



"Stepping Up"

- 1 Samuel 11

by Pastor Tim Dodson
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Whenever there is a spiritual mountain top, it seems the valley follows shortly after. Israel had just had a great event...a 'high moment' when they had anointed their new king. However, nothing really changed after the event. Everyone...*including Saul*, just went on back home and continued to live their lives. Saul did not go off to a palace someplace, but in fact, as chapter 11 opens, we find Saul working in the fields just as he did before he was made king. Saul began his life and calling in great fashion. He was humble and contrite, but as we find out in this story he was also still bold and action oriented when need be. Like so many of us, he began his race well, but as we follow his steps, we will also see his unraveling and his ultimate sad end. And again, like some of us, there seems to be no stopping him...no deterrent that he would heed, no counsel he would receive.

But this day he was "on." On this day he would be the hand of God. Quickly after that great event of recognizing their new king, a far region of Israel was attacked by a constant enemy of God's people, the Ammonites. As is with God's people today, none of us are immune from such attacks. Sadly, those attacks more often than not come from those who count themselves to be a part of the family of God. There is an purposeful ignoring of passages that say to engage in such practices you are in truth outside of God's family. To attack your own says they are in reality *not* your own because you are *not* really in the family of God...you are not a true Christian.

It was a reality during the earthly ministry of Jesus, when the religious folks were they greatest persecutors and ultimately were directly behind his execution. But today with Saul and the people of Israel, this was an enemy that was openly "outside " of the realm of the following of Jehovah. These boys were from "out there" on the street. A clear and stated enemy of God. And enemy of Israel. A "profiteer." An imperialist. These boys were just pirates, as many people groups were at that time. Notice they attacked from a distance...and they went after the little guy. Those tactics are still the attack plan of choice today with such folks.

Upon laying siege to the city of Jabesh-gilead, the people inside quickly began to negotiate with the enemy, seeking the least painful, least expensive way out of this jam. The thought was: "*How much do I need to compromise...how much do I need to surrender in order to get out of this?*" That too is usually our immediate reaction, our quickest tendency. The scene is painted: *I am in a jam...this is really bad trouble, and I have to do something to get out of it with as few scars as possible.*

When the folks in Jabesh-gilead proposed a surrender, such was not enough for Nahash and these Ammonite boys. No, they wanted humiliation and public degradation. They wanted shame and embarrassment! The Ammonites didn't just want to win, they wanted Israel to *look* bad. So they agreed to the surrender but only with

the stipulation that his army would gouge out the right eye of every resident. This demand would have no real practical aspect behind it. It would be just to humiliate the people of Jabesh-gilead. The Ammonites wanted to shame them. It is evil at its most copious.

Naturally, the residents of Jabesh-gilead needed a little time to think about it! So they asked for a few days. Yes, they actually "negotiated" a stay of execution from their enemies! They were taking matters into their own hands, even while they held out for some sort of redemption from outside also. The parallel to our own handling of such problems, issues, and attacks are staggering! Everything was dealt with in the physical realm...on the secular and practical plane. I guess the miraculous was not a viable option here! Bowing before the sovereignty of the all-powerful God and/or being willing to die fighting I guess was not an alternative. It was apparently physical survival at any cost.

I am often amazed at how quickly it seems we will compromise, surrender, or take matters into our own hands when we have boundless resources at our hands as children of the king! Is it not true that it is because we want the least painful way out and God's may very well not be such? We want rather the easiest and least expensive method. One where we won't be embarrassed, we can dodge any public humiliation, and we can hang onto as much of our stuff and our lives as possible. Is that not the way we usually handle things? I mean frankly we just don't *want* to go to war! If we go to God, well He tends to be so "black-and-white" and we are more into a "negotiated settlement" ...more of a "shared custody" kind of thing!

Saul had a different reaction to this situation. Firstly, it says he was got really mad. A lot of folks don't like that trait in their leaders. They are the first folks to compromise and seek a "soft landing" for the situations in their lives. They don't like "extreme." They don't want leaders who will get fired up in such a manner. They would rather negotiate and compromise. They want a "middle ground" and a "pliable" leader. But with Saul, there would be no negotiation and no deal making! He knew that this 'band-aid' had to be *ripped off*, quickly and emphatically. He wasn't going to be messing around.

Saul gathered up the men of Israel...*all the men*, to "report to duty." There would be no "conscientious objectors" here! They were all members of the family of Israel...all receiving the blessings and benefits of that relationship, and now it was time to defend that family. This relationship and expectation was much like our Covenant membership here at JFB. We ask you if you are one of us, and if the answer is yes, you can depend on us to be there for you and we expect therefore that you will be there for us also. There will always be those who will just attend here, and they will always be welcome. But a Covenant agreement between us establishes something else entirely: *it establishes who we can count on*. Who is *promising*. Who is faithful not only to themselves but to God, kingdom, and church. To *others*.

Today we seem to think we can claim all the benefits and blessings of belonging but don't have to step up when war is declared. After all, we don't want to be inconvenienced! We don't want to have to give of our time, finances or status for the sake of others. It is usually at those times and in those situations that we wash our hands of it all saying "*hey...it's not my issue! It's not my problem! I have my own life to live and my own responsibilities!*" And that comes even after consuming and enjoying the blessings of that unity for often years!

I am often greatly pained over this issue. Some folks are *STILL* enduring the attacks and slander of their church saying..."*well...that reckoning day is coming! Yes sir....one of these days I'm going to throw down and put an end that talk!*" But of course that day never comes and the years go by. Some of us will listen to gossip and slander from those outside the church and will repeat it, seemingly *believe* it, without cause, and will discuss it

in their homes and we know this because your kids repeat it! How shameful! For some, this is after years of consuming here and seeing clearly the faithfulness of what goes on inside this church's walls!

Saul was at this point not that man. He was faithful, dependable, and loyal. Some men never learned what that is, but I did from my dad, and I seek those attributes in those I call my friends. Saul was a *man*. I think the world has few of those left! Saul was consumed by a righteous anger, and a righteous man should always be so aroused by evil! Jesus, Moses, Nehemiah, King David, Paul the apostle, and others...all knew what it was to man-up and act via a righteous anger. There is no place for passivity in the walk of a faithful man or woman of Christ! I'm not talking about needless aggression and grandiose public lynchings. But cowardice and disregard of what is right and the love action toward a brother or sister in need or under attack is unconscionable. There is no place for that kind of selfishness in a real body of Christ believers!

Saul was "*calling them all in*." Someone is hurting one of our own, and we are going to go rescue them. And the Spirit of God was with Him, just as the Spirit of God is with us to overcome the enemies that come against us. Not just personally, but intervening to help a brother or sister if we are given opportunity. And sometimes stepping up and *making* that opportunity! Standing with the truth. Living out a faithful Christ example of loyalty and faithfulness and *friendship and love!*

Even in our own lives we must get serious about issues and people and problems and tendencies that seek to bind us up and push us down, away from dynamic kingdom living. For some of us, we need to "go to war" and stop messing around. We can't keep seeking compromise and the least evasive solutions that never really solve the problem but rather just duct tapes the issue for awhile.

Instead of "breaking of relationship" with some people we do the dance of compromise and just "try to ignore it." We have financial issues and instead of making hard choices, we just work more hours or get a second job. (even if it's Sundays and Wednesday evenings!) We have historical alcohol problems but we decide to just "drink a little" and you know...*not get real drunk*. And we refuse to get some treatment but try to manage it ourselves. We have marriage problems, but we attempt to pacify and bandaid the situation because we don't want the embarrassment or the humbling that comes with being forthright.

The list goes on and on. When we fail to face the enemy head-on, we are saying God can't handle it and the Holy Spirit in me is not strong enough, and/or I just don't love God and others enough to get serious about it. Satan does all he can to keep you from stepping up. But my friends, quiet and calm is not always the qualities and attributes of faithful living. Sometimes, to be a man you need to step up. Sometimes you need to go to war.

Saul finished out this event with rejecting any revenge or recourse against past shortcomings. God is always the God of the second and third chance! So should we be! I don't care what you were or what you have done in the past. I only care what you are *today*, and what you are doing *today*. Forgiveness is also a trait of a Godly man and a Godly woman! We must learn how to forgive as much as we need to learn to fight. Sadly, we usually fail to step up and resolve an issue with whatever action is necessary, and then we remain bitter and angry for years instead!

I had a guy approach me recently to apologize for being angry at me and carrying bitterness against me for something that apparently happened in a matter of seconds a large number of years ago. I didn't remember him or the incident whatsoever. Not one piece of the story was familiar to me. But instead of dealing with it then, he carried that cancerous anger for literally years and let it eat at him, all the while I knew nothing of the issue whatsoever. I'm glad he finally squared things, but I felt bad that he suffered for something that apparently was a small and inconsequential thing in my world! That's bitterness! That's what *unrighteous* anger will do to you.

As men...as women of God, as REAL and FAITHFUL and HUMBLE and BOLD...we have to decide to get serious about some things in our lives and step up to the hard thing. God has got your back when you do. I won't promise that such will be a bloodless coup or that you will come out of it without a scratch. But you *will* come out of it.

Maybe like Saul you were that man at one time, or that woman sometime in the past, but just like he did you began to let all that slip away as you began to prop up the facade walls and the veneer of control and the pretense that you are well when you are not. Now today you are AWOL...long since out of the battle, or if you **are** here you are acting purely out of religious peer pressure, self-imposed churchy constraint, or even self-preservation. After all, we wouldn't want to look bad right?

Maybe your personal life is a mess, but you keep putting on that Sunday smile and saying all is well when it is not. Home, personal life, vocational, financial, parental, you name it...it's a mess and all the tweaking and buffing in the world will not bring peace. And now the world seems to be asking for your right eye to keep you "square with the house."

When will you decide it's time to go to war?