

When God Says No

By Pastor Greg
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1 Samuel 28

Bunkertown COB

In July of 2000, my mother ended up in a coma because of a large hole in her colon. Lying in a hospital bed, she tried to fight the poison that had spread through her body. I spent weeks praying each day for healing. It's the natural thing to do. Now, there's nothing wrong in letting God know how you feel and what you want. But I wasn't prepared for the lesson God was trying to teach me; that what I want from God cannot influence what I expect from God.

As we learned last week, David again spares Saul's life. But not trusting him, he leaves southern Judah and travels north to live with the Philistines. Hard to believe, isn't it? To live with the very people you had been fighting with for the past several years. David and his men spend about 16 months there, living in a town called Ziklag (ZIKK lag). What's interesting is that by now, people are beginning to notice something different between David and King Saul. According to 1 Chronicles 12, some of Saul's men actually defected and joined David (*Some men from Manasseh defected from the Israelite army and joined David when he set out with the Philistines to fight against Saul.*¹). Apparently they've been noticing the godliness of David's conduct.

The difference between David and Saul really continues to grow, especially in the way they respect and honor God. From the depth of his cave, it seems that David is learning to completely trust God, while Saul continues to ignore God. *Read chapter 28 of 1 Samuel* to see just how far Saul has fallen.

King Saul takes one look at the Philistine army and panics. With his life now a complete wreck, he turns to God for help, but God remains silent. Frustrated, he then asks for a second opinion, consulting a Medium from Endor (Did you hear about the short fortuneteller who escaped from prison? She was a small medium at large). And instead of having her stoned, he asks her to get in touch with Samuel. Maybe he would speak just one more time on behalf of God. Well, I got to

¹Tyndale House Publishers. (2004). *Holy Bible : New Living Translation*. "Text edition"--Spine. (2nd ed.) (1 Ch 12:19). Wheaton, Ill.: Tyndale House Publishers.

wondering what it was Saul expected to hear. I mean, if he was seeking the Lord, surely he had some answer in mind. But what he heard is not what he hoped. And Saul becomes a wreck.

In contrast to this, notice how God answers David. Back in chapter 23, God quickly answers David when he asks about the people living in the town of Keilah. And if you jump ahead to chapter 30, David asks God whether or not he should pursue the army that raided their city. Again, God's answer comes quickly and clearly. How's come God answered David while it seems He ignored Saul altogether? Why was God silent to the prayers of Saul?

In the Old Testament there were several ways God would give direction and answer to prayer. We see God speaking through dreams (as He did with Joseph in Genesis 37). On special occasions God would speak through the High Priest who wore the Ephod. This was a finely woven vest interlaced with threads of gold. And on the shoulders there were two onyx stones engraved with the names of the Twelve Tribes of Israel. There were also twelve sacred stones located in pockets on the breastplate. Although little is known how this Ephod worked, the two stones (called the Urim and Thummim) were supposed to be used as sacred lots to determine God's will (see Numbers 27:21). Kinda like drawing straws or rolling dice. Apparently Abiathar only took the Ephod with him when he fled the city of Nob. The Urim and Thummim must have been left behind to be used by Saul. The third method was through prophetic revelation, which is what Samuel had been doing before he died. All three methods did not work. In effect, God refused to give Saul an answer.

Have you ever found yourself dealing with the same thing? Like Saul, have you exhausted yourself before God only to have Him remain silent to your prayers? Isn't it frustrating to hear the testimony of others whose prayers were answered while your prayers seem to fall on deaf ears? Well, I think there may be a lesson to learn if we compare Saul and David's attitudes toward God.

If you look back over Saul's reign as King, not once does he really act with any reverence to the Lord. He makes a rash vow that almost gets his son killed. He is too impatient to wait on Samuel and actually offers the sacrifice to God himself!

This really made Samuel angry. And Saul completely disobeys God's direction, but makes up some story that sounds all righteous. As I read these things, I get the impression that Saul did not think too highly of the Lord. It's almost as if Saul felt God was working for him.

David, on the other hand, allows God to continually mold and shape his life. Many times God humbles him, and David responds to His teaching. David seeks to honor God through his obedience. David lives his life with the understanding that God is the one in charge, and he is willing to submit himself to however and whenever God decides to answer. In other words, David has allowed God to say no.

As I continually prayed for my mother's healing, I began to realize that what I wanted, I expected God to do. In other words, I expected Him to answer according to my wishes and desires. For a month I prayed with this attitude, but late one night I realized that I was not treating God the way I should. So for the first time I prayed that God would make a choice. I finally was willing to hear His answer. I let God decide what was best for my mother, and was willing to accept whichever way He chose. What was interesting is that shortly after I surrendered my will and accepted His, God called my mother to Heaven, and I was able to accept His decision.

I run in to a lot of people who exhaust themselves trying to get God to answer their prayers. After they can stand the silence no longer, they resign themselves by saying, "It's in God's hands now". But although their words sound very righteous, most of these people are still hanging on to the thought that God will answer their pray when He is ready. What they fail to realize though, is that they truly have not given their requests over to God. They're still expecting Him to answer the way they want. And these individuals are not ready for when God says no. In their hearts they are not prepared for the answer.

As I read through 1 Samuel, I'm beginning to see that David truly did honor God and respect God, and that King Saul did not. I'm not surprised then that God remained silent for a while. And I'm not surprised how devastated Saul became when God said NO! So I'm curious about you. In your situation that you have brought before the Lord, how would you respond if He says no?