

LET'S GET SERIOUS ABOUT CHANGING

1 Samuel 9–10

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1 Samuel 9:1–3 (NIV)

“There was a Benjamite, a man of standing, whose name was Kish son of Abiel, the son of Zeror, the son of Becorath, the son of Aphiah of Benjamin. He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man without equal among the Israelites—a head taller than any of the others. Now the donkeys belonging to Saul's father Kish were lost, and Kish said to his son Saul, ‘Take one of the servants with you and go and look for the donkeys.’”

The next number of verses talk about that search—it is fruitless. They go to the town where Samuel lives. Saul did not know a prophet lived there until his servant told him. They go up to find him to see if Samuel can tell them where the donkeys are.

“They went up to the town, and as they were entering it, there was Samuel, coming toward them on his way up to the high place.

Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed this to Samuel: ‘About this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him leader over my people Israel; he will deliver my people from the hand of the Philistines. I have looked upon my people, for their cry has reached me.’

When Samuel caught sight of Saul, the LORD said to him, ‘This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people’” (1 Samuel 9:14–17, NIV).

Samuel then initiates conversation with Saul, and he tells him that he is the desire of all Israel.

Saul responds in verse 21, “But am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?”

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(NIV). Then there's a time of sacrifice and a time of eating with Samuel. After dinner, they talk on Samuel's rooftop.

Then in 1 Samuel 10:1, "Then Samuel took a flask of oil and poured it on Saul's head and kissed him, saying, 'Has not the LORD anointed you leader over his inheritance?'" (NIV). Then he told Saul three things that would happen to confirm this anointing. First, at Rachel's tomb, he would meet men who told him his donkeys were found. Then, at the great tree of Tabor, three men carrying three goats, three loaves of bread, and a wineskin would meet him. Then at Gibeah, he would meet a company of prophets singing and prophesying. He would fall into that company. Verses 6–7 say, "The Spirit of the LORD will come upon you in power, and you will prophesy with them; and you will be changed into a different person. Once these signs are fulfilled, do whatever your hand finds to do, for God is with you" (NIV). In verse 9 it says, "As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day" (NIV). In verse 11, "When all those who had formerly known him saw him prophesying with the prophets, they asked each other, 'What is this that has happened to the son of Kish? Is Saul also among the prophets?'" (NIV). Saul returns home sometime later—days, weeks, or months later. Verse 17, Samuel summoned the people to the Lord at Mizpah. Verses 20–24, "When Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel near, the tribe of Benjamin was chosen. Then he brought forward the tribe of Benjamin, clan by clan, and Matri's clan was chosen. Finally Saul son of Kish was chosen. But when they looked for him, he was not to be found. So they inquired further of the LORD, 'Has the man come here yet?' And the LORD said, 'Yes, he has hidden himself among the baggage.' They ran and brought him out, and as he stood among the people he was a head taller than any of the others. Samuel said to all the people, 'Do you see the man the LORD has chosen? There is no one like him among all the people.' Then the people shouted, 'Long live the king!'" (NIV).

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Finally, verses 26–27, “Saul also went to his home in Gibeah, accompanied by valiant men whose hearts God had touched. But some troublemakers said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’ They despised him and brought him no gifts. But Saul kept silent” (NIV).

The title of my message today is “Let’s Get Serious About Changing.” The title may not seem to fit the text. This text does not appear to talk about personal, human change. It does relate a great external life change that occurs in the personality of Saul. Our Bible reading began with Saul looking for donkeys, and Samuel looking for a king. Both found what they did not expect. We see clearly in these chapters a transformation in Saul—a transformation of his status and position. We do not see as clearly the really important changes—the changes that need to take place inside him. However, as we read the text carefully, we’ll find implicit the suggestion that Saul had deficiencies in his personality. And these deficiencies need prompt attention in order for his reign to be successful. I would submit to you that the changes which Saul needs to take in his own life are exactly the changes we need to make in ours.

As we look at the text today, I want to focus on two broad areas of thought. First, the aspect that God is the initiator of change. We’ll look at that very briefly. Then we’ll look at the second aspect, the need to change must be identified by us and then must be acted upon.

I. First, God is the initiator of change.

Whenever anything is going to happen in the kingdom of God or in our lives—it is God who takes the lead. God is the one who takes action. It is Him seeking us. These two chapters, therefore, tell us very important things about the personality of the Lord our God—three things in particular.

A. The first is that God can be counted upon to do the unexpected. Let’s face it. The selection of Saul as king of Israel had to be a totally unexpected phenomenon. What a way the Lord goes

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about searching for a king. If you were looking for a chief executive officer, you certainly wouldn't use the process articulated in 1 Samuel 9 and 10. How ridiculous! Samuel was hungry, he stays around, he does some preaching, then he finally goes home and says, "I'm not going to go looking for anybody. I'm going to wait until they come to me. Then I'm going to pray about it and see if I've got God's will." Furthermore, the guy who gets the job as chief executive officer doesn't even have a resume. And if he did have a resume, the best thing he could say about himself was that he was a failure at finding lost donkeys. Big deal! God is going to choose this guy who has nothing more important to do than look for lost animals. God's going to choose this guy, and He'll set him on a throne. God's always doing the unexpected. Just expect God to do the unexpected. When He chose you and me, He did something very unlikely, didn't He? Many of your friends wonder what in the world you're doing being a Christian.

B. Secondly, when God does the unexpected, His actions have rationale. We may not see it at the time. It may seem like the craziest decision in the world to choose Saul. But it makes sense when you have a chance to back off and look at it. If you look at the political and geographical realities of Samuel's day, immediately the choice makes such good sense. The two dominant tribes were Ephraim and Judah. If the first king of Israel came from Ephraim or Judah, it would have polarized the nation. These two tribes were always trying to prove which was the greatest. So, sandwiched between Ephraim on the north and Judah on the south was the littlest tribe—Benjamin. We know how volatile the political situation was between Ephraim and Judah because of what happened after David's time. The son of Solomon split the kingdom, and Judah and Ephraim parted. That fault line politically and geographically was always there. So, in the first king God said, "I'm going to reach into the center. That way the tribes won't knock each other

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out vying for who is the greatest because I've selected one of their own as king." So He chooses Saul. It makes sense.

C. The third thing is that the Lord is always working behind the scenes in non-spectacular ways. It's always more fun to look at the spectacular ways God might lead—handwriting in the sky, an audible voice. That's all well and good and great. But God, most often, does not work that way. He works in a quiet agenda.

Look at the quiet coincidences in this story where God's hand can be discerned. Kish's donkey went astray at the precise time Samuel was looking for a king. No lost donkey, no Saul meeting Samuel. Kish treated his son as a servant—sending Saul off on a mission that was more fitting for a servant than for a son. Had there not been that nature to their relationship, Saul would not have been the one looking for the donkeys. Another coincidence—Saul did not find the donkeys. If he had found them, he would have gone home. Again, he would have never met Samuel. The servant with Saul happened to know that a seer or a prophet lived at Ramah. Had the servant not known, then Saul would have passed by the town, and there would have been no connection. Maybe one of the other servants of Kish wouldn't have known that—another coincidence.

Samuel arrived home from a preaching mission on the one day in his life that Saul comes to his hometown. Had Samuel arrived one day later, they wouldn't have made connections.

That's how perilously life really hangs. It's all cause and effect and seemingly coincidences. But "coincidences" are really "God incidences" when you look back. God is the initiator in our life.

You may not see it. If you had said to Saul, "Saul, do you realize God has some magnificent plan for your life? You think you're going to find lost donkeys, but God's actually got you out on something else right now. You just wait and see what He has for you." There is that hidden nature of God—He is waiting to lead His people and guide them through paths that they would

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not have chosen on their own—paths that He has chosen them to walk in. God is the initiator of relationships. That doesn't mean that our will has been neutered—that we are not free. In all of the incidences I have related, Saul had freedom to react without the slightest pressure from God. At the same time, God was at work. That brings us to the second part of this message.

II. Our need for change must be identified and dealt with.

There is, in this human personality of Saul, a commingling of hidden potential and hidden faults. He could break either way. He is either going to be great, or he is going to be a disaster. How he will turn out depends on how he resolves the inner issues of his life. God has brought him to a new external position. How well he fills that external position is going to be determined by how well he deals with long standing issues in his life.

It so happens that we have the complete story, but we don't have our own story. We don't know how we're going to turn out, but we know how Saul's going to turn out. We can learn something by that. We know how tragic Saul's end is—it's heart rending. He's rejected from kingship. War breaks out in his reign. His family turns against him, and he against his family. Ultimately, he commits suicide and is decapitated. It's an awful ending for the first king of Israel. The incredible thing is—it could all have been avoided had he dealt with the underlying issues in his life. They are microscopically observable in this text. At the beginning, Saul's faults are almost impossible to detect. At the end, you could see them. They were everywhere evident and impossible to cure. The issues that Saul wrestles with are the same ones that everyone in this room wrestles with. There are three of them—changes that we need to identify and resolve.

Let's look at Saul's relationship to his parents. When Saul is introduced to us, a later chapter will tell us that he was thirty years of age. He is a thirty-year-old man looking for lost donkeys. He's not a teenage kid going out there. We only know a bit about his parents. First, his mother is not

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mentioned. That's a significant omission. It's significant because in the text of 1 Samuel, there has already been a woman of powerful, spiritual influence. She cradled and shaped the life of Samuel. Her name was Hannah. She was an impelling factor in Samuel's life—to make him the person of God he became. He had a rich, spiritual heritage which was drilled into him by his mother when he was just a little tyke. Every year she visited him at Eli's house, and she reinforced that sense of spiritual mission and destiny. In a very real way, Samuel is a product of his praying mother, Hannah. Saul has no such mother. She is insignificant enough not to merit mention.

Furthermore, Saul's spiritual ignorance is well attested by the text. This means that there was no parental influence drilling into him the essentials of his faith as a covenant child of God. He appears to be totally ignorant of what his nationality and people stand for.

As to his father, we know more. His name is Kish. He is called a mighty man. The Hebrew means "a mighty man of valor" or "a man of standing." Essentially, this meant that in his culture, he functioned as a local militia leader or a mayor who protected his land, his family, and his clan from marauders. When we look at the dynamics of Kish and Saul's relationship, we discover that Saul did not have the best parental input. He is sent on a menial task—finding donkeys. This task could have easily been given to another servant, rather than to his son. That says a lot about what his father felt Saul was capable of at the age of thirty.

Secondly, in pursuit of that task, Saul shows a lack of planning for contingency. He quickly runs out of food. Maybe that's why Kish sent him—he was not sharp administratively. Kish had a manor or plantation to run, and it required somebody with accounting and management skills. Poor Saul couldn't think more than three days ahead. So Kish sent him out on a personal mission to find a lost donkey. There was that dynamic.

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Thirdly, Saul appears to have had no spiritual training. He has no knowledge of Samuel. When they're up north at Ramah, Samuel had already dominated the spiritual skyline of his nation for two decades. He was a magnetic, charismatic, unifying force in all Israel. Yet, when they get to his hometown of Ramah, Saul has absolutely no knowledge Samuel is there. He doesn't even know who Samuel is or that a prophet is in this town. He finally learns from the servant that there is a prophet in the town. Saul, in fact, is so non-spiritual that when he begins prophesying with the other prophets, the people who knew him say, "Has Saul also become a prophet?" And their inflection is such that they can't believe it. "That guy in church? That guy prophesying? That guy preaching?"

A. Let's take a deeper look into the father-son relationship. Saul is easily convinced by a subordinate to follow the subordinate's plan of action. For example, when the subordinate says, "There is a prophet here. We ought to see him." Saul says, "We don't have any money." And the servant says, "I've got some." Saul is very easily guided. Not a good trait for a king—somebody who's led around by a subordinate.

The most clinching thing, however, about the father-son relationship is Saul's lack of self worth. He was a man of extremely low self-esteem. He had a grand inferiority complex. Look at what he says in verse 21 after Samuel tells him that he's the desire of all Israel. He says, "Am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel? And is not my clan the least of the clans of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me? I am nothing." Then his extremely low sense of self-esteem is brought out again in 1 Samuel 10:22. Saul is hiding out among the baggage. He's already been anointed as king. Now the big coronation has come, and everybody all over is gathered at Mizpah for the coronation. Everybody's dying to find out who it is. Saul knows he's the guy. He knows he needs to be present, to be brought out, to be crowned, and to be publicly

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anointed. So where is he when it comes time for Samuel to anoint him? He's not there. He's crouched down among the animals and baggage hiding. Some people say, "That's a wonderful trait of humility." I say, "That's not the point!" He's got a low sense of self-esteem. He's not up to the occasion. He wants it to go away. He thinks so little of himself. There's a difference between humility and then going beyond that, into the point of self-rejection. This low sense of self-esteem came in spite of the fact that he was attractive physically—an impressive young man without equal. He was a head taller than any others. The thing that made him unique was his height. Just because a person looks put together, it doesn't mean they are. Saul feels like he's a loser, even though he looks great.

Overnight, this man is going to become a king. Saul—this guy who says, "I can't. I want to hide." This is going to be a man who rules, who gives orders, who gives executive decisions—this man, who has no confidence, is going to head a kingdom. What Samuel does for Saul, however, is say, "You're going to be anointed. The Spirit of God is going to come upon you, and you're going to be a different person." That's Saul's one hope—that God will make him a different person. That's all of our hope.

When you look at the New Testament, you'll find it's no different. First Peter 2:9–10 says, "You are a chosen people, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people belonging to God... Once you were not a people, but now you are the people of God." Peter is saying, "You're kings and priests to God. If you thought you were nobodies, if you thought your life was over, if you thought you could never be godly, if you thought you could never be spiritual, or that you could never have contact with God—that thinking is all over because of Christ. In one fell swoop, He's made you a new creation."

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The problem Saul will face now being elected king—he can no longer define his personal existence by his father's servant-like treatment of him. He's going to have to define his existence by what God thinks of him. God says, "I think you're so good—I'm going to make you king." His father says, "You're so dumb—I'm sending you to get donkeys." Saul will have to choose whether he is going to live with the input of his father or the input of his Heavenly Father. I'm saying this for every one of us in this audience who has ever struggled with a low sense of self-esteem and worth. God is again and again saying to us, in His Word, that we must define our existence by what He thinks of us, not by what is in our past. In Christ, we are not stupid. We are not ugly. We are not incompetent. In Him, we amount to something. Saul must begin to make the change of stepping outside the shadow of his father—a dominating shadow. He must begin to take these steps immediately. We simply cannot afford to accept the labels other people place on us—whether it's our parents, our friends, or someone with the family. We cannot live with the labels if they are different from what God has for us. Saul is going to have to switch gears and get used to what God has called him to be—king. God is reaching down to Saul. By God's appointment of him, he's counteracting his parental deficiency. God is saying to Saul, "You are worth something. You have an identity of your own. I accept you. You are competent. You will be king." And the Lord says that to each of us.

B. Saul will also have to work through his relationship to God. It is patently clear from the text that Saul has very little spiritual knowledge as he steps onto the scene of human history. In the Hebrew text, he uses a common, generic word for God—"El." He does not use the covenanted name used by people of faith, "Jehovah" or "Yahweh." He appears to be in total ignorance of the role of Samuel. Samuel, this great man who has single-handedly been the spiritual and political leader of Israel for years. Saul doesn't even know who he is. He's been hiding out in some

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hollow in Bethlehem hills—protected and away from the world. It's typical of a person in today's culture who never listens to the news, never reads a newspaper, never knows what's going on. Somehow, all is life, Saul didn't know what was going on.

His training with Samuel is limited to a crash course of a single evening—dinner and an after-dinner rooftop conversation. How would you feel if a prophet of God showed up to you and said, "I have authority to install you as the next President." It almost seems unfair to launch Saul so quickly—to catapult him so rapidly into such an assignment where so much is being expected from him. And he's had so little time to get ready for it. It seems unfair, except for the fact that before Samuel sent him away, he poured out some oil on him. Samuel poured it over him and said, "The Spirit of God will come upon you, and you will be changed into a different person." God did a bypass around the whole education and preparation process. He gave Saul an instant gift of wisdom and insight that he didn't have by natural training. One can have all the training and equipment in the world but still be a failure if the Spirit of God is not there. Saul is a person who has missed the opportunity to prepare.

Isn't that what Jesus did? When he called the disciples, He didn't step into the seminaries or the philosophy departments. He stepped into the middle class—to people who were out fishing. Jesus said, "I'm going to make you world changers. I'm going to do something with you!" He's in the business of doing the dynamic and the unexpected. When He gives His Spirit to you, you become a different person.

In the last stretch of my life, I want to step into a new vista of opportunity—where what happens can only be explained by the Spirit of God. Saul coming into the office of king is unexplainable—except that God anointed him and made him a different person. That was the sum and substance of his training. We don't need to think something weird or fanatic is going on

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here. To prophesy is to see the nature of God and the heart of man and join the two—so that God's personality and Word accurately pinpoint the specific human need. Saul, who knew nothing about God, is suddenly God's spokesman. It's a powerful experience. It happened to the 120 on the Day of Pentecost.

We must never lapse into a mentality that thinks our training or expertise is needed to bring about what God has called us to be in this generation. Unless our generation has a great wave of the Holy Spirit break upon it, we're going to leave the church worse off than the way we found it.

Saul's problem ultimately is going to be that he does not choose to maintain this vital relationship, his charismatic experience. He doesn't walk in it. He has it, and then he leaves it. He doesn't come back to it. He isn't renewed in it day by day. This godliness that was infused into him—that made him a different person—it dissipates. It flees from him. In his kingship, he goes back to being an ordinary man. Finally, he becomes a vicious, anti-God man. I know people like that—people who came into the charismatic renewal, and at one time in their lives, they had a special empowerment laid upon them. They walked with God and knew Him. They saw answers to prayer, they did things in God's name, and they had unquestioned experiences with God. But they didn't walk in it. They're now away from Him. They are without power. They are broken, and their kingdom is broken. Saul is going to have to choose whether this religious experience is going to be a one-time thing he then kisses goodbye, or the common denominator of his life. That is the decision Saul's success depends on. What choices are we making in this area of life? Is it a constant hunger and openness to God in our life?

C. Thirdly, Saul must work through his relationship to obstacles to succeed as king. Chapter 10 ends on the note that some people rejected Saul. Notice the eloquent reaction. Saul kept silent.

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That both pleases me and worries me. That trait of brooding will become more and more dominant in Saul's personality. The trait of keeping silent can be good. There are some times you need to hold your tongue. But it can also be for ill. It can break either way. For Saul it began to break badly as he went along. But first, he was generous with the enemies named in chapter 11. He spares their lives. But ultimately, as he keeps this habit of keeping silent, his spirit becomes jealous, angry, bitter, and possessive. When he is rejected, he keeps silent.

Last week, when we looked at the theme from Samuel's life "Coping with Rejection," we saw what Samuel did when he was rejected. When the leaders came to Samuel and said to him, "Samuel, you're too old to be our leader anymore. Your kids are rotten, and we want a new guy," Samuel didn't keep silent. What did Samuel do? He beat a path to the Lord in prayer, and he worked it out with God. Saul never worked things out with God.

As you read the rest of 1 Samuel, you see that Saul's story comes to crashing conclusion. But look all through his life—the only times he talked with God are when he was in trouble. He talked with God when he wanted to win a battle. He talked with God when he wanted to fight a battle. He talked with God when he did something so wrong that finally God said that He was going to teach him a lesson. He never voluntarily comes to God on his own and says, "Do something about the evil in my own life. Do something about the evil in me." That's going to be his fatal flaw. Will it be our fatal flaw? Do we handle obstacles by sitting on them? By brooding on them until they become acid within our guts? And we're filled with "resentment, anger, bitterness, rivalry," and all those wonderful King James words! Or will we work through it and work out of it? Will obstacles in life embitter us? Or will they be occasions where we work through them with God's help, and we become people of love, joy, peace, patience, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, meekness, and self control?

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Compared to the renovation God has in mind, our efforts to improve our own lives may seem trivial. When we become God's, we are giving him the invitation to make all things new. What He wants is the site and our permission to build. That's what He's doing with Saul. "Saul, your parental background and your relationship with Me in the past—all that's over. I'm going to do a whole new thing. Will you choose it with Me? Will you become the man inside I want you to be? To correspond with the direction I'm leading you into? Believe that, and you'll be king. Not just for a day, but on and on." Saul has those choices. They need to be made early in his reign. We know what he did with his choices. How about us and our choices?

Closing Prayer

Lord, each of us have choices—our relationship with our parents. Some of us at thirty, forty, fifty, sixty, and beyond are still wrestling with negative input from our parents. We're still feeling that we're the ugly, clumsy, whatever. Your Spirit is seeking to come upon us, and You're telling us to say, "I can do all things through Christ who strengthens me." Help us, Lord, to define our reality by what You say about us, about what Your Word reveals about us, and about what Your Spirit does when You come into our life. Help us, Lord, to go past a ritualistic relationship with You—into a real and vital relationship. A relationship that goes beyond just doing the duties of worship to a relationship with You that practices abandonment—one that is willing to release self to You and be available to You. We all have that sense in us that wants to be straight and proper. Yet, when Saul came upon the prophets, he began to act in a way that's consistent with his inner spiritual nature. There was an aspect of his personality emerging that was not in the normal course of things. When Your Spirit begins to visit us, we may act in ways we have not acted before. We may raise our hands, raise our voice, testify, and sing from outside of ourselves—from deep within ourselves. Help us to be open to express whatever You're doing

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in our lives. Help our relationship with You to be, not an arms-length kind of relationship, but a relationship of closeness, love, and power. For those here in this congregation today who are struggling with obstacles—every one of us has something that is an obstacle in our life—how we handle that shapes our disposition. It determines whether or not we're going to make it as a Christian and as a person. Help us, Lord, to have the Holy Spirit, to have Your mind, and to have Your heart given to us. Any obstacle identified today, we can face it with a sound mind, with sweetness, and with the power of Jesus Christ. Let Your Spirit be upon us, so that in all of our life circumstances—pleasant or difficult—we can reflect the character of Jesus Christ. We ask these things in Your name, confident of our standing with You today in Christ. Amen.