but pours themselves into serving in volunteer organizations. There are entire religious systems built around this idea. Some people come from religious backgrounds where “ritual” (communion, confession, saying the Rosary) is substituted for a genuine commitment to God and His will.

For part “b,” religion is so much easier because it's God on our terms. We can do whatever we want and think God should be pleased with it. It doesn't require us to give our will to God, just do what is easy and convenient for us.

Spend 7-10 minutes on this question in its entirety.

4. **a. Has there ever been a time in your life when you tried to make up for disobedience to God in one area of your life by resorting to “religious” practices, or offering to God something that he didn't ask for? How did that turn out?**
- b. In general, are you ever tempted to try and “bargain” with God, thinking that if you do certain things, then God will owe you special favors? What do you think motivates that behavior?**
- c. Is there an area in your life right now where you might be trying to bargain with God—thinking He owes you something in exchange for something you're doing for him? Or is there an area where you're trying to mask an area of disobedience by resorting to “religious” practices, offering to God something He hasn't asked for? What would it take for you to simply be obedient in that area of your life for no other reason than because God asked for it? What keeps you from doing that?**

It's common in the Christian life to either not doing everything that God asks us to do, and justify our lack of obedience with, “But, I do so much in other areas,” or to DO what God has asked us to do, but think that because of it we are owed something from God in return—that somehow our

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obedience puts God in debt to us. Both are wrong. Simply put, God wants obedience from us. He doesn't want us to "bargain" with Him, either by trying to convince Him that since we're obeying in other areas He should ignore an area of disobedience, or by thinking He now owes us something for our obedience. God simply wants us to obey because He is God and we are not.

Spend about 10-12 minutes on this question in its entirety.

5. One of the contrasts between Saul's life and David's is that when Saul is confronted with his sin, he insists he is doing what's right (see 1 Samuel 15:20), while when David is confronted with his sin he admits his wrongdoing immediately (see 2 Samuel 12:13). When you are confronted with wrongdoing, who are you more like—David or Saul? How can you become more like David in this area of your life?

It's important to note that God always meets genuine confession with grace. The second that David admitted his mistake in 2 Samuel 12:13, Nathan tells David that God forgives Him. Often we resist confession because we're afraid of what will happen when we admit we've done something wrong. There is no condemnation for the believer (Romans 8:1), and therefore, there is no reason to not admit our wrongdoing before God (or others, since God is the ultimate judge). Realizing this can help us become more like David in this area.

Spend 7-10 minutes on this question in its entirety.