

David

The Point: Serve with excellence even when that work is not appreciated by others.

Session Passage: 1 Samuel 18:5-16

1 Samuel 18:5-7

Connection to The Point. Saul sent David out on military campaigns, and David successfully completed the charge given to him.

The setting. After David killed Goliath, the stalemate between Israel and the Philistine army finally ended with the Israelite army pursuing the enemy and plundering their camps. Saul determined to find out more about Israel's new hero (1 Sam. 17:1-55). The king's commander, Abner, found David, still toting Goliath's head (vv. 56-58). Strangely enough, Saul needed to know more about the giant slayer, even though David had previously soothed his anxious heart by playing the lyre for him and remained in service whenever the king needed him (16:14-23).

The conversation between David and Saul clinched matters for Jonathan, Saul's son. The impressive victory against Goliath notwithstanding, David's words with Saul impressed Jonathan the most. A friendship bond between David and Jonathan formed immediately, a relationship marked by unity and commitment. That Jonathan gave David his robe, military tunic, sword, bow, and belt signaled his admiration for David and that he recognized God had chosen David to be Israel's next king. Eager to add such a skilled military man to his cabinet, Saul determined David would remain and not return to his father's house (18:1-4).

David (v. 5). Because of Saul's failure to lead Israel according to God's standards, God sent the prophet Samuel to anoint David as the next king (15:23,35; 16:1,13). Then the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on David, but left Saul. An evil spirit tormented Saul (16:14). When one of Saul's servants suggested that someone who played the lyre come and play soothing music for the king to quell his tormenting spirit, David's name surfaced (vv. 15-23). David served Saul in relative obscurity until he killed Goliath. Then Saul elevated David and he became a permanent part of the king's court. He surely gained practical knowledge while serving there that would equip him to become king of Israel some years later. However, his education included many unpleasant experiences, especially because of Saul's extreme jealousy. That envy would eventually destroy Saul and lead to his downfall.

Was successful in everything Saul sent him to do Whatever mission Saul sent him on, David was so successful David went out whithersoever Saul sent him, and behaved himself wisely (v. 5). David's attitude, conduct, and work ethic demonstrated his success, and everyone in Saul's court and throughout Israel recognized it and praised him for it. He submitted himself to Saul and sought to serve him wisely. The word translated *successful behaved . . . wisely* comes from a Hebrew word that means to give careful attention to, to prosper, or to act wisely. David knew the way to be blessed and refused to undercut Saul's authority. Although he had little military experience, his abilities on the battlefield became evident to all.

Saul put him in command Saul gave him a high rank Saul set him over the men of war (v. 5). Because of David's military successes and faithful service, Saul rewarded him by appointing him commander in the standing army of professional military men, a remarkable promotion given to a man likely in his early twenties. Later Saul would give him a different assignment (v. 13), so this position may have had more administrative duties than actual combat. This sudden promotion and the accompanying success could have potentially led to jealousy among the men. However, David won the good will of the people and Saul's servants.

When David was returning from killing the Philistine Returning home after David had killed the Philistine When David was returned from the slaughter of the Philistine (v. 6). David's stunning defeat of Goliath led to the Israelite army chasing the Philistine army and eventually defeating them. Afterwards, David led a triumphant march through every town celebrating

their victory over Israel's archenemy. For a time, his victories restored Israel's supremacy in Canaan. This established his reputation for bravery and skill within the hearts of the people.

The women came out (v. 6) Following the customs of the day, grateful mothers, wives, and daughters treated the homecoming army with expressions of adoration and appreciation. They rejoiced in jubilant celebration over the victory God had given.

Singing and dancing (v. 6). The women danced to the sound of **timbrelstabrets** or tambourines **tambourines** and **three-stringed instruments** **resinstruments of musick** and sang as they played. The inclusion of **shouts of joyful songs** in addition to the two instruments reveals the celebratory mood. They also composed extemporaneous songs in honor of the leaders who earned the highest distinction by their feats.

"Saul hashath killedslain his thousands, butand David his tens of thousands" (v. 7). As Israelite women had done for centuries (Ex. 15:21; Judg. 5:1) the women composed songs with lyrics that celebrated the military successes. The poetry (only five words in Hebrew) actually linked Saul and David together for their military successes. The convention of putting a number in the first line then beefing it up in the second mirrored Hebrew poetic style. They never intended to make Saul feel inferior. After all, he received top billing in the song. The women probably sang the two lines antiphonally with the whole crowd eventually joining them in singing. While it may be hard for modern readers to grasp that such a simple chorus could reach national popularity, eventually even the Philistines heard this song in Gath and Aphek (1 Sam. 21:10-11; 29:5).

1 Samuel 18:8-11

Connection to The Point. David was so successful in what Saul charged him to do that Saul became envious and resentful of David.

Saul was furious and resented this songSaul was very angry; this refrain displeased him greatlySaul was very wrath, and the saying displeased him (v. 8). David had unwittingly captured the imagination of the people and had received the people's praise and affirmation that Saul craved for himself. *FuriousVery angrywrath* emphasized the kindling and burning aspects of anger. Saul's reaction should not have surprised the readers. Saul hated the idea of having David mentioned in the same breath as himself, thus placing the young boy who had killed the giant at the same rank as the king. This demonstrated a flaw in Saul's character—he felt threatened by or begrudged the success of his subordinate.

What more can he havegetWhat can he have more but the kingdom? (v. 8). Saul overreacted to the song. He knew his kingdom would end, and now he had spliced together Samuel's prediction (15:26-29) with David as his possible replacement. This dreaded expectation hung over him and eventually led to his demise. Saul apparently had concluded the young shepherd might be the one about whom Samuel had spoken.

Saul watched David jealouslySaul kept a close eye on DavidSaul eyed David from that day and forward (v. 9). The phrase means to look at with iniquity, perversity, or depravity. Blinded to David's excellent character, Saul always saw him in an evil light. Suspicious, Saul never took his eyes off of David. Jealousy and suspicion had engulfed Saul's thinking. His heart sprouted the evil fruit of jealousy. Everything he heard David say, he heard with suspicious ears. Everything David did, he watched with suspicious eyes. Saul's thoughts became twisted with suspicion, and he descended deeper into a pit of desperation. Ever since Samuel had pronounced God's rejection of him, Saul had constantly scanned those around him looking for his possible supplanter.

The next dayOn the morrow (v. 10). Having allowed his jealousy to fester and take root in his heart, Saul wasted no time in attempting to eliminate his perceived rival. His first explosion of hatred against David came the day after the army's triumphant march through the cities.

AnThe evil spirit sent from God (v. 10). Saul had lost the empowering of the Lord when God rejected him as king (16:14), at which time an evil spirit began to torment him. This supernatural assault came at God's command as a result of Saul's

disobedience. God did not make Saul do wrong by deliberately overpowering his will through sending an evil spirit. Saul had numerous opportunities to accept God's leading through Samuel. However, Saul had chosen to disobey God and ignore His commands. Paul described a similar process when God gave people over to their sinful desires (Rom. 1:21-28).

Evil here indicates misery, distress, and harm this spirit or mood would cause Saul and should not be understood in a moral sense. He experienced some really bad days because of the evil spirit from the Lord. The evil that this mood brought to Saul God allowed as punishment because of Saul's disobedient heart.

Came powerfully/forcefully upon Saul (v. 10). The evil spirit had observable effects on Saul as it rushed over him and dominated his personality. Saul permitted his jealousy of David to boil over and fill his heart and mind with bitter hatred.

Began to rave inside the palace/He was prophesying in his house/He prophesied in the midst of the house (v. 10). *Rave* here can easily be misunderstood as a form of temporary insanity. Saul's behavior later in the narrative may contribute to such an understanding. However, the same Hebrew word is most frequently translated as "prophesy." Here the writer portrayed Saul prophesying or raving under the influence of a troubling spirit which would identify him as a false prophet. Apparently Saul screamed uncontrollably and acted like a madman, spewing out ecstatic and hate-filled words with abnormal behavior.

Playing the lyre/Played with his hand (v. 10). Performing one of his regular duties, David provided music for this previously tranquil scene as he strummed his harp *with his hand* when Saul all at once erupted into his savage tantrum. Consider the paradox displayed by David and Saul. Young David played calmly and melodiously, trying to soothe the king as Saul *began to rave* furiously/became enraged at David. Did David or anyone else in the house have any idea Saul would attempt to kill David?

Holding a spear/Had a spear in his hand/There was a javelin in Saul's hand (v. 10). Saul's *javelin* of spear—a sharp blade attached to the end of a stick, similar to a lance but with a shorter handle—may have been a sign of his kingship, kind of like a scepter (22:6; 26:7).

Threw it/Hurled it/Cast the javelin (v. 11). Saul's brooding hostility suddenly erupted. He flung his javelin towards David because of the hatred brewing in his jealous heart. Rather than rejoicing that God had sent him such a brave warrior, Saul sulked because he thought David had received more adulation from the people. Now Saul had permitted the evil spirit to move him to kill this young hero.

"Pin David to the wall"/Smite David even to the wall (v. 11). *Pin/Smite* can mean to strike, smite/pin, or slay. Hoping to kill his imagined rival by hurling the spear and pinning David to the wall, Saul failed as his spear quivered in the wall.

David got away from/eluded him twice/David avoided out of his presence twice (v. 11). David eluded Saul's evil intent two times. Perhaps he continued to play his lyre for Saul after the first attempt to kill him, testifying to his loyalty to Saul and his commitment to help Saul overcome his episodes of rage.

1 Samuel 18:12-16

Connection to The Point. Despite the fact David's life had been physically threatened by Saul, David continued to obediently lead Saul's army. Furthermore, David continued to do well because God was with him.

Afraid of David (v. 12). Rather than David being afraid of Saul, the king who had the power to do away with the musician, it was Saul who feared David. Having hurled his spear twice and failed twice, Saul's fear of David only increased. Saul had no faith, so he fell into fear. Without faith, Saul could not please God (Heb. 11:6).

The LORD was with David/him (v. 12). Having escaped his spear twice, Saul recognized God's hand on David and became impressed with a dread gnawing deep within him. Even though he sat on the throne as the king of Israel, Saul knew God was

with David. That David did not leave Saul immediately after these two attempts on his life perhaps stemmed from his own sense God had placed him in Saul's court for a purpose.

The LORD . . . had departed from Saul (v. 12). Saul's fear arose from the consciousness of knowing the Spirit of God had left him. Such an awareness should have served to warn Saul. However, he had his mind set on protecting his position and destroying David, ignoring the voice of his conscience. Therefore, Saul's downfall became inevitable. When he could not tolerate David's success in the eyes of the people, Saul took his focus away from God. He saw that the Lord blessed David, but he could not stand the thought of David becoming king.

Saul removed David from his presence (v. 13). Saul could not stand to have David in his house any longer. Fearing David posed a threat against his throne and the dynasty he hoped to establish through his son, Jonathan, Saul removed David from his presence. By sending David away from his court, Saul hoped to curb the admiration of the people, especially that of his son.

Made him commander (v. 13). Putting David into active duty, Saul did not promote him to commander in order to bless him but to set him up to fail. The manipulative king conjured up a sinister plan by elevating the former slingshot-marksman-shepherd-turned-soldier to command part of the Israelite army. The people would believe that David earned such a military commission. At the least, David would be out of his sight, but more likely, Saul hoped the inexperienced leader would fail miserably. Even one failure on the battlefield would erode David's popularity with the people.

David led the troops (v. 13). Saul sent David out to fight risky battles, hoping David would suffer losses and lose favor with the people, or even better, that he would be killed in the fighting (v. 17). By increasing David's time on the battlefield, Saul increased the possibility David would suffer defeat. If his plan worked, he would not have to fear losing his throne to David.

Continued to be successful (v. 14). But David's new post as a commander of a thousand troops backfired on Saul. As in verse 5, behaving wisely carries the meaning of giving careful attention to, prospering, or succeeding. David carried out his military enterprises with such wisdom that his army won all its battles. The battlefield afforded David with better opportunities to show that he possessed not only the qualities of a champion, but he also had the talents and prudence of a military general. David's success came because he behaved wisely in all his ways and acted with godly insight. The word translated as *successful* means prudent or wise. He could have responded differently when Saul threw his spear at him and when Saul put him out of the palace and onto the battlefield. But David knew the secret to anyone's success comes through living in a way that honors God.

Because the LORD was with him (v. 14). David never gave into a victim's mentality. He had been the target of Saul's evil plots, but he behaved wisely. Despite every attempt Saul made to abuse, ridicule, slander, assault, or destroy him, David never returned any of those evil actions against Saul. Because he lived in such a way, David enjoyed God's favor. In spite of Saul's evil plans to destroy him, David continued to walk in the ways of the Lord and prospered on the battlefield. God turned all Saul's devices against the king and for David's advantage.

Dreaded him (v. 15). Previously the writer reported Saul "was afraid of David" (v. 12). Here a different word is used. Its root meaning is to dwell or remain. Saul's fear no longer subsided. He couldn't be soothed, but he remained or dwelt in constant dread because David's successes confirmed that the Lord had blessed David and departed from himself. Once again his increasing fear of David should have served to warn Saul. However, his heart boiled over with such hatred for David that he ignored anything or anyone that may have snapped him into a more reasonable attitude.

All Israel and Judah loved David (v. 16). Contrary to Saul's deep dread, David's popularity increased more and more among the people because God was with him. They celebrated their new national hero. That the writer distinguished between *Israel* and *Judah* may point to the books of Samuel being written during the time of the Divided Kingdom after David's and Solomon's reigns.

Leading their troopsLed them in their campaignsWent out and came in before them (v. 16). This phrase literally meant “going out and coming in before them.” This Hebrew figure of speech meant David acted as Israel’s leader in war and conducted successful military operations. God had His hand on David even though Saul had schemed against him. Saul tried all kinds of attacks and placed barriers in David’s path to thwart his success, but God would not allow Saul to have the victory.