



Cornton Baptist Church
 Demonstrating God's love in action
 in the community of Cornton

Through the Bible

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August 2011

When the angel of the LORD appeared to Gideon, he said, “The LORD is with you, mighty warrior.” (v.12)

We often hear people say things like: “I’m only a housewife.” “I’m only a janitor.” “I’m only an average student.” “I don’t know my bible well enough.” Underestimating one’s usefulness to God is nothing new. In Old Testament times, for example, when God looked for someone to conquer the troublesome Midianites, He chose unimpressive Gideon, calling him a ‘*mighty warrior*’. And look at what Gideon does...he does what each one of us would do – he makes excuses.

For Gideon his excuse is he is from the weakest clan in the smallest tribe and he is the least in that family. Who am I? Doesn’t this remind you of the call of Moses? I’m a nobody he says. I can’t achieve anything. And God says yes you can and I will be with you. This wasn’t enough for Gideon; he wanted to test it further. And so he asks for time to offer a sacrifice. Following this he asks the Lord about laying down a fleece – and not once but twice.

How many times do we ignore God’s call on our life because we are scared? How many times do we make excuses the way Gideon does here? It doesn’t matter how insignificant or inadequate you feel if God is calling you to serve him he says to you as he says to Gideon ‘*I will be with you.*’ (verse 16). We see throughout the Scriptures how God takes and uses ordinary everyday people and uses them for his purposes and for his glory.

And just as an aside in regard to the fleece – this is not necessarily a weakness in Gideon. He was willing and obedient to serve the Lord by entering into a fatally dangerous situation. But he wanted to make sure that he’d heard the Lord right. There is nothing wrong with ensuring you are hearing God’s call and not the world’s call. We don’t need a fleece today – simply test the call against God’s Word and ask for the Holy Spirit’s guidance then you will get the confirmation you need.

Pray: asking for the Holy Spirit’s guidance in your life.

Reflect: what is God calling me to do that I am making excuses for?

The LORD said to Gideon, “You have too many men for me to deliver Midian into their hands.” (v.2)

Gideon gathers his men ready for battle. He has 32,000 but the Lord tells him this is too many. Why did the Lord want Israel to have a smaller army? God knows that sometimes we tend to take all the credit. We can have a sense that God is at work, but after it's all over, we kind of pat ourselves on the back for doing such a good job. So for Gideon and Israel, God makes it harder. Sometimes we face impossible tasks with overwhelming odds, just for the purpose of having to trust in God because it's obvious that we can't do it.

God doesn't want Israel boasting so he says lets any who are afraid go home. Back in Deuteronomy 20 God told the people of Israel that he was with them in battle so they need not be afraid and those who were afraid were to leave so they would not cause that fear to spread throughout the camp. The same applies here. It was better to have a small army of men who trusted God than to have a big army that included the fearful, because fear is contagious.

But as a result, more than two thirds of Gideon's army left. With 10,000 people, there were still too many for God's taste. The Lord told Gideon to send home anyone that knelt down to drink at the water. The only ones that were to stick around were the ones that had brought the water up to their mouths with their hands – they were keeping an eye on what was going on around them. That only left 300 guys! But that little number perfectly suited God.

We should notice something about the people that God chose. He got rid of those that were fearful of the enemy, but kept those that were watchful of the enemy. We too have an enemy, the devil. And there are two things we should remember about him: we needn't be fearful of him, but we must always be watchful regarding him.

Pray: asking for God's help to stand against the enemy.

Reflect: am I on my guard against the ways of the devil?

But Gideon told them, "I will not rule over you, nor will my son rule over you. The LORD will rule over you." (v.23)

Have you ever had one of those "I was just trying to help" moments? Perhaps you offered to carry the cake through to the table and you ended up dropping it. Or you offered to look after the neighbours rabbits and they end up getting out the hut and running away. In Judges 8 it appears Gideon tries to do the good thing – he is full of good intentions. The people come to him after their victory and ask him to be their king. Gideon knows that they should be obeying God and God alone so he declines their offer and reminds them that *'the Lord will rule over you.'* (verse 23). This really speaks of Gideon's character.

Good as his decision was to turn down the kingdom, Gideon was not perfect by any means. He asked for some of the gold that was taken in the battle and made it into an ephod, a sort of apron. He takes it to his city of Ophrah and puts it on display to remind the people of the Lord's victory and their deliverance from the Midianites. But as the Israelites were so prone to do, they turned it into an idol. It became a stumbling block to Gideon and his family as well, because rather than pointing the victory to God, Gideon became the "hot shot" and the guy who was going to be made king. He tried to do the right thing but because he did not seek God first rather making the decision himself it had disastrous consequences.

As the chapter finishes we find Gideon dead and the people forgetting God and returning to their wicked ways. Once again Judges 2:19 comes true *'But when the judge died, the people returned to ways even more corrupt than those of their fathers, following other gods and serving and worshipping them. They refused to give up their evil practices and stubborn ways.'* Friends let's make sure we always seek God's ways, testing what we think we hear against His Word. Let's keep our eyes fixed on Jesus and not turn away and return to a life of sin.

Pray: asking for God's help to live His way.

Reflect: what 'right thing' am I trying to achieve just now? Is it of God?

One day the trees went out to anoint a king for themselves. (v.8)

In medieval thought, each order of living creatures had an imagined king. Every “king” possessed an innate majesty, authority, and power qualifying him to rule. The king of the four-footed creatures, for example, was the lion; the king of the birds, the eagle; the king of the planets, Jupiter. These majestic creatures were often used to represent human royalty, as with the English king, Richard, the Lion Heart. Scripture uses trees to symbolise kings. In today’s reading Jotham uses symbolism in his parable, but his tree imagery is designed to undercut Abimelech’s rule, not to support it. After Abimelech conspires with the citizens of Shechem he murders his seventy brothers, who were all sons of Gideon; only Jotham, the youngest, escapes.

It happened during the time of the judges. Abimelech crowned himself king. His ambition defied God; he not only murdered his brothers, but he instituted a form of government not yet ordained by God, Israel’s true king (Judges 8:23). Even worse, he relied on Baal and his worshipers (v. 4), the very forces his father Gideon had rightly sought to destroy. Abimelech was the very opposite of what God’s judge had to be.

Jotham’s prophetic parable of the four trees highlights this fact. The olive, fig, and vine, all producing important fruit, refuse to be king, though they are kingly trees. They recognise that their function is to grow fruit, not to rule. Only the scraggly, unfruitful thornbush, an irritant to farmers and a cause of brush-fires, agrees to be king. Given Abimelech’s destructive reign, the thornbush appropriately symbolises his kingship.

This tree was a benchmark for gauging Israel’s relationship with God. Is there a similar benchmark in your spiritual pilgrimage? Perhaps a place, symbol, or verse that you have returned to, imaginatively or literally, in your journey with the Lord? Return there today and ask God to show you if you have been faithful like Joshua or if you have lapsed like Abimelech.

Pray: thanking God for His faithfulness and asking him to help you be faithful.

Reflect: am I faithfully following God or am I going my own way?

But the Israelites said to the LORD, "We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now." Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the LORD. And he could bear Israel's misery no longer. (v.15)

The book of Judges is a somewhat depressing account of God's people locked in a recurring cycle of rebellion, punishment, repentance, and deliverance. After every divine intervention, the process was repeated. It was always their pain that caused God's people to call on Him as they do in verse 15.

The people are acknowledging that they have fallen away from the Lord. This is a step in the right direction, but only one step. I think it's a good example to see that the people make two statements about their sin. They see in verse 10 that they've walked away from God ('forsaking our God') and they see that they've fallen into sin ('served the Baals'). I think that too often I focus on the sin I've fallen into and neglect the fact that at the same time I've sinned against God. If you've been away from the Lord, the place to start is with confession - telling God what you've done. 1 John 1:9 reminds us that God is faithful to forgive us. Jesus died that our sins could be forgiven.

God reminds them he has heard their cries before and saved them but here they are forsaking him again and serving false gods. He tells them to go and cry to them for help. I think that God is challenging the people to see just how sincere they are in asking Him for help. They've expressed words as if they want God's help, but do they? Perhaps they're just keeping all their options open? Here's the turning point for the people. Talk is cheap. God doesn't just want to hear you say you're sorry; He wants to see you take a step in the right direction. And the people rid themselves of their false gods and turn back to serve the one true God.

Confess your sin and prove your repentance by turning away from all that holds you back and serving God wholeheartedly.

Pray: confessing any sin to God.

Reflect: am I serving God completely and fully?

Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. (v.1)

With the people of Israel turned back to God we are introduced to the next judge. This man is called Jephthah and as we begin to read we discover he is a bit of an outcast. His mother was a prostitute and he carried the stigma of that with him even although it was not his own fault. When his younger half-brothers grew to be men, they ostracised him and ran him out of town. He ran to the land of Tob where a group of adventurers, or worthless men as it should more accurately be translated, gathered around him and followed him.

The Ammonites made war against Israel so the people turned to Jephthah asking for him to be their leader. Jephthah's reputation as a strong warrior made him the perfect candidate to lead the Israeli army, regardless of his questionable lineage. Jephthah only agreed to head up the army if he would also be put in his rightful place of leadership as the eldest son of Gilead. We see Jephthah's skills as a leader and judge. He first tries the peaceful approach but the king of Ammon paid no attention and so Jephthah went over to fight with the Lord on his side and won.

Verse 29 tells us that the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. Jephthah now joins a select group of people who had the Holy Spirit come upon them in the Old Testament. We are privileged that we have the Holy Spirit on us as well – the moment we turn from our sin and crown Jesus as Lord of our lives the Bible promises that the Spirit comes upon us.

Here is the lesson for us, the reminder if you like - God uses outcasts. It seems that God has this habit of using people that have been rejected by others. Joseph was rejected by his brothers. David was rejected by his boss, Saul. Jeremiah and many of the other prophets were often rejected because of their message. Jesus was rejected by His people, the Jews. And still it continues today. People may well reject you but that does not mean God will. He can and will use you if you are willing to serve him.

Pray: thanking God for loving you and giving you His Spirit.

Reflect: what ways is God using you in His service?

*Why did you go to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you?
We're going to burn down your house over your head. (v.1)*

Jealousy is a terrible and destructive trait. Jealousy turns brother against brother, sister against sister. Jealousy leads to separation and envy and bitterness. Here in Judges 12 we come across the men of Ephraim once more. We have seen them before in Judges and each time they cause dissension and trouble.

Ephraim was at it again, boasting of being the biggest, baddest and the best! They had not lifted a finger to help Gilead for 18 years. Now they feel their pride crushed over this “nobody”, this “outcast”, leading an insignificant group in victory. They felt left out – they are complaining that they did not get to go into battle. Pride cannot accept the sovereign work of God. Ephraim was jealous of the glory that Jephthah and those with him received after defeating the sons of Ammon, but they hadn't been willing to come and fight the battle in the first place. Just as they had been with Gideon, Ephraim wanted the glory but didn't want to risk their lives nor do the work of going to battle!

This had happened before of course with Gideon back in Judges 8. Gideon was able to talk to the Ephraimites and they walked away peacefully. Jephthah won't have such success – he was cut from a different cloth than Gideon. Jephthah gave testimony in verse 2 and 3 but it was not enough. He shot straight while Gideon appeased them (8:1-3). Pride always battles against the reality of our own weak, sinful flesh. And here we find Jephthah going into battle and killing 42,000 Ephraimites. And all because of jealousy.

Friends, we have to be wary that we do not get jealous of other people because they have achieved something we haven't or are doing something in the church we want to do but can't. Rejoice with others as they experience God at work.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for times you have been jealous recently.

Reflect: what is causing me to be jealous at the moment?

Then Manoah prayed to the LORD: “O Lord, I beg you, let the man of God you sent to us come again to teach us how to bring up the boy who is to be born.” (v.8)

What a great day it is when a couple discovers they’re going to be parents! It’s even more exciting for those who have been unable to have children. Such was the case for Manoah and his wife, the parents-to-be of Samson. Here in chapter 13 we are introduced to the last of the judges – Samson.

The “Angel of the Lord” appeared to Manoah’s wife and told her that she would bear a son, one who would ‘*begin the deliverance of Israel from the hands of the Philistines*’ (verse 5). He also told her how she was to live and that her son was to be a ‘*Nazirite, set apart to God*’ (verse 4-5). Part of Samson’s preparation for his calling came before he was even conceived or born. Part of what was built into Samson was the commitment of a mother who was willing to make sacrifices for her child.

When she told her husband about it, he asked the Lord to send the Angel again and give them further instructions. Manoah’s question was: ‘*What is to be the rule for the boy’s life and work?*’ (verse 12). But the Angel’s answer pointed primarily to the obedience of the mother (verse 13-14).

These godly parents did not ask for their son to be great rather they asked what they needed to do to be godly parents. Godly parents seek to bring their children up the best that they can in the instruction of the Lord. There is no greater privilege in life than raising children. Moses reminds the children of Israel of this in Deuteronomy 6 and Paul does the same in Ephesians 5. Parents please dedicate your children to God, thanking him for the wonderful gift he has given you in them. Please also ask the question Manoah asked and seek to bring your children up in the training and instruction of the Lord.

Pray: thanking God for your children if you are a parent, and if you are not a parent give thanks for all the children in the church.

Reflect: am I bringing up my child(ren) in the way of the Lord? Am I a good witness to them?

The Spirit of the LORD came upon him in power... (v.6)

Samson is a hot blooded young male. He sees a woman and thinks she is beautiful beyond words. He desires her and he wants her. This will be Samson's weakness – he likes the ladies. So he ignores God's Word and demands his parents allow him to marry her. You will remember of course back in Deuteronomy 7 that God forbid the Israelites to marry any Canaanite when they entered the Promised Land. Here he is defying that to get what he wants. Samson is in sin: lust, coveting, and desiring to be unequally yoked.

Yet verse 4 tells us that God has a plan even in the midst of Samson's rebellion and sin. God is going to use Samson's sins - his lust and rage - to begin the deliverance of the Israelites from the Philistines. Most of his attacks against the Philistines stem from a woman being in the centre of the situation, and Samson getting angry.

It never ceases to amaze me that God uses everything. Everything. The most terrible tragedy, the most hateful and vindictive leader, the most sinful person. The awful affliction that Joseph endured - sold into slavery by his own brothers, falsely accused of sexual attack by his owner's wife, abandoned in prison for years - these things were all working together for good - not only for Joseph's good, but for his entire country. Later in life, when Joseph confronted his brothers, he said, '*God meant it for good.*' Samson will spend much of his life following his sensual desire, yet God is going to use it for Israel's deliverance from the Philistines.

And we discover in verse 6 that the Holy Spirit is upon Samson and gives him incredible strength. The Holy Spirit works through imperfect people. He may work through people you or I don't approve of. He may work through us. Ours is not to ask why ours is simply to give glory to God that he can use the weak things of the world for his purposes and glory.

Pray: thanking God for using you in His service.

Reflect: in what area do I sin again and again? Ask God to give you strength to overcome temptation in that area.

Because he was thirsty he cried out to the Lord... (v.18)

Chapter 15 finally shows us Samson realising who God is and who it is that gives him strength. This only comes after he first goes into battle on his own. It's a few months after the encounter in chapter 14 and so he has cooled down and wants to go back to his wife. Unfortunately the father-in-law has given her to the best man because he thought Samson hated her. So Samson now wants revenge. He forgets that God has already taught through Deuteronomy that vengeance is mine says the Lord. His revenge though ends up in the loss of his wife, the loss of his authority and the loss of his people. The people of Israel have become so accustomed to Philistine rule that they don't want any bother and so are willing to hand Samson over. They don't see him as judge nor do they think he can save them.

It's here that the Spirit of the Lord comes on Samson again and with God's help now victory is won. He learned to call upon God. First of all, he learned who he was - a servant. He learned that deliverance from the Philistines came from God, and he learned that he couldn't fight them in his own strength, that he needed to trust God for everything. He illustrates this because, after this incredible slaughter of the enemy, he calls on God, the God of all the universe, for a simple glass of water. He says, "Lord, it's been quite a battle. I'm dying of thirst, but I can't afford to die here because if they see me dead with the jawbone in my hand then they'll think that you're not the God that you really are. Your name is at stake, so revive me and give me back my ministry."

When Samson sowed personal revenge he reaped the loss of his wife, the loss of his authority and the loss of his people. But when he sowed the seed of faith in the Lord then we discover that he reaped the strength of the Lord; he reaped the victory over his enemies, and he reaped renewed strength to judge Israel for twenty years. Are you going it alone or are you calling on the Lord, trusting Him and following Him?

Pray: asking God for strength and courage to follow him wholeheartedly.

Reflect: am I going it alone or allowing God to lead and guide me?

But he did not know that the LORD had left him. (v.20)

One of the easiest temptations to which people succumb is self-sufficiency. We take on tasks in our strength with our own abilities and ingenuity. The more we are self-sufficient, however, the less we are God-dependent. Samson demonstrated this. His strength was from God, but after a while he forgot that. Then came the day when the Lord left him, ‘*but he did not know that*’ (verse 20). When Delilah called, ‘*Samson, the Philistines are upon you!*’ he thought nothing had changed. Yet everything had changed.

Whatever physical ability Samson had was insufficient. His resourcefulness could not undo the cords that bound him. The Philistines were able to overcome him and, after blinding Samson, humiliated him. His final act against the Philistines came when he prayed, ‘*O Sovereign LORD, remember me. O God, please strengthen me just once more*’ (verse 28). Samson was no longer self-sufficient but was once again God-dependent. Strength comes from commitment. Samson’s strength did not come from his hair. It came from his special commitment to God, which was symbolised by his long hair.

Someone has said that “the Holy Spirit could be removed from the world and most Christians would not even notice.” The point is that we tend to live, work and even serve God in self-sufficiency. We think we can do it all ourselves – our modern culture has taught us that.

Are you dependent on God or independent of Him? The easiest tests to measure this are your prayers and your thoughts. Do you pray for God’s help regularly, or only when up against a wall like Samson was? Do you think about needing and receiving God’s help, or do you just get things done in your own strength? Don’t be foolish. Why be self-sufficient when you can be God-dependent?

Pray: asking God to help us fully rely on him.

Reflect: do I depend on God or go it alone?

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. (v.6)

The previous train had been cancelled. The people were crowded around the gates at St Pancras Rail Station in London awaiting the next train. Those who were due on the train and had booked their seats were ready for the rush; those from the cancelled train were ready for the rush; and then the gates opened and everyone made a mad dash for the train – pushing and shoving all to get on. It didn't matter if you had booked a seat or not everyone pushed in and grabbed what seat they could. A first come first served principle seemed to apply. But there was one positive note: no one was breaking the law - there seemed to be no law!

Judges 17:6 tells us everyone did as he saw fit. This sentence is a good summation of the rest of the book of Judges. Unfortunately, it's also a good summation of the direction our own society is headed. Moral relativism is teaching the younger generation that because there is no God, then there are no moral absolutes. And hence, there is no right and wrong. We just need to do what we think is right. But the Bible warns us in Proverbs 14:12 '*There is a way that seems right to a man, but in the end it leads to death.*' When everyone is doing what is right in their own eyes, you can be sure a society is headed for destruction.

Micah at first makes an idol and has a shrine and even installs one of his own sons as his priest. Later he meets a Levite and does not ask anything about him but rather installs him as priest. Here we see a complete lack of knowledge regarding the ways of the God that Micah believes he is worshipping. This is not the tabernacle of God. This is not a priest of God. And these idols are forbidden by God. This entire situation is grievous to the Lord.

And yet people live that way today – doing what they want rather than asking what God wants. We have to watch we do not fall into that trap. In order to live life God's way and honour Him we have to read His word and follow it.

Pray: asking God to forgive us when we live as we see fit ignoring him.

Reflect: what areas of my life do I do as I see fit?

He replied, “You took the gods I made, and my priest, and went away. What else do I have? How can you ask, ‘What’s the matter with you?’” (v.24)

Here we are reintroduced to the tribe of Dan. They had actually been given a land for their inheritance along with all the other tribes of Israel. The trouble was they had difficulty taking the land allotted to them and settled for some place else (Joshua 19). Here they come looking for new land once more. Interestingly they do not ask God before they set off or before they ask the rent-a-priest. Our first action ought always to be to seek the Lord’s face. Whenever we face a decision we can bring it before the Lord asking for his leading and guiding. This people don’t. They walk in to spy the land and find the priest and ask him. Remember this is the Levite who was searching for a place to stay and Micah offered him lodging and a wage if he would his priest – hence rent-a-priest. Sadly there are many like this priest in ministry today – for money they will say what you want them to say and tickle your ears. This priest does not even go and pray, he simply says go, you have the Lord’s approval.

The other interesting point that comes forth from this chapter is that man is by nature religious. These men have something in them that is drawn to religion. But their problem is that they have a slightly twisted view of what is right in the sight of God. They see the idol and the carved image and take it. They think this will help them and we see in verse 31 that they used the idols the whole time they were in Shiloh.

Micah too is concerned. He thinks the idols are all he has. They are his god. We do the same in life at times...other things become our god – our job, our possessions, our leisure activities. And when we cannot work for some reason or cannot play sport we think all is lost. It’s not. It might be disappointing but life is still there for living. God is still on the throne. Let’s make sure we worship Him and Him alone.

Pray: asking for the Lord’s guidance in an area of your life you need it at the moment.

Reflect: what things in my life become gods to me?

In those days Israel had no king. (v.1)

A man writes, “I was going to bed the other night when my wife told me that I had left the light on in the shed, she could see from the bedroom window. As I looked for myself, I saw that there were people in the shed taking things. I phoned the police, but they told me that no one was in the area to help at this time, but they would send someone over as soon as they were available. I said OK, hung up, and waited one minute, then phoned the police back. ‘Hello. I just called you a minute ago because there were people in my shed. Well, you don’t have to worry about them now cause I’ve shot them all.’ Within five minutes there were half a dozen police cars in the area, an Armed Response unit, the works. Of course, they caught the burglars red-handed. One of the officers said: ‘I thought you said that you’d shot them!’ I replied with ‘I thought you said there was nobody available!’”

In a similar way the Levite in our chapter today captures the attention of the people of Israel. We are told at the start of the chapter for the third time in three chapters that Israel had no king. Without a king and a judge, the nation has gone to ruin. They had taken their eyes off of the Lord and were doing their own thing. We see that in the Levite’s life as he has a concubine – he is not married to her but having a sexual relationship with her. The bible teaches us sex is a gift for married relationship. In the wider context the men of the city he goes to are sinful even tending toward homosexual relationships. In the end they gang rape his concubine and she dies. Sin has taken over. The Levite cuts up her dead body and sends a part to each tribe of Israel. As we find out next they stand to attention and respond to purge evil from among them.

Evil is best avoided by keeping our eyes on our king – King Jesus. When we look to him, worship him and follow him we will not be led astray and sin.

Pray: thanking Jesus for being Lord of our lives.

Reflect: are my eyes fixed on Jesus always?

And the Israelites inquired of the Lord. (v.27)

Think of the story of the sorcerer's apprentice. The young man is still very unskilled in the sorcerer's art, and when the sorcerer leaves one day, he begins to play with the potions and to cast spells. All of a sudden things lurch out of control. Disasters begin that he can't stop. He attempts to cast more spells to get control of the powers that he's loosed, but that makes it all worse, and things spin further and further out of control. The sorcerer's apprentice can't, by his own efforts, stop the consequences of the problems that he's initiated.

The righteously indignant Israelites here are like the sorcerer's apprentice. They dive into action. Instead of seeking the Lord, the men of Israel immediately jump into action. They don't take time to think about it or to see what God might do. They are angry at the vile nature of this crime and decide to seek vengeance. They ask the Benjamites to hand over the wicked men but they refuse and so they go to war. The tribe of Benjamin are strong though. Of the 26,700 men, 700 were left-handed men that were masters of the sling. Of course, with 400,000 Israelites, you would think that this is going to be a short battle. But remember, they haven't sought the Lord's guidance yet.

When they do come to inquire of God they come with their plan already worked out – they simply want the nod to go ahead. How many times do we pray to God already having the answer worked out? Instead of asking for his guidance we seek his approval. That's not how it is to work. The Israelites go into battle and lose. Then they get the idea a bit better. They stop, they fast and they pray. And this time they ask the Lord what he would have them do. They do not think they have the answer. They have not made their own plans. They are seeking God's guidance. And God answers and they overcome the Benjamites.

Don't let things spiral out of control but thinking you can do it all yourself. Turn to God, seek his face and follow his leading.

Pray: asking God to lead you through life.

Reflect: what problem is before me today? Ask for God's guidance.

In those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit. (v.25)

The Bible is much like the owner's manual of a car. If the driver doesn't service his car according to the instructions in the little book in the glove compartment, he's going to run into trouble. But if he carefully follows that guide, he should enjoy many trouble-free miles.

J. I. Packer changes the analogy but makes the same point. In his book *Knowing God*, he says, "Keep the law, and in thus serving God you find freedom and delight, because human nature is programmed for fulfillment through obedience."

We see here again at the end of Judges that the people did as they saw fit. They didn't follow the instruction manual. They don't follow God and his ways. They did what they wanted. And the laugh is the blame God in verse 3 by saying how could this happen – how could you let this happen. Isn't this just like us? We violate the precepts of God; we ignore the statutes of God; we don't listen to the leading of God... and then we say, 'thanks a lot, Lord. My life is a mess.'

Once again in chapter 21 the people do not wait for God or seek his guidance, rather they go about fixing the problem themselves. They go to Jabesh Gilead and kill everyone apart from the four hundred virgins. Still that is not enough for the six hundred remaining Benjamites so they send them in to a party to kidnap for themselves two hundred girls. Forget the instruction book we can sort it ourselves. And so they do evil to get what they want and to fix the problem. They do what is right in their eyes.

This is a good summary of the entire book. When God is only given lip service, when religion replaces relationship, and when wickedness is allowed to prevail, this is the situation we find ourselves in - both nationally and individually. May God grant our own nation and our own selves hearts of repentance to once again do what is right in His eyes.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for doing what is right in our own eyes.

Reflect: do I follow the instruction manual (the Bible)?

Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. (v.16)

One of the most delightful and endearing stories in the last couple of decades is Driving Miss Daisy. It's the story of a friendship that develops over a twenty to thirty year period between a man and a woman. What makes the story so touching is that this is a totally improbable relationship! Hoke Colburn is a chauffeur; Daisy Werthan is a woman who does not want a chauffeur. He is black; she is white. He is poor; she is wealthy. He is a Christian; she is Jewish. He is illiterate; she is educated and well-read. He is warm and friendly; she is cold and crotchety. He is "the hired help"; she is "the boss." And yet by the end of the story, Miss Daisy says, "Hoke, you're my best friend."

We may be tempted to dismiss such an unlikely friendship as mere fantasy; yet the Scriptures show us that such relationships are possible. Consider the Old Testament book of Ruth. Despite cultural, religious and generational differences, despite economic hardship, tragedy, and the age-old "in-law" factor, these two women - Ruth and Naomi - developed a close relationship marked by genuine concern.

One day a tough choice had to be made. Naomi was a widow and now her 2 married sons had died. Naomi was going to return home to the land of Judah. She told her daughter-in-laws to stay in their own and make a new life for themselves. Going with Naomi would probably mean living in a foreign land as widows for the rest of their lives, since few Jewish men would want to marry a foreign woman. Ruth's choice was simple – she had a deep love and respect for Naomi so she went with her. She proclaimed those wonderful words in verse 16 which we often use at weddings.

Ruth chose to serve the needs of Naomi rather than to serve herself. Ruth went on to play a significant role in Jewish history and became an ancestor of Jesus (Matthew 1:5). Make the best choice. Choose to serve others.

Pray: for your friends and loved ones.

Reflect: do I serve myself or others?

Thursday 18 August 2011

Ruth 2:1-23

May the LORD repay you for what you have done. May you be richly rewarded by the LORD, the God of Israel, under whose wings you have come to take refuge. (v.12)

At one end of the truck terminal where H. H. Lee worked years ago was a coal company. Nearby was a railroad, and each day several freight trains passed by. Lee often noticed that the owner of the company, who was a Christian, threw chunks of coal over the fence at various places along the track. One day he asked the man why he did this.

The man replied, “An elderly woman lives across the street, and I know that her pension is inadequate to buy enough coal. After the trains go by, she walks along and picks up the pieces she thinks have fallen from the coal car behind the engine. She doesn’t realise that diesels have replaced steam locomotives. I don’t want to disappoint her, so I just throw some pieces over the fence.”

That’s Christianity in action! The book of Ruth vividly portrays this principle of giving. When Boaz saw Ruth gathering grain behind the reapers in his field, he commanded them to leave some handfuls of grain for her. To her, this was a blessing from the Lord. Boaz does this because he recognises Ruth’s testimony and character. She has come home with Naomi and is caring for her. She has come out to work to earn what she can to help them live. Boaz sees this and seeks to help. He prays that the Lord will bless her and repay her for her kindness.

In the same way, the people whose lives we touch need to experience God’s love through our compassion and generosity. That’s why we should ask God to make us aware of opportunities to show kindness. Of course we have to show the ultimate kindness by sharing our faith with them too.

May our testimonies be like Ruth’s who cares for her mother-in-law and seeks to provide for her and may it be like Boaz’s showing kindness and generosity to others.

Pray: giving thanks for the kindness of others in your own life.

Reflect: do I share God’s love in word and deed?

*All my fellow townsmen know that you are a woman of noble character.
(v.11)*

Ruth's reputation is growing. She has left her homeland and all she knows to be with her widowed mother-in-law. She has cared for her and gone out to work to provide for her. Boaz has already noticed this and blessed her with his kindness and generosity. Ruth is also submissive to her mother-in-law and follows her leading. Here in chapter 3 Naomi tells Ruth that she needs a husband and that Boaz is their kinsman redeemer. A kinsman redeemer was one who was a close family member who could redeem: a family member sold into slavery, land which needed to be sold under economic hardship and/or the family name by virtue of marriage. Ruth does as Naomi tells her – she gets all dolled up and goes and lies with her feet under his blanket. Now this is not the most orthodox way of getting a husband and we would not encourage our children to go and lie with another before marriage.

Boaz wakes and finds Ruth at his feet. He expresses his feelings about her reputation which has grown throughout the town. She is recognised as a woman of noble character. He recognises she has not slept around and acted immorally but rather sought to do things right and honour her mother-in-law and her mother—in-law's religion and culture. He says he will check with the one who is a closer kinsman redeemer and if he will not fulfil the duty then he, Boaz, will be delighted to. She is told to get up early so his reputation remains untarnished and then to go home and wait. He wants to remain above reproach. And wait she does until the right time.

A reminder here of the need to watch our reputation. Let's be known as people who are of noble character – more importantly let's be known as Christians because of the way we live and act and speak. Many a reputation is ruined by careless words and sinful acts. And let's remember to be patient as well and at times to wait. God is faithful and He will bring about His purposes to bear in His time.

Pray: asking God to help us be faithful to Him.

Reflect: is my witness at all times a good one?

Praise be to the LORD, who this day has not left you without a kinsman-redeemer. May he become famous throughout Israel! He will renew your life and sustain you in your old age. (v.14)

As we reach the final chapter of Ruth the love story comes to a happy ending. Boaz wants Ruth. It is clear that he has fallen in love with her despite her poor situation. She has nothing to offer him as the wealthy landowner he already is other than love. Boaz goes to the one who is first in line to be kinsman redeemer. He responds yes to the idea of land but then when Ruth is mentioned he runs a mile. Boaz steps in and seals the agreement in the cultural way of the day by accepting the others sandal.

They marry and Ruth conceives a child. Naomi is delighted and the women around recognise God's hand on her and the blessing she has received. Her family line will continue. Naomi's fortunes have been restored. In the first chapter Naomi wanted to change her name because she was bitter. Her life had dramatically changed. She had left Judah with life full and now it was empty. Her husband had died and her two sons had died. She had no grandchildren and no land – nothing. And now on account of Ruth's commitment to her mother-in-law, Naomi's life was full once more. She has a grandchild and a daughter-in-law who loves her deeply. The recognition comes that God has brought blessing to barrenness. Her life has been renewed and sustained in old age.

Many have gone through tremendous difficulty. Some have gone through great loss. God can restore. Take heart.

The great overarching theme of this short book is God's work in redemption. He has taken that which was broken and barren and has blessed it. He has redeemed our life from the pit and given us new life in Jesus Christ. He has bought our salvation at a price. He is our kinsman redeemer.

Pray: thanking God for saving you.

Reflect: on God's blessings in your life and give Him thanks and praise.

I was pouring out my soul to the LORD. (v.15)

I'm sure you've had it happen to you. You call some company and ask for the service department. "Can you hold?" a cheerful voice asks, and before you know it you're hearing music. Every so often a taped message assures you that your call will be answered. You wait and wait. You think, "I could have driven over there and back by now!" You feel forgotten and that nobody cares. Sometimes it seems that God has put us on hold. We pray and pray about a matter of extreme importance, but nothing happens. Nothing!

I'm sure that's how Hannah felt. She was asking God for a baby. Childlessness was a curse in her day. To make it worse, her husband's other wife ridiculed her mercilessly. Hannah wanted desperately to give her husband a child. She prayed out of deep pain and bitterness. Yet year after year she did not conceive.

And then she comes this day and pours out her heart to the Lord in the temple. Eli observes her and sees her mouth moving but cannot hear a word. She is praying quietly. We don't always need to pray out loud. More than praying she is pouring out her heart. She longs for a child. Eli tells her to go and says may God grant her request. As she goes this time from the temple she goes happier than before – she is no longer downcast. She has poured out her soul and goes to wait the Lord's response.

And the Lord heard her request and she gave birth to a son. She was overjoyed and in due course kept the vow she had made by giving her son to the Lord.

The encouragement from Hannah is to persist in prayer and to pour out all our concerns to God. And then it is to wait on the Lord answering in His time and according to His plans. That is the hard bit. What are you struggling with just now? Pour out your heart to God.

Pray: asking for God's help in your current struggles.

Reflect: what are you struggling with just now? Pour out your heart to God.

My heart rejoices in the LORD. (v.1)

It's often difficult for parents to "let go" of their children, allowing them to be independent. Because of the strong emotional bond, this is especially true of mothers. They like to keep their children close as long as possible. This is equally true of fathers too – I'm dreading the children leaving home in a few years.

Imagine letting go when your child is very small, as Hannah did with Samuel. For us today, that kind of sacrifice is inconceivable. Yet that's what Hannah and her husband Elkanah did.

This mother's sacrifice was remarkable as an example of complete trust in God. Notice what Hannah said after she dedicated her son to God's work: '*My heart rejoices in the Lord*' (verse 1). She didn't express bitterness or anger - just total release of her only child, knowing that God's work and will for him were best. This must have been so difficult after all that Hannah had been through. She had longed for a child for years and prayed to that end. Finally she came and poured out her heart to God and she conceived. She had made a vow though to offer the child back to God. And that is exactly what she does.

Every year she would go to the temple with her husband to worship and she would take a new robe for him to wear. Eli blessed them and prayed for another child for them. And the Lord was gracious to Hannah. On account of her obedience and willingness to let Samuel go she conceived other children.

Releasing our children to the Lord and His will for their lives demands great faith. As our children grow up, we need to prayerfully entrust them to God's care. If we do, we'll experience the peace and joy of knowing that God loves them even more than we do.

Pray: thanking God for our children.

Reflect: am I bringing up my children in the way of the Lord? Do I entrust them to his care regularly in prayer?

Speak for your servant is listening. (v.10)

And he revealed himself to Samuel through his word. (v.21)

Years ago, an annoyed senior citizen from Richmond Heights, Missouri, hung up on President Reagan, who was trying to call him. This happened not just once, but half a dozen times! He didn't believe the operator when she insisted that the White House was calling. He was so sure it was a prank that he didn't stay on the line. But the Southwestern Bell operator and a neighbour finally convinced him it was for real. As a result, the man had the privilege of chatting with President Reagan for about 15 minutes.

That incident reminded me of a call received centuries ago by a young Israelite named Samuel (1 Samuel 3). He didn't realise who was calling - even after the call was repeated. It came from one greater than a president. It was from God Himself. At first Samuel was perplexed, but when Eli told him who was trying to get through to him, he listened.

God went on to explain how he would judge Eli's family on account of their sin. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the next day but he eventually did hiding nothing of what God had told him. And we read that as Samuel grew up the Lord continued to reveal himself to him through his word.

Have you ever heard the Lord speaking to you? God speaks to us today through His written Word, the Bible (2 Timothy 3:16-17), and indwells us in the person of the Holy Spirit, who enables us to hear His voice (1 Corinthians 2:9-16). The encouragement is to keep reading God's Word and listening for what he has to say to us through it. As we read God's word he reveals himself to us as well and we grow to know him more and more through that.

God is always trying to get through to us! The important question is this: Are we taking the time to listen?

Pray: thanking God for revealing himself in Scripture.

Reflect: do I take the time to listen for God and to God?

So the people sent men to Shiloh, and they brought back the ark of the covenant of the LORD Almighty, who is enthroned between the cherubim. And Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were there with the ark of the covenant of God. (v.4)

People are very superstitious. Grand slam tennis champion Rafa Nadal has a ritual that he follows every time he enters the court, which involves removing water bottles from his bag, taking a sip from each, then carefully lining them up so that their labels all face precisely the same way. Olympic champion swimmer Rebecca Adlington has admitted to having obsessive compulsive disorder when it comes to numbers. "I can only set my alarm on two, four or six, I can't even set it on a five or a seven. Otherwise I think the worse is going to happen. It's the same with the TV volume or radio - I have to have it on an even number."

There is a touch of the superstitious to the Israelites here in chapter 4. Israel was defeated by long time arch enemies the Philistines. They ask why the Lord brought defeat upon them and then called for the Ark of the Covenant. They then took the ark into battle with them but ended up being defeated again and the ark taken by the Philistines.

The Israelites recognised that the Lord determined the outcome of battles, and that was correct. Where they made their mistake was in the superstitious notion that they could force God's hand to aid them by taking the Ark of the Covenant into battle with them. It is so important for us to understand that God is not ours - we are God's. God is not here to serve us - we are here to serve God. We are not supposed to be saying "what can God do for me," but rather, "what can I do for God?"

All of this stems from a lack of the real presence of the Lord. The people had forgotten God and were going their own way and doing their own thing. When we've wandered away from the Lord, we can fall into thinking that certain "things" will bring back that sense of closeness. What we really need is simply to turn around and come back to Him.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for going our own way.

Reflect: what am I doing to draw closer to God?

But the following morning when they rose, there was Dagon, fallen on his face on the ground before the ark of the LORD! (v.4)

After the Philistines captured the Ark of the Covenant they took it to Dagon's temple in one of their cities. Dagon was the main Philistine god - the top half was of a man, the bottom half was of a fish. He was a god of fertility. The Philistines took the ark to Dagon's temple to be a show that Dagon was superior to the God of Israel. Trouble was when the people went in the next day Dagon had fallen over and was facedown on the ground. They lifted him up but the next day the same thing except this time his head and hands were broken off.

As time went by other things happened, namely tumours coming upon the people, so they moved the ark from city to city and still the same happened. The message was clear – God was more powerful than any of their gods.

What are you putting your trust in? Who do you count on? Can your “god” fall? Some people put their whole lives into their job, and then they are laid off. Some people put their whole lives into their marriage, and then their spouse leaves them. Some people put their whole life into material possessions and then they break or lose them or can no longer afford them.

Can your “god” fail? Your “god” is the thing or person that is most important to you. A good test might be to think of the top 5 things or people that are important to you and ask yourself, “what if this thing or person fails me?” If you would be devastated, then perhaps that “thing” might have become a “god” to you.

The other great picture here is of Dagon falling before the Ark of the Covenant. Paul tells us in Philippians that one day every knee in heaven and on earth and under the earth will bow before Jesus. Let's fall before God now and offer him our praise and worship.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for placing other things before him.

Reflect: what is most important to me?

Who can stand in the presence of the LORD, this holy God? (v.20)

After seven months of disaster, the Philistines knew they had to get rid of the ark and send it back to Israel. They sent for the priests and diviners to discover the ceremonial process by which the ark should be returned. They suggested that the ark shouldn't be returned by itself, but with a box containing a guilt offering. They were to make five golden images each of the tumours, and of mice. (This is an indication that part of the curse that the Lord brought upon the Philistines was a plague of mice.) Furthermore they had to place the ark on a cart and have two cows pull the cart back to Israeli territory.

God is not like us. He is pure. He is without sin. He is holy. The ark was not God, but it was to be a symbol to remind people of God's presence, and so God wanted the people to treat it differently. This form of transporting the ark would be copied later. God intended that the ark be carried on the shoulders of the priests. (Exodus 25:12-14). But the Philistines put it on an ox cart. But after all, they were just Philistines, they didn't know any better.

The people of Israel should have known better though. They rejoiced at the ark being returned but once it had been taken down by the Levites some of the people decided to look inside the ark. Perhaps they were curious to see what was inside. Perhaps they wanted to check if the Philistines had stolen the contents. Either way they forget the requirements of a holy God – no-one was to touch the ark. We read that those who looked inside were put to death. This led the people to cry out '*who can stand in the presence of the Lord, this holy God?*'

As we know from Psalm 24:3 '*Who may ascend the hill of the LORD? Who may stand in his holy place? He who has clean hands and a pure heart.*' How can we have a pure heart? By trusting in Jesus whose blood was shed to make us clean.

Pray: asking God's forgiveness for sins committed this day.

Reflect: do I treat God in the right way?

If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines. (v.3)

With the Ark of the Covenant back in Israelite possession, Samuel makes a national plea for Israel to return to the Lord and rid themselves of the idolatry that they have been practicing. Samuel promises that if they do this, God will deliver them from the terrible oppression of the Philistines.

The people actually listened! They removed their idols and served the Lord! Samuel has everyone gather at Mizpah to pray for them. There they spent a day fasting and confessing their sins. As we learn later in 2 Chronicles 7:14 God gives his people a conditional command *‘if my people, who are called by name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.’*

The Lord would always rather forgive you than judge you. That’s His divine nature. But for forgiveness to take place, there has to be repentance. There has to be confession. There has to be brokenness. This is why it is so important to continually confess our sins before the Lord and repent. 1John 1:9 *‘If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness.’* Israel did this. They fasted, they prayed, they confessed, they repented. And God forgave them.

The truth is it is not enough to confess our sins; we have to turn from them, ridding ourselves of anything that hinders us, and committing ourselves completely to serve God. Then he will forgive us just as he forgave the Israelites and delivered them from the Philistines.

Pray: thanking God for his faithfulness in forgiving sin,

Reflect: do I need to return to the Lord? Then confess your sin, turn from it, and follow him completely.

Listen to all that the people are saying to you; it is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. (v.7)

Just like his mentor, Eli, Samuel's sons do not follow the Lord. We could look at this and point a finger and condemn Samuel. Perhaps he spent too much time at church. Perhaps he didn't have family devotions with his children. Perhaps he didn't spank his boys enough. I'm not sure that's the point. I think the point is, even the godliest people can have rebellious children. No matter how well we bring up our children sometimes they do not listen and walk their own way. That's the way of life with the freewill God has given us. However that does not stop us from bringing our children up the best we can in the ways of the Lord and praying for them always from a young age.

The other lesson that comes out for us in this passage is that people do sometimes reject us. I think that sometimes people treat us differently simply because we are Christians, simply because we are following the Lord. However you may not be the one they have a problem with. It may be the Lord. This was the real problem with what was happening with Samuel. It's not that the people wanted a king, it's not that they wanted to be like other kingdoms, but it's that they were rejecting God's leadership over their nation.

God wants to be the King of your life. That's what it means for Jesus to be "Lord".

It is said that a certain guide lived in the deserts of Arabia who never lost his way. He carried with him a homing pigeon with a very fine cord attached to one of its legs. When in doubt as to which path to take, he threw the bird into the air. The pigeon quickly strained at the cord to fly in the direction of home, and thus led the guide accurately to his goal. Because of this unique practice he was known as "the dove man." God wants us to learn to let Him lead us. He wants to prompt us through the leading of the Holy Spirit. He wants to rule and reign in our lives.

Pray: asking for God's continued leading and guiding.

Reflect: am I allowing Jesus to be king or am I rejecting his rule?

Look in this town is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take. (v.6)

In London there is a road named Godliman Street. I was told that a man once lived there whose life was so saintly that his street became known as “that godly man’s street.” This reminded me of an Old Testament story.

Saul’s father sent his son and a servant to look for some donkeys that had wandered away. The young men searched for many days but couldn’t find the animals. Saul was ready to give up and go home, but his servant pointed toward Ramah, the prophet Samuel’s village, and replied, ‘*Look in this town is a man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true. Let's go there now. Perhaps he will tell us what way to take.*’ (verse 6).

Throughout his years and into old age, Samuel had sought friendship and fellowship with God, and his words were weighty with truth. People knew him to be a prophet of the Lord. So Saul and his servant ‘*set out for the town where the man of God was.*’ (verse 10) Oh, that our lives would so reflect Jesus that we would leave a mark on our neighbourhoods and the memory of our godliness would linger on.

I love the way this story happens. Kish’s donkeys happen to run away. Saul happens to end up in Ramah. The servant happens to suggest they look for the seer. Saul happens to walk right up to Samuel in the city. Have you figured out yet that nothing “just happens” in your life? As believers, we cannot attribute anything to the “luck of the draw.” There are really no coincidences for you as a Christian.

And just as an aside note as we read on in the chapter that the Lord revealed to Samuel that Saul would be coming through and he was the one to be appointed leader Israel.

Pray: asking God to help us grow to know him more and more.

Reflect: how do my neighbours view me?

As Saul turned to leave Samuel, God changed Saul's heart, and all these signs were fulfilled that day. (v.9)

Samuel takes Saul aside and anoints him with oil. He then shares with him that he is to be Israel's leader – their first king in fact. He goes on to explain to Saul what to expect on his journey back. Why did Samuel tell him all this in advance? It would seem that these signs were given to Saul to reassure him that Samuel was speaking from God.

When Saul turned from Samuel, God turned his heart into something different. God is in the business of changing hearts. Remember David prayed, Psalm 51:10 *'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'* And the Lord promised Ezekiel 11:19 *'I will give them an undivided heart, and put a new spirit in them; I will remove from them their heart of stone and give them a heart of flesh.'*

The Lord can take someone who is awful, nasty, and bitter and change that person's heart. We've seen it happen time and time again. But are these permanent changes? Once we get a spiritual heart transplant, are we in the free and clear for the rest of our lives? Certainly not in Saul's case, which we will see as we continue on in this book.

How about us? When we become new creatures in Christ, born again, is our heart now permanently new? May I suggest that it is only if we take care of it. Hebrew 3:12-13 *'See to it, brothers, that none of you has a sinful, unbelieving heart that turns away from the living God. But encourage one another daily, as long as it is called Today, so that none of you may be hardened by sin's deceitfulness.'*

Our new hearts can be hardened by sin. That is what will happen to Saul's new heart as we will see in time to come.

Pray: the words of Psalm 51:10 *'Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me.'*

Reflect: am I guarding my heart and remaining focused on Jesus?

When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger. (v.6)

The Ammonites once again were causing problems. They besieged Jabesh Gilead and told the people they would only make a treaty if they gouged out the right eye of each of them. The elders asked for time to see if anyone could save them. When they came to Gibeah they told the people and they wept. At which point our new king enters the scene. Saul hears what is going on and we read that *'the Spirit of God came upon him in power, and he burned with anger.'*

We often associate anger with rage and sin. It is possible to be filled with the Spirit and also be angry. Jesus got angry in the Temple. Twice. Once at the beginning of his ministry (John 2:13) and once towards the end (Matthew 21:12). But many times, our anger is wrong. We need to be careful not to justify our anger and have a falsely spiritual overtone. We need to watch not to sin whilst we are angry. Ephesians 4:22 warns us *'In your anger do not sin: Do not let the sun go down while you are still angry, and do not give the devil a foothold.'*

Saul was filled with the Spirit and with the Spirit's help he was able to work out a plan. He attacked the Ammonites the night leading up to the surrender. The chapter ends with Saul being confirmed as king of Israel. In the process of this some remind Samuel of the words of a section of the people who didn't want Saul to reign over them. They suggested they be put to death. Saul demonstrates great grace here. He is aware that God has done the work. He sees no place for revenge. And most importantly he gives the praise and glory to God.

Samuel calls the people to renew the kingdom at Gilgal. He had anointed Saul privately, and the Lord had chosen him by lot publicly. But it wasn't until the people were convinced powerfully that he would be recognised as king. Now that he has shown himself able to lead victoriously, Saul is recognised as the king.

Pray: asking God to help us control our anger.

Reflect: do I allow my anger to lead me to sin?