

Discipleship: How to Face Life-Changing Moments Part 9

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I. Introduction

When something upsets you, why do you do what you do? Your wife disrespects you, your husband is unloving and then you react...badly. Why? What voice told you that your wife's comments meant that? What voice then told you that being mean to her was the answer? Why do we fail to follow God's plan, what *He* told us to do?

II. Discipleship: *ACT, Time to Do What God Said*

Something upsets you, but instead of reacting and doing something stupid, you ask God. As you observe what happened and reflect on your reaction and discuss it with trusted friends, God reveals the problem. So you create a plan to fix what God showed you and ask one of your friends to hold you accountable. All that's left is to do it....but then another voice speaks.

ACT, time to do what God said, once God tells you to do something, especially if you don't quite understand or agree, it should drive you into action. Once God told Noah that a flood was coming, even though it hadn't rained on the earth ever, Noah started to build an ark, which is why God says that faith "is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen" (Hebrews 11:1). Noah's building of the ark was the evidence of what was not yet seen: the flood. And if God tells you something and you believe it, it's useless unless you actually do it. James goes on at length about this; he plainly tells us that "faith without works is dead." What good is it if you genuinely believe that you shouldn't discriminate or turn away a needy brother unless you do it? This kind of religion is useless (James 1:22-2:26).

When it's time to act, which voice do you obey (king Saul and the Amalekites, 1 Samuel 15)? God told king Saul to do something and he did it...sort of, which is to say, he didn't do it at all and it cost him the throne. Approximately 400 years earlier, the Amalekites, without provocation, attacked Israel after God freed them from Egypt. They killed all the weak and tired who were falling behind (Exodus 17:8-16; Deuteronomy 25:17-19). For doing so, God swore to blot them out of history. It was now time to fulfill that promise. So through Samuel, He tells Saul to attack Amalek and kill everything, men, women, children, babies, and animals. Saul gathers 210,000 soldiers and does as the Lord commanded, except that they brought back the king and the best animals under the pretense that they would sacrifice them to God.

When Samuel finds out, he's livid and confronts Saul. He not only accuses him of disobeying the voice of the Lord but of stealing from Him. In his defense, Saul points to the very evidence that convicts him: king Agag and the animals. In response, Samuel utters a famous phrase, "to obey is better than sacrifice." And he equates failing to obey God's voice with witchcraft and idolatry, sins punishable by death in the Mosaic Law (Exodus 22:18; Deut.13:6-11; 18:9-14). God's not looking for you to go to church every Sunday and read your Bible every day. What He wants is for you to obey His voice, which includes going to church and reading your Bible. But offering Him the sacrifices of Sunday church and Bible reading without obedience is doing what Saul did, rebellion. Saul finally admits that he sinned and why: he listened to another voice (15:24). Why do we do this to God all the time? Why do we fail to do what He said and instead always follow the other voice in our head?

Why did Saul fail to act on what God said (why do we)? When life happens, we observe, analyze, and define. Then we act on our findings. In milliseconds, we put a plan together and act on it. That's what Saul did, that's what we all do. The problem is that we do it apart from God. The voice that guides us is not God's; it's our own + Satan's (Ephesians 6:12-16; 1 Peter 5:8). Why did Saul not obey God? Because of the voice of doubt that was constantly in his head, even before God ever chose him as king (1 Samuel 9:21; 10:20-22; 13:1-13; 15:17). And what that voice told him on this occasion as he led 210,000 warriors is this, "You really don't have what it takes to be king. You're certainly not wise enough, clever enough, or strong enough to lead these fierce warriors. You can try your best, but realize that you're in waaay over your head." So when thousands of his strong and fierce warriors (1 Samuel 14:52) stood up and said, "Saul, we're not going to kill all these perfectly good animals; we're gonna keep them for ourselves," Saul said, "Whatever you say" (1 Samuel 15:24).

How do we avoid this, how could Saul have avoided this horrible incident that cost him his throne? We have to obey the voice of God; we have to act based on what He says. The voice in his head may be telling him that he's not king material, that he can't stand up to all these warriors but Saul should've known better. Long before this event, God showed Saul that he was king material, that he was strong enough to lead men into battle and earn their respect and obedience. The Lord told him all this the day He chose him as king when He gave him a new heart and His presence (1 Samuel 9:20-10:9, 20-24), the day the Lord's Spirit strengthened him and provided him 330,000 warriors to defeat the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11:4-8), and the day the Lord told Saul that He would always have his back as king (1 Samuel 12:13-15). Saul had nothing to fear, nothing to doubt....unless he focused on the current circumstances and the voice in his head telling him that he's too weak to face these warriors.

Your past upbringing, your past mistakes, etc., etc., seem like overwhelming odds that you cannot defeat. Not only is this not true, NOTHING is stronger than God. The One who dwells inside you is greater than anything in your past, greater than that voice in your head that keeps condemning you, greater than Satan (1 John 3:20; 4:4). When Saul lives as a nobody from the smallest tribe of Israel, he's unsure of himself and he cannot lead even one soldier let alone hundreds of thousands. But when he lives based on what the Lord says about him, nothing can stop him. So it is with us. We all have a past and a false view of ourselves; and that negative voice speaks to us loudly and every day.

But the question is this, "What did God say about us?" What is He telling us about the latest thing that has us so upset? How does He define it versus the voice in our head? And what is He telling us to do about it and do we believe Him? If we believe Him, we must take action and live in what He tells us.....don't let Satan deceive you into thinking that there's something wrong with you, that you can't, that you're weak, that it won't work, blah, blah, blah.

III. Conclusion

Then Samuel said: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king." Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the LORD and your words, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice."