

***The Story Series***  
***Week 10: Samuel/Saul***  
***“Standing Tall, Falling Hard”***

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Have you ever been rejected? It's a part of life, isn't it? Rejection. I remember back in grade school when our PE class would pick teams for dodge ball. I would always be one of the last kids picked, as if they called out my name just because they had to. With a body like mine, I can't imagine why!!!

Rejection. We've all experienced it. Maybe it was that potential date that you were all excited about, and you made the phone call, and the voice at the other end said, "No, thank you." Maybe it was when your application was turned down, or your resume was rejected. Maybe it was that moment when the divorce papers were served.

Think about how it felt when that moment of rejection hit? It was a combination of hurt and anger, embarrassment and aloneness all rolled into one. We all know how that feels. So imagine how God must have felt that day when his very own people rejected him as their King. God had hand-picked this specific group of people to be his very own. God had delivered them from Egyptian slavery, provided for them in the barren desert, and gifted them with a land of bounty. But now, after God had done all of that for them, the people of Israel decide that they want to trade God in for a new king, like you do with a car that has too many miles.

This is where *The Story* takes us this morning. It has to be one of the saddest moments in the Old Testament. God's very own people reject him. They don't just *disobey* God, they *disown* him. They flat out tell God to his face, "We don't want you around here anymore. We're done with you. We want a *real* king to rule and lead us." Ouch!

The Old Testament book of 1 Samuel tells this sad tale. In this point in history, God's people have been under the spiritual leadership of a great judge and prophet named Samuel. But Samuel is now growing old. Custom would have it that one of his sons would take over the leadership, but neither one of his sons are worthy of the position. They are both wicked and unbelievers. The lack of spiritual leadership causes the people of Israel to make a tragic decision – I mean tragic with a capital "T". They decide to reject God as their King, as Lord of their lives, and they choose an earthly king to lead them. That decision has a crippling effect on God's people.

Their sole reason to disown God is so that, "We can be like all the other nations"; so that we can be like everyone else. Now if you remember back, that's the one thing God told them they can never do: be like the other nations. God chose them for a special purpose. They were to stand apart from the other nations; they were to be examples of holiness and love so that they would transform the sinful ways of the other nations who were living around

them. By the manner in which God's people lived their lives, they were to lead others to the one, true God.

It goes without saying, but I will say it anyway. Bad things happen to God's people when they reject God and God's ways. It sounds so obvious. But take a look at the world today. In so many ways, we have rejected the ways of God. We have allowed the world to set the agenda for our lives rather than devoting ourselves fully to the ways of the one true King, Jesus Christ.

The story of Saul can serve as a very relevant, contemporary warning for all of us. We, as God's people, are tempted every day to reject God as King, as Lord of our lives. We are tempted to say "No" to God as the supreme "boss" of our lives.

How many situations come up on a daily basis where we know what King Jesus has said, but we opt for another way – the easier, less complicated way?

Case in point: There are always lots of transients passing through Sherman who show up at the church office during the week. They are looking for assistance, for food, for a bus ticket. Sometimes they just need someone to talk to. And they always seem to show up at the most inconvenient time, on the most hectic of days. I catch myself thinking, "Oh, please come back some other day when I have more time."

But then this little voice speaks to me – the voice of King Jesus – and he reminds me that such people are not an interruption to our ministry; they ARE our ministry. Jesus calls us to reach out to those in need – the homeless and hopeless and hungry – and to find a way to share with them God's love and to provide for their daily needs. In moments like those, we all have a choice: obey the will of King Jesus, or choose the ways of the world.

We must be ever mindful about the dangers of rejecting Christ as our King. In 1 Samuel chapter 8, we learn the reason for God's people rejecting him. It says, "As Samuel (the judge and prophet) grew old, he appointed his sons to be judges over Israel.

But they were not like their father, for they were greedy for money and power. They accepted bribes and perverted justice." (Sounds like an American politician, doesn't it?) They had chosen the ways of the world over the ways of God. "So all of the elders of Israel meet to discuss the matter with Samuel. Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not faithful and righteous like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

With the decline of the great spiritual leader Samuel, it causes the people of God to disregard and forget the ways of God. They were no longer connected to God, and so they began to be naturally sucked into the ways of the culture. God's people were supposed to be drawing other people to God; instead, God's people were being drawn into the ways of the culture. Instead of God being their guide and teacher, the world had now taken on that role. And it had disastrous results. For the remaining 11 sessions of this Old Testament series, we will witness – chapter after chapter – the consequences of Israel tragically rejecting God as their King.

Thank goodness, a thousand years later, we have learned this lesson. Thank goodness we now know better than to make this same mistake! We would never, ever let the world influence us! The world is such a tempting place. Unless we find a way to stay connected to God, I guarantee you that just like the people of the Old Testament, we, too, will be sucked into the ways of the world. And if we choose the world over God, we will never experience the full blessings that God desires to give us.

There are many effective ways to stay connected to God. Weekly Sunday School and worship keeps our focus on God. Our children's church is marvelous at grounding the kids in a life of faith. Having some type of daily devotional time is quite effective. I know of runners who listen to God's Word on their i-Pods as they run. Others subscribe to e-mail devotionals that daily arrive in their in-box. Some stay connected by listening to Christian music, while others hang around with Christian friends – people who have a positive influence because of their desire to live out God's ways in their daily lives.

All of us must find a way to stay connected to God. When I counsel couples or parents who feel distant from their spouse or children, the culprit is usually the same. They have lost touch with each other. They have not been faithful in making time for each other. They have not stayed connected. The demands of everyday life have pulled them away from remembering what's most important.

The same thing can happen to us in our journey of faith. In order to feel close to God, in order to know God's ways and desire to live them out, we have to stay connected to God. God has to be the number one priority of our lives. It's the first commandment: put God first. We must set aside some intentional time each day to be with God. Otherwise, we will forget what's most important and cash everything in for something that will ultimately turn out to be worthless.

As we hear about the life story of King Saul today, we discover that the focus of his life was in the wrong place. He had a lot going for him. He was Mr. Tall, Dark, and Handsome. He was a savvy military commander. But he never fully gave his heart over to God. Sure, he was willing to serve God on occasion, when it was convenient. Sure, he was willing to give God the glory, when it would also make himself look good.

But Saul never fully surrendered himself over to God. He rarely sought God's wisdom, and when he did, he didn't follow God's leading. It's no wonder things didn't work out well for Saul. Rather than Saul living as a faithful servant of the one true King, Saul put himself in charge. Rather than putting God at the center of his life, King Saul chose to put himself at the center of everything. And that decision brought many problems into Saul's life. Let's not make the same mistake. Let us fervently seek out God's wisdom and heed God's leading. Let us faithfully honor Jesus as King by modeling his teachings in our daily lives. "Let your light so shine before others... that they may glorify your Father in heaven." That's servant language.

Because Jesus is our King, we must live differently than the rest of the world. Our lives must be marked with authenticity and integrity. We must live our lives in such a way that others will recognize the character of our lives and desire to know more about King Jesus. Our life's agenda must be to live in such a way that we will lead others to Jesus. We must model our lives after Jesus Christ because he is our King. He's our leader. He's the one we serve. Christ must become the King to the throne of our heart.

God has welcomed us into his kingdom here on earth. And as residents of the kingdom, there is an expectation for us to model the ways of Jesus our King in our daily lives. As John records in his gospel, Jesus says, "If you love me, you will obey what I command." (*John 14:15*) Christ's ways must be our ways. Loving one another must always be the priority of the day. Choosing anything but love means that we have rejected God as our King. For as the Scriptures say, "God is love. Anyone who does not love does not know God, for God is love." (*1 John 4:7-8*) The defining characteristic of our King is love. No matter how many options Jesus has, Jesus will always choose love. It's the defining trait of his kingdom. So we, as citizens of his kingdom, must make love the defining characteristic of our life, otherwise we disgrace our King.

So hear the wisdom from God's Word this day. The only legitimate King for our lives is Jesus Christ. Lots of other worldly kings are vying for our allegiance. Who will we choose as our King? Christ calls us to join forces with him so that we can win this world for God. Let's not make the same mistake that God's people made so long ago. Let's fully surrender our lives over to the one, true King – Jesus Christ – so that he can use us to spread the Good News throughout his earthly kingdom.

And all God's people said, "Amen."