



— EDDIE ESTEP —

WHO'S GOT YOUR BACK?

LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM THE LIFE OF KING DAVID

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— ONE —

SAMUEL

GOD KNOWS WHERE TO FIND YOU

The Background

The story of Samuel is told in 1 Samuel. He is also mentioned in 1 Chronicles 6:27, 28, 33; 7:2; 9:22; 11:3; 26:28; 29:29; 2 Chronicles 35:18; Psalm 99:6; Jeremiah 15:1; Acts 3:24; 13:20; and Hebrews 11:32.

The Story

Samuel was Israel's last judge, Israel's first prophet, and a member of Israel's long line of priests—a veritable one-man spiritual band.¹ Yahweh's representative and the de facto leader of Israel, he served a very important transitional role in Israel's history. By the time he anointed David king of Israel, Samuel was already long retired. He thought his service to Israel had concluded years before, but that was not to be. Again and again after his farewell address to the nation, Samuel was called back to duty for God and for his community.

From his earliest memories, Samuel had an awareness that God was going to use him in a special way. He had been told of how his mother, Hannah, had prayed for a son each year as she and his father, Elkanah, made their annual pilgrimage to worship at Shiloh. She prayed with such fervor that Eli the priest thought her a common drunk. In the course of time, God answered her

prayer, and Hannah gave birth to Samuel. As she had promised, while he was still very young, she brought Samuel to Shiloh to be dedicated and raised by Eli.

Early in his life Samuel was recognized as a prophet to whom, and through whom, God spoke. As a young boy, Samuel first heard the call of God one night as he slept in the house of the Lord. The Lord had a message for Eli that Samuel faithfully delivered, at Eli's urging.

Later, upon the death of Eli and his two corrupt sons, Samuel gained national prominence as the spiritual leader of the nation. He called the nation to repentance and guided Israel to a great victory over the Philistines at Mizpah, bringing about the return of the ark of the covenant. He erected a large stone at the battle site as a memorial, and there ensued a long period of peace with Samuel annually traveling Israel as circuit judge.

As Samuel neared retirement, the people began clamoring for a king. There were a couple of reasons for this. First, Samuel's two greedy sons were not much better than Eli's sons in their dishonesty and propensity to pervert justice. They were in line to succeed Samuel as judge, and Israel wanted no part of either of them. Instead, looking at the surrounding nations, and seeing that monarchies were all the political rage, Israel decided that they wanted a king just like everybody else. Samuel accused Israel of wanting to look to a human king rather than to God, expressing his contempt for the idea of monarchy and warning the people of what having a king would cost them. Nevertheless, they insisted on a king and God gave them what they wanted. God directed Samuel to Saul, an impressive young man of the tribe of Benjamin, handsome and a head taller than any other Israelite.

Soon after Samuel anointed Saul king at Mizpah, Samuel gave his farewell speech, reminding Israel of their heritage and exhorting them to be faithful to God. The pouring of the horn of olive oil over Saul's head was Samuel's last act before retiring from public service. But it would not be long before Samuel would again be called to serve.

The first time Samuel was called back to duty was to address the Philistine threat at Gilgal. Saul's behavior at Gilgal only confirmed Samuel's earlier misgivings. Rather than obeying Samuel's instructions and waiting for the priest to arrive to make the sacrifices, Saul grew impatient and made the sacrifices himself. When Samuel arrived, he rebuked Saul for his disobedience and impatience.

The second time Samuel was called back to duty was to address the sin of Saul regarding the Amalekites. When Saul blatantly disregarded the instructions to completely annihilate the Amalekites and totally destroy their possessions, Samuel confronted the king and announced that his sin had disqualified him for the kingship.

The third and final time Samuel was called back to duty was to consecrate the successor of Saul. When Saul was rejected by God because of his disobedience, Samuel wiped away his last tears of disappointment over Israel's first king, refilled his horn with oil, and set out for Bethlehem, having been instructed by God that the new king would be one of Jesse's sons. Because he was afraid that King Saul might kill him if he suspected the true reason for his arrival in Bethlehem, the stated purpose for his visit to Bethlehem was to offer a sacrifice. Samuel took a young cow with him for the sacrifice and invited Jesse and his sons to the ceremony. Seven of Jesse's sons were present and passed before Samuel, but none of them were chosen. Samuel asked if there were any other sons, and Jesse told of David, the youngest, who was watching the sheep. Samuel knew immediately that he had found God's choice for king. Samuel's horn of oil was put to use a second time, and David, in the presence of his father and brothers, was anointed king.

As he stood looking at young David, Samuel must have been overwhelmed with the realization that this young man—young enough to be Samuel's grandson—was the future promise of Israel. What a contrast between David and Saul. David was a generation younger than Saul, a head shorter, full of innocence, unassuming and pure. From that day on the Spirit of the Lord came upon David with power, and Samuel returned home to live out his days in Ramah.

Sometime later, however, David forced Samuel out of retirement by fleeing to him at Ramah when Saul was trying to kill David; Samuel agreed to help him and, together, the two of them went to Naioth. Saul sent men to Naioth to capture Samuel and David, but instead Saul's men began to prophesy with Samuel and the prophets. Saul was exasperated, especially after it happened a second and a third time. Finally, Saul himself went to Naioth, and the same thing happened to him. Instead of capturing David and Samuel, Saul stripped off his own clothes and, in the presence of Samuel, began to prophesy.

At Samuel's death, all Israel gathered to mourn him and bury him at Ramah; but even now, Samuel would be called, once more, back into service. Saul, fearful of the outcome of a looming battle with the Philistines, asked a medium in Endor to conjure up Samuel in a séance. While alive, Samuel seldom had good news for Saul; that pattern only continued when Samuel was summoned from the dead. Samuel told Saul that he and his sons would meet their end at the hands of the Philistines and that the kingdom would pass into the hands of David. In life, not one of Samuel's words had "fall[en] to the ground" (1 Sam. 3:19). The same would prove true in death.

Leadership Lessons

1. God knows where to find you.

God found Samuel, though Samuel was just a boy sleeping near the ark of the covenant in the house of the Lord. God found Moses, though Moses was at the far side of the desert watching his father-in-law's herds. God found David, though David was in the fields watching his father's flocks. These were all found by God and called by God to significant leadership. None of them sought the responsibility God gave them, but each was willing to accept the responsibility, once called.

Would-be leaders sometimes attempt to "position" themselves for opportunity, making great efforts to be at the right place at

the right time. The opposite was true for Moses, Samuel, and David, all of whom were sought out by God for significant places of leadership. As we will see later, even after David had been anointed king, he was willing to wait patiently for God to open doors before he assumed the throne.

Great leaders seldom seek great responsibility. Instead, great responsibility seeks them. Great leaders are often too busy faithfully accomplishing their present mission to seek assignments of greater responsibility. Ulysses S. Grant observed, “It is men who wait to be selected, and not those who seek, from whom we may always expect the most efficient service.”²

There seem to be two paths to leadership. One path is traveled by those who hasten to bring about leadership opportunities. These individuals seek authority for the perceived benefits associated with those positions. The other path is traveled by those who trust providence and the will of God to bring to pass the leadership opportunities. As I heard a friend say, “God always saves the best for those who give the choice to him.”³

A. W. Tozer wrote,

A true and safe leader is likely to be one who has no desire to lead but is forced into a position of leadership by the inward pressure of the Spirit and the press of the external situation. Such were Moses and David and the Old Testament prophets. I believe it might be accepted as a fairly reliable rule of thumb that the man who is ambitious to lead is disqualified as a leader.⁴

2. Emerging leaders need experienced leaders to bless them.

Being anointed with oil by the spiritual leader of the nation would have been a visible sign of blessing and a significant call to leadership. Samuel might have said to David “God has called you to this, and given you this special opportunity to serve him. He is with you. Be strong. Take courage.” For young David to be blessed by the aged prophet Samuel would have provided the confirmation of his call that young David would carry in his heart and his memory until he himself reached old age.

David and Samuel may never have seen each other prior to the day of David's anointing in Bethlehem. But that day was the beginning of a very special relationship. It was to Samuel that David, while running for his life from Saul, first turned for refuge.

The blessing of an experienced leader is a significant gift to an emerging leader. Such a blessing can provide encouragement and confidence for the challenges that lie ahead.

3. The leaders of the next generation might not resemble the leaders of this generation.

When Samuel began to size up Jesse's sons, he was first drawn to the tall, handsome, elder brother, Eliab, who stood head and shoulders taller than the others. Eliab appeared to be the best choice for king and even resembled King Saul. David's leadership potential was completely overlooked at first. Only after a thorough search was Samuel able to recognize him as God's choice.

When looking for leaders, do not make hasty judgments based on outward appearances. There are numerous studies that demonstrate how easily we are misled by a leader's physical appearance. Inward character, though harder to assess, is a better qualifier than outward appearance.

The leaders of the next generation may not resemble the leaders of this generation. Our challenge is to ensure that emerging leaders are not overlooked. God has his eye on next-generation leaders, whether we do or not.

4. Recognizing potential—and helping to bring it out—is one of the most critical roles of leadership.

Led by God, Samuel anointed both Saul and David for leadership. Neither Saul nor David had impressive résumés that indicated their qualifications for national leadership. Both were chosen based on their leadership potential rather than on their impressive records of previous performance.

Effective leaders have the ability to recognize the potential in others. They can perceive—within particular individuals—the

seeds of success that will produce fruit if only given the right opportunity.

Some of the indicators of leadership potential include integrity, success in previous responsibilities, relational skills, receptivity to feedback (nondefensiveness), ability to bring out the best in others, eagerness to learn, adaptability, and cultural fit.

5. Retirement need not be the end of a leader's contributions.

Even in retirement, Samuel continued to be of significant service to God and his community. Samuel was still willing to be used, had much to contribute, and was provided by God with continued opportunities to serve.

Albert Mohler refers to the “scandal of retirement” and suggests that it would be more appropriate for leaders to think of “redeployment” rather than “retirement.”⁵ Men and women of character—even though they may be retired—who are willing to share their wisdom, experiences, and insights will always have opportunity to contribute to the success of younger leaders.⁶

Questions for Leadership Development

1. Who has blessed you for leadership?
2. What emerging leader would benefit from your blessing?
3. In what situations is it appropriate to pursue an opportunity for leadership and in what situations should one wait to be pursued by an opportunity for leadership?
4. How can you and your organization actively seek out emerging leaders?
5. What additional leadership lessons can you identify in the story of Samuel?

The Psalm

Psalm 99 describes the majesty of the great and just God who reigns over all the earth and who hears the leaders of his people, notably Moses, Aaron, and Samuel.

Psalm 99

- ¹The LORD reigns,
let the nations tremble;
he sits enthroned between the cherubim,
let the earth shake.
- ²Great is the LORD in Zion;
he is exalted over all the nations.
- ³Let them praise your great and awesome name—
he is holy.
- ⁴The King is mighty, he loves justice—
you have established equity;
in Jacob you have done
what is just and right.
- ⁵Exalt the LORD our God
and worship at his footstool;
he is holy.
- ⁶Moses and Aaron were among his priests,
Samuel was among those who called on his name;
they called on the LORD
and he answered them.
- ⁷He spoke to them from the pillar of cloud;
they kept his statutes and the decrees he gave them.
- ⁸LORD our God,
you answered them;
you were to Israel a forgiving God,
though you punished their misdeeds.
- ⁹Exalt the LORD our God
and worship at his holy mountain,
for the LORD our God is holy.

“Christians are called to be strong leaders, and this book serves as a foundation to build the skills needed to be successful regardless of the position of authority they hold.”

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LEADERSHIP LESSONS FROM A BIBLICAL GREAT

Fast-paced change presents new challenges for leaders, but biblical principles about leadership and relationships are timeless.

Nowhere is this more evident than in the life of David.

Who's Got Your Back? examines the leadership lessons we can learn from David's relationships with friends, family, and foes. You'll learn how to apply these lessons by answering the questions for personal development at the end of each chapter.

Perfect for individuals, leadership teams, and small groups, this book will help you discover timeless wisdom valuable for leaders today, tomorrow, and beyond.



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