

One of the things that God reminded me of during the 40DOP was an attitude God trained me to embrace some years ago, the attitude that comes out of the understanding that my boss is my Heavenly Father. Anyone that is in a position of authority over me has been put there by Him, therefore the only response is to serve my boss as if I was serving God. That means, not entering into the usual smoko room griping about how useless the boss is. It means looking for the best way to perform the tasks put before me, not the quickest way to get it done, and not looking for some excuse for not doing it. It means saying 'Yes' when asked to do something, then fulfilling that commitment.

This is the sort of attitude God showed me that I should have towards my employer, and to some degree I have embraced it.

But did you know there is a natural law at work that affects our attitudes as much as it does the physical world around us. The law probably has a name but it alludes me at present – more evidence of its existence I suppose – but it states that everything left to its own devices will naturally degenerate or decay. A rock will eventually break down into sand. A tree will eventually die and rot and turn back into the soil from which it grew. A car will eventually rust away and return to the ores and compounds from which it was manufactured. And the best of intentions, left unattended will degenerate to the base intentions of our fallen natures.

That is, of course unless there is a force acting in opposition to this tendency to decay. You keep a rock away from sun and wind and moisture and temperature fluctuation and it will remain a rock. Granted, a tree is not going to last forever but with proper care and nurture it will live a lot longer than if left to its own devices. Likewise with a car. They will all eventually rust away, but the process can be slowed considerably by proper care and attention.

It's the same with our intentions. Most of us will be familiar with Galatians 5:22 – 23, the verses that list the Fruit of the Spirit. **READ IT, NIV & MSG**. And many of us will be familiar with 1st Corinthians 12, the “Love” chapter. **READ IT, NIV & MSG** and maybe even the challenge it presents when we exchange the word “Love” with our own name. I think most of us aspire to these ideals, but equally most of us see them as just that, ideals that are largely unattainable.

There is a remedy though, and it has mentioned it a number of times during the Fellowship series Chris has just taken us through. As I said, this law says that everything **left to itself** will decay. If we are to attain to the lofty standards that the Bible prescribes, then we need to discover and learn how to harness the only force that can successfully oppose this law.

This sermon is a sermon on commitment. But before you brace yourselves for a good old 'Fire & Brimstone' berating, let me say my intention is to equip us with the tools, show us how to harness this force so we can meet our commitments, whatever and wherever they may be.

Turn with me please to the 1st book of Samuel. We're going to look at part of the life of King Saul. I don't usually like to look too close at Saul because I find all too painfully that often I'm looking into a mirror.

The first we hear of Saul is in Chapter 9 where we find he is the son of a well-to-do

descendant of Benjamin. The NIV bible describes him as an impressive young man, a bit like me I imagine, only taller. Dads donkeys had got lost and Saul was sent to look for them. I imagine there must have been quite a few donkeys because Saul spent more than an afternoon looking for them. Saul was committed, he spent 3 days looking for them and it sounds like he covered a fair distance as well. He was determined not to fail, but eventually he had to face defeat and consider going home empty handed. I don't know about you, but I see a man here who is diligent and trustworthy, a man who is prepared to take a challenge and run with it, a man who won't give up easily. Remember Israel was a land under siege at the time, a people oppressed by neighbouring nations who ran roughshod over the place doing whatever they pleased. And Saul only had one man to accompany him.

As you read through chapters 9 & 10 you can build up an impression of the type of person Saul was. In these verses we read how the prophet Samuel reveals to Saul that he is to be the 1st king of Israel, well the 2nd really because God was and always will be the 1st. I don't doubt Saul was sincere and hard working but there are a few character flaws poking their noses out through these verses. First off what's with all the signs God gave to establish the authenticity of Samuels words? Don't get me wrong, signs from God are a good thing and we should always seek confirmation from Him in each decision we have to take in life. But I see at least 8 separate prophetic signs in the last half of chapt 9 and 1st half of chapt 10. This man might have been diligent and trustworthy, but his need for so much reassurance indicates a degree of mistrust of others and more than a degree of self doubt as well.

We read a little comment in chapt 10:9, “.....God changed Sauls heart”. Hmmm. What was the change, why was it needed and was it a permanent thing?

In vs 14 Saul meets his uncle and gives an account of his absence, but notice he leaves out the minor detail that he has been anointed King of the nation, and not just by any old King maker but by Samuel, the last of the Great Judges, who was effectively Gods Governor General to Israel. Saul may not have mentioned it because he was instructed to keep quiet, but I suspect from the way the verse is written that it's more likely there was a bit of false humility and some of that same self doubt that we saw earlier creeping in. “God has made me King and I'm not going to tell my uncle in case it is really all just a big bubble and he bursts it for me!” This self doubt is revealed further in vs22. In those days Gods direction was often sought and given by use of something known as the Urim and Thummim. We don't know what this was but it appears to be related to casting of lots, or drawing straws if you would. We see in the verses preceding 22 that some decision process, obviously relying on some sort of universally recognized divine direction, was being used to determine who was to be King. First the tribe of Benjamin was selected, then the clan Saul was a member of, then finally Saul was the only name in the hat. Where was Saul? Nobody could find him, but Saul wasn't hidden from God. He brought out from his hiding place to the people with a very sheepish look on his face. Humility is one thing, but don't you think you're carrying this a bit far Saul? This sort of behaviour is tolerated in a 6 year old but even then it's painful.

In verse 27 we see what at first read appears to be even more of this self doubt/false humility thing, but as we read on you'll see that Sauls refusal to rebuke the doubters was in fact an indication that finally he was accepting the mantle God and the people had given him. This is reinforced in chapter 11 where Saul rescues the city of Jabesh. First a Holy anger empowers him to rally the whole of Israel behind him to engage and route the Ammonites in battle, then in vs 13 he exhibits a compassion and wisdom totally at odds with his earlier attitude. Saul is getting into this King thing. Maybe I can do it. Maybe God did get it right. Maybe I am the man to take over where Samuel leave off. Maybe I

will be the one to rid this fair land of all our oppressors.

But there is still a flaw. They're not obvious yet but the stress marks are beginning to form under the surface.

We'll skip now across to chapter 13. Saul has already delivered a severe blow to one of Israel's antagonists, but this time he is provoking the fight. It appears that this action might have been directed by God because Saul is at Gilgal, where he was told to wait for Samuel, who was going to offer a sacrifice to God before the battle. We see here a repeat of Gideon's experience. Saul starts out with 3000 men but the fear of the Philistine army amassed against them whittles that number down to about 600.

Now **WE** know that God is always on time don't we. He's never too late, never gets caught in traffic, never double books his appointments. And we never get anxious when things start closing in around us do we? We never doubt that God will always come through and see his purposes served in our lives do we? Well Saul wasn't anywhere near as spiritual as us, because he did doubt. Well, it looks like Samuel's not going to make it this time. Maybe he got eaten by a bear. Maybe he got waylaid with a flat tyre. Maybe he missed his connecting flight. Looks like I'll just have to do it myself again. You just can't get good help these days.

Wouldn't you know, just as Saul is washing up after performing the priestly role of sacrifice, Samuel's limo pulls up.

You can see a recurring theme throughout all of this. Saul was diligent, hard working, sincere and trustworthy. But he wasn't faithful. He couldn't see past himself.

- Dad is relying on me to find his donkeys. I won't fail him.
- Dad will have given up thinking about the donkeys by now and will be worried about me.
- I'm not so sure about this Priest. What makes him so sure I've been chosen as King?
- Looks like Samuel got it right this time but I'm not going to look like an idiot in front of all these people.
- I've got to defeat this army now. It's all up to me. How could Samuel let me down now?

Saul obviously hadn't attended a 40 Days of Purpose campaign. It's not about him!

Dad was relying on Saul to find the donkeys, but Saul needed to see that God put the breath in his lungs and the strength in his legs.

How many signs did Saul need to accept that Samuel was hearing from God?

If God was the one who chose me, then who cares what people say?

God put me in this place. God chose me. God will see me through.

Let's just quickly compare Saul's attitude with that of his successor David. The proverbial chalk and cheese.

In chapter 16 of 1st Samuel we find David being anointed by Samuel. But in vs 13 we see that the Spirit of the Lord came upon David in Power. No mention of a need to change his heart. It was already receptive.

Chapter 17:37 finds David before Saul explaining how he is able to defeat the Philistine Goliath. He says, "The Lord who delivered me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine." Now that's a refreshing change isn't it.

Verse 45 to Goliath, "You come against me with sword and spear and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord Almighty, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you

have defiled. This day the Lord will hand you over to me, and I'll strike you down and cut off your head. Today I will give the carcasses of the Philistine army to the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and the whole world will know there is a God in Israel. All those gathered here will know that it is not by sword or spear that the Lord saves; for the battle is the Lords, and he will give you all into our hands!.

Now dems fightin' words. But notice who's strength was David going to do it in, notice who was going to give the victory, notice who's battle it was.

The Bible records that David blew it many times and some of them were fairly spectacular. But throughout his life, he recognized where his strength and success came from. Every moment he could he gave God the credit for all his successes.

What was the difference? Saul couldn't see past himself. He was a big man and he obviously knew how to look after himself. Maybe he never found himself in a place where he had to test his faith in God. Maybe he was like many of us and just let the lessons of his youth slip, let the forces of nature erode and overtake him. One thing I notice that is similar in the lives of these two men. Both of them got plenty of chances from God. Saul faltered in his walk away from God but didn't stop. He gradually slipped from being the one on whom the Lords favour rested to dying a lonely death on a battlefield, his dead and dying army and son his company. Gods favour rested on David too, only David cherished it. His walk faltered many a time too, but it was ultimately going in the right direction. He died in his bed full of years with his family around him, his Kingdom secure and provision made for the building of Solomons Temple, Davids greatest desire.

What was the difference in their lives?

Saul couldn't see past himself. David couldn't see past God.

Saul thought it was all up to him to accomplish. David knew he couldn't do it by himself, and if he could then it wasn't worth doing.

Saul doubted himself. David knew he was "Just a worm" but he knew too that the Lord Almighty thought David was 'alright'.

Saul couldn't trust others. David knew that no matter what those about him said or did, God was his vindicator.

Saul knew about God. David knew God.

What about you? I said at the beginning that I intended to give you the tools and show you how to harness them so you could fulfil your commitments.

There are three basic steps.

1. You need to know God. It's not enough to have heard of him. It's not enough to acknowledge his existence, although that's a start. It's not even enough to have become a Christian, although that is essential. You need to be pursuing a relationship with Him, spending time with Him, talking to Him, letting Him talk to you.
2. You need to walk with an attitude of obedience. That means stop doing the things you know He doesn't like, start doing the things you know he likes, finding out the specific things He has planned for you, being pro-active in your relationship with Him.
3. You need to walk with Faith. Faith that can embrace the fact that God loves you, has called you, will keep you safe no matter what, and won't lead you into a place where you cannot serve him.