

Eugene Peterson, *Leap Over A Wall*.

“David deals with God. As an instance of humanity in himself, he isn’t much. He has little wisdom to pass on to us on how to live successfully. He was an unfortunate parent and an unfaithful husband. From a purely historical viewpoint, he was a barbaric (Iron Age) chieftain with a talent for poetry. But **David’s importance isn’t in his morality or his military prowess but in his experience of and witness to God. Every event in his life was a confrontation with God.**” (p.5)

David's story is rooted in two other stories.

- Samuel who called and anointed him king
- and Saul, his predecessor

Samuel:

His parents are godly people, and he attends a parochial school attached to the temple of the Lord at Shiloh. Very early on, God calls Samuel to serve him, and the text tells us that “All Israel from Dan to Beersheba knew that Samuel was a trustworthy prophet of the Lord.” 1 Samuel 3:2

“Dan to Beersheba”

= “from sea to shining sea”

“from border to border”

“from Bellingham to San Diego”

Throughout his career, Samuel presides over significant military action, administers justice as a circuit rider throughout the nation, and raises two boys. They show no talent or character to follow in Samuel's footsteps, so as he approaches retirement, the question arises, who will succeed Samuel in this critical role of leadership over Israel?

Always before, God raised up a charismatic leader who was anointed by God to serve in very particular ways.

- Moses led the people out of Egypt.
- Joshua led them into the Promised Land.
- Judges were called upon to provide military leadership in the formative years of the nation.
- Priests served in places of worship.

It wasn't a perfect system. The phrase "*and Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord*" is a refrain that sounds throughout their history. But it kept the 12 tribes of Israel united in a loose federation and reminded them that **God was always in charge of preparing a new person for service.**

The office of leader was not inherited, and Scripture makes a point of noting how inadequate the second generation often became.

The twist this time is that Israel has been looking around at all their neighbors, and they decide they don't want a religious leader like a priest or a prophet. They don't want a temporary general. The threats to their safety and sovereignty seem so great that now they want a king like everybody else.

1 Samuel 8:4-5 “Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, and said to him, ‘You are old and your sons do not follow in your ways; appoint for us, then, a king to govern us, like other nations.’”

Samuel isn't happy with this request, and neither is God. God sees it as a rejection of God's own self, not just of Samuel as prophet. So God has Samuel warn them of how high the cost will be to support a king.

“A king will take your sons to be warriors, and your daughters to run his household,” Samuel cautions. “He will take the best of what you produce and possess, and you will be sorry you ever asked.” **(v 10-18)**

1 Samuel 8: 19-22 “But the people refused to listen to the voice of Samuel; they said, ‘No! We are determined to have a king over us, so that we also may be like other nations, and that our king may govern us and go out before us and fight our battles.’

“When Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the Lord.”

Can you hear the deep sigh from heaven??

“Then, the Lord said to Samuel, ‘Listen to their voice and set a king over them.’” **(21-22)**

Another long sigh.

And even though Samuel doesn't write it down, I hear God say: “But they can't say I didn't warn them!”

There is something important for us in these verses.

Begging and demanding and ignoring wise warnings may mean that we eventually get what we want, but that doesn't necessarily make it good for us.

Whatever we choose, God remains with us.
God loves us just as much as ever.

But this text asks us to consider the cost of having things our own way. Perhaps we need to reconsider even the deepest desires of our hearts. What price will we pay for ignoring warning signs, underestimating costs, plunging ahead, determined to ask for forgiveness rather than for permission?

Saul: Humble and Handsome

1 Samuel 9:1-17, 10:9-27

Saul was the price Israel paid. God says, “Well, right then, give them a king,” (8:22)

In the very next verse, we meet the man God chooses for the job. Saul is the handsome son of a wealthy man. “There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he; he stood head and shoulders above everyone else.” 9:2

I've always wondered if God wasn't being just a teensy bit ironic here.

Maybe not, but doesn't Saul sound somewhat like a character in a prime-time soap opera?



Apparently, his stature had not yet gone to Saul's head, because when we meet him, he is still a working man. His father's donkeys had strayed, and so Dad sends Saul off with "one of the boys", perhaps a servant, perhaps a younger brother, to find them.



The tracking team wanders quite a distance to the north, and finally realize they've gone too far. Saul wants to turn back, but the boy with him remembers that Samuel lives nearby and might be able to help them.

1 Samuel 9:6 “There is a man of God in this town; he is a man held in honor. Whatever he says always come true. Let us go there now; perhaps he will tell us about the journey on which we have set out.”

Something for us in these verses too:

- Samuel's word was reliable.
- He always told the truth.
- People trusted him.

These are not traits that his successors manage to imitate, to their great detriment and the detriment of Israel.

Simultaneously, God speaks to Samuel.

9:16 “Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be ruler over my people Israel.”

And so, when Saul walks into town just when God told Samuel he would, the process is set into motion to name him king over Israel.

It is possible that both men could have missed this divine encounter.

Saul could have refused to do the menial labor involved in chasing donkeys through the mountains. We are talking about a journey through several counties here, all in the mountains above Jericho, not a jaunt through the local dog park.

Is it there something for us here about God working through the most tedious of chores?

Then again, Saul could have ignored the advice of the boy with him--he was too young and inconsequential to be taken seriously.

Saul could also have dismissed the thought that a man of God might be helpful to them in their work. What do prophets know about recovering livestock?

Is there something for us here about hearing God speak through voices that are often disregarded?

Then, there's **Samuel**. Samuel could have been busy with far more important things than watching for a stranger to wander into town. He could easily have been so busy sacrificing, speaking, and problem solving for the clamoring crowds that he missed God's quiet voice of direction. He could have been on his way somewhere else, where the pastures seemed greener than his own hometown. Who expects to find a king lurking around their own neighborhood?

Wonder who we'll find in ours?

There is so little drama in this story that it is unnerving. It is all very, very quiet for such a momentous occasion, although the shouting starts a few chapters later. But here, now, God uses the routine daily activities of two men to move them into a life changing encounter with each other.

Saul helps his dad out and goes along with a young boy's curiosity and finds himself being anointed king of Israel. Samuel is hanging out in his hometown, doing his regular work, and runs into Saul.

What could be perceived as sheer coincidence becomes a divine encounter, because both are open to God as they go about their day.

It can happen for us, too. Every hour of our daily work has the potential to be filled with the presence of God; every encounter with another person, the possibility of a divine appointment.

Saul and Samuel both invite us to stay awake, to pay attention.

They tell us to do good work, and to look beyond the obvious and to honor those we might easily overlook.

No need for drama they say. It's all in the details. Every person you meet might just be pointing you towards God.