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ON BECOMING AN ARTIST

1 Samuel 26

In January 2010 Jeff Miller, a business man from the Chicago area, won his third consecutive Ultimate Couch Potato championship at Chicago's ESPN Zone. He defeated 3 other competitors by sitting on a couch in the restaurant and watching sports programming for 72 straight hours. He earned a new recliner, \$1000 toward the purchase of a new TV, a free one year subscription for cable TV, \$1000 in ESPN Zone credit and, of course, a trophy. Miller said, "It's all about determination" as he explained his amazing stamina.

Isn't it surprising what people can be passionate about? I love watching sports on TV, but 72 straight hours without sleeping? I don't think so. I don't have that kind of determination I guess. Miller's passion may seem weird, but there are worse things to be passionate about. Did you know there is a sport of shin kicking, in which the two contestants try to kick each others' shins? They have a world championship every year in Dover's Hill, England. A fad that started in Singapore is collecting air sick bags from airliners. Reportedly the leading "baggist" right now has 388 bags from 186 different airlines. I hope none of them are used. What are you passionate about? I want to talk about passion today. We will see someone with undying passion today in the life of David as we look at 1 Samuel 26.

DAVID HAD SAUL IN HIS SIGHTS – TWICE

In chapter 23 we encountered the people of Ziph when they decided that it would be to their advantage to rat out David to Saul. Even though Saul had revealed himself to be a violent and unstable man, clearly unfit for leadership, they scurried to him when they spotted David and his troops in their territory. They hoped informing on David would put them in Saul's good graces. In the beginning of chapter 26 they show up again. Again they run to Saul with the information that David is in their area.

After an incident that is recorded in chapter 24 Saul had admitted that his pursuit of David was wrong. He promised to quit trying to kill David. But Saul's promises weren't worth much. They were about as reliable as the Russian claims that their athletes never use performance-enhancing drugs. Sure enough, as soon as he learned of David's location, Saul set off in pursuit of him with murderous intent, accompanied by 3000 of his best troops.

The situation for David was beyond perilous. Saul was coming with his best troops to attack David and his ragtag group of 600 outcasts. But David never lacked courage. He didn't seem daunted by the situation. Quite the opposite. Instead of fleeing in a panicked retreat, David proposed an audacious and aggressive action. He asked for a volunteer to accompany him as he attempted to infiltrate Saul's camp. Instead of having odds of 3000 against 600 David proposed a plan that had him outnumbered 3000 against 2. This was to be an outrageous black op.

One of David's most trusted and courageous allies, a man named Abishai, volunteered to go with him. Verse 7 tells us they were able to sneak past the guards and get all the way to the center of the camp where they found Saul lying asleep with his spear stuck in the ground near his head and his most loyal soldiers lying near him.

Abishai could hardly believe they made it this far. I suspect he figured they would be spotted while trying to enter the camp and have to run for their lives. I'm not sure it ever crossed his mind that they could actually sneak all the way into the middle of the camp and reach Saul. At this point he thought David's long ordeal was finally over. After years of being hounded and hunted by Saul, of hiding in caves and desert wilderness areas, of fleeing to enemy territory in desperation, at last deliverance was at hand. All they needed to do was take Saul's spear and run it through his heart, then escape the camp quietly and there would be no more Saul to try to hunt David down.

This was the logical thing to do. What was the point of quietly sneaking in to Saul's camp and tracking him down if it were not to finally kill him and rid David of the man who had tormented him for so long? It was not only fair, it seemed the right thing to do. Saul had proven that he was mentally unstable and cruel, and he certainly was not obeying God. David would never be safe as long as Saul was alive. And everyone knew that David had been chosen by God to be the next king of Israel. Surely it was God's will for them to end Saul's insane reign. He had just given them the chance to do it. Abishai said in verse 8, "today God has delivered your enemy into your hands." That was clearly true. How were those two able to sneak into a camp of 3000 highly trained soldiers without being spotted? Don't you think that they had guards on duty? Verse 12 tells us, "They were all sleeping, because the Lord had put them into a deep sleep." David and his buddy didn't pull off that op because they were the best special forces operators that have ever lived. It was because God caused the people of the camp to be so sound asleep they weren't aware of anything.

This was not the first time something like this had happened. In chapter 24 David and his men were, as usual, out in the wilderness hiding from Saul, who was again pursuing them. At one point Saul went into a cave to relieve himself. Apparently out in that wilderness they were a little short on restroom facilities. Ironically, David and his men were hiding in the very cave that Saul chose to use. According to verse 4 David's men said "this is the day the Lord spoke of when he said to you, I will give your enemy into your hands for you to deal with as you wish." In other words, they thought exactly the same thing that Abishai thought. God had just given David a golden opportunity. He had Saul right where he wanted him.

DAVID REFUSED TO PULL THE TRIGGER – TWICE

Back in chapter 26 David did a shocking thing. In verse nine David said, "don't destroy him! Who can lay a hand on the Lord's anointed and be guiltless?" In verse 11 he went on to say, "the Lord forbid that I should lay a hand on the Lord's anointed. Now get the spear and water jug that are near his head, and let's go."

David knew that God had anointed him to be the next king. He knew that was going to happen. In verse 10 he said of Saul, "the Lord himself will strike him, or his time will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish." David knew that sooner or later Saul was going to be removed from the throne. But he was absolutely determined that it needed to be God himself who removed him, not David. God had put Saul on the throne. He was anointed by God to be the king, so God would need to remove him.

So David and his buddy took Saul's spear and water jug and crept out of the camp unnoticed. Once safely away he stood on the top of the hill and began yelling to get the attention of those in the camp. At the end of verse 16 he said, "look around you. Where are the king's spear and water jug that were near his head?" At that point Saul and everyone else knew that David had been in the camp and had Saul dead to rights, and had let him live. Back in 22:13 Saul had accused Ahimelech, the priest, of conspiring with David. He said "why have you conspired against me, you and the son of Jesse, giving him bread and a sword and inquiring of God for him, so that he is rebelled against me and lies in wait for me, as he does today?" Saul excused his pursuit of David publicly by claiming that David was the leader of a right-wing conspiracy that was trying to kill him. David had just proven openly before 3000 troops that was a lie. If he wanted to kill Saul he could've done it, but he refused to do so.

The same thing had happened in chapter 24. David had Saul cornered, unaware of his peril, in a cave. But according to verse 4 instead of killing him, David "crept up

unnoticed and cut off the corner of Saul's robe." Verse 7 says that he had to sharply rebuke his men and not allow them to attack Saul. Saul left that cave with no idea how close he had come to dying.

In that situation again, once David was at a safe distance he called out to Saul and pointed out to him that he was holding a corner of Saul's robe. He said in verse 10, "This day you have seen with your own eyes how the Lord delivered you into my hands in the cave. Some urged me to kill you, but I spared you; I said, I will not lay my hand on my lord, because he is the Lord's anointed."

When David spared his life the second time in chapter 26 Saul said in verse 21, "I have sinned. Come back, David my son. Because you considered my life precious today, I will not try to harm you again. Surely I have acted like a fool and have been terribly wrong." That was the last interaction that would ever take place between David and Saul. Even after that incident David knew that he was not safe as long as Saul lived. He didn't trust him. That will lead to another misstep on David's part but in this incident we see the true heart of David. We see his courage, his nobility, his integrity and most of all his faith.

IMPLICATIONS

David and Saul present a great contrast. Both of them were exceptional men who were chosen by God. Early on Saul was a great leader. He was handed the unenviable task of pulling together the 12 independent tribes of Israel. He welded them into one nation, and that was no minor feat. He created a national army and led them to victory after victory. In a way, he was like the George Washington of Israel. However, Saul soon went sideways, and was the farthest thing from a godly leader. David was also a great leader. But there was a fundamental difference between Saul and David. The two of them represent two very different ways of living. They had completely different approaches to life. Those two approaches are still available to people today. At every moment of our lives we face a choice between which of those two approaches we will take.

SAUL WAS ALL ABOUT POWER FOR HIMSELF

Saul didn't initially seem to be this way. In 1 Samuel 9:20 Samuel informed Saul when he was a young man that God had chosen him to be the first king of Israel. In verse 21 Saul answered, "but am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel, and is not my clan the least of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why do you say such a thing to me?" The idea of him being king seemed ludicrous to him. He did not aspire to such a position nor did he even think himself capable of it. In fact, in the next chapter when the time came for Samuel to declare to the

whole nation God's choice for king 1 Samuel 10: 22 says that Saul was hiding among the supplies. He wanted no part of being king.

Unfortunately something changed. Actor Leonardo DiCaprio recently said, "as soon as enough people give you enough compliments... It's not that you become arrogant... But you get a false sense of your own importance and what you've accomplished... You actually think you've altered the course of history." In other words success, acclaim and power have an effect on people. It certainly had an effect on Saul. He went from trying to duck responsibility of being the king of Israel to being utterly consumed with the need to hold onto that position. He was the king. He deserved to be the king. He had to remain the king.

The problem Leonardo DiCaprio identified and Saul fell victim to, is not an isolated one. The Bible tells us that it lies within all of us. What happened to Saul can happen to any of us. Saul became obsessed with the fear that David might usurp his throne. Maintaining his grasp on the crown of Israel became the ultimate good for Saul. It was more important than anything else. It became such an obsession that it clouded his ability to even perceive reality. We have seen that it severely damaged his relationships with people who loved him.

When we become focused so totally on something that we absolutely feel we must have, it is a short step to being willing to do anything to get it or keep it. That's what happened to Saul. He started believing that it was up to him to keep himself in power. He could not trust God with this.

Saul was obsessed with promoting and protecting his own power and position.

The result of Saul's death grip on his position of power was that he became irrational, fearful, easily and unnecessarily threatened, suspicious, unreasonably jealous of others and violent. He was given to outbursts of anger to the point where it is clear that he is only marginally sane. For some reason our family has always enjoyed the old Kevin Costner movie *Robin Hood, Prince of Thieves*. In it the Sheriff of Nottingham is something of a Saul figure. His desperation to maintain his hold on power caused him to be cruel, suspicious, brutal to the point of being evil. In one scene he says to Maid Marian after making dark threats against an innocent child, "I had a very sad childhood. I'll tell you about it sometime. I never knew my parents; it's amazing I'm sane." It's quite obvious that he's the only one who thinks he's sane. That's pretty much where Saul ended up.

In his book *A Tale Of Three Kings*, Gene Edwards about the fact that many of us have experienced a King Saul in our lives. We may even have one right now. Maybe it is a boss, a parent, a coach, a teacher, or maybe even a spouse. It feels like this person keeps firing spears at us and we wonder why God would allow this person to be in our lives. We want nothing more than to defeat that person and be rid of them. Edwards wrote, “God has his eyes fastened sharply on another King Saul. Not the visible one standing up there throwing spears at you. No, God is looking at another King Saul. One just as bad, or worse. God is looking at the King Saul in you. In me?! Saul is in your bloodstream, in the marrow of your bones. He makes up the very flesh and muscle of your heart. He is mixed into your soul. He inhabits the nuclei of your atoms. He breathes in the lungs and beats in the breast of all of us.”

We might think that surely cannot be true of us. I don’t feel like I have some need to be the king. I’ve always wondered how they ever get people to run for president because to me it looks like a terrible job. I want no part of that kind of power. I’m the furthest thing from Saul because I don’t have any big need to have power over other people. However this desire and need for power and the commitment to gain it for ourselves comes in a lot of more subtle forms.

In his book *Fearless* Max Lucado wrote, “Fear turns us into control freaks. Fear...is a perceived loss of control. When life spins wildly, we grab for a component of life we can manage, our diet, the tidiness of our home, the armrest of the plane, or, in many cases, people. The more insecure we feel, the meaner we become. We growl and bear our fangs. Why? Because we are bad? In part. But also because we feel cornered.”

We wrestle with others because we’re afraid of something and trying to gain control of life so that we can make it be what we want it to be. Martin Niemoeller was a German pastor who would eventually resist Adolf Hitler. He first met Hitler in 1933 at a meeting where he had an opportunity to observe him. After that meeting he told his wife, “I have discovered that Herr Hitler is a terribly frightened man.”

In his book, *Death By Suburb*, David Goetz detailed how his wife had sacrificed continually and repeatedly so that he could pursue his career goals on many different occasions. Years later a time came when his wife announced that she wanted to go back to school. When she did he said he became unsupportive and critical. He insisted that they did not have the money to afford that, even though on previous occasions they didn’t have the money for him to pursue his goals but they

did it anyway. He said he had the chance to give up power to help her. But he found it wasn't that easy. He told her, "I know in my head that I need to do this, and it's killing me because it's so difficult." It was hard because he had to give up control and sacrifice what he wanted in order for her to pursue her goal.

That certainly is different than Saul trying to kill David, but it comes from the same source. It's about having power and wanting to control things in one's life. David Goetz, like Saul, had something that he wanted, he wanted power, he wanted control, and he was going to do whatever he felt necessary to get it. We tend to do the same thing.

I was dealing with a married couple who were having some struggles. As is always the case both of them had contributed to their problems. It was clear that it was the wife that was insisting on them getting some help. The husband went along, but he did so primarily to get her off his back. At one point he said, "I just want her to be happy," which really meant, "She's making my life miserable and I just want to find some way for her to stop being upset and nagging at me all the time." As they talked it became obvious that 2 things were true about the wife. One was that she had some lifestyle things she wanted and she was upset because her husband had not gotten them for her. She was resentful about that and was not letting go of it. The other was she wanted her husband to be someone other than who he was. She was like a dog gnawing on a bone. She would not let go. When I suggested that her best course of action was to let go, be content, trust God and love her husband, our conversations ended. She wanted power for herself, the power to get what she deemed necessary for her to be happy, and she would do whatever was necessary to get it. Be aware that in every conflict you have your inner Saul is trying to get out.

DAVID WAS ALL ABOUT SUBMISSION TO GOD

David was not perfect, but down at the core of his being David wanted more than anything to be and to do what God wanted him to be and to do. He wanted to submit to God, and we see it in these two incidents. There is a statement in 1 Samuel 24:5 that astounds me every time I read it. David had just passed up the opportunity to end this long bout of suffering by killing Saul. David refused to kill Saul and merely sliced off a corner of the king's robe. He wanted to use this as a way of proving to Saul that he had no malicious intent toward him.

In verse 5 we read, "afterward, David was conscience stricken for having cut off a corner of his robe." David had such deep respect for Saul, not because of his character, which was not worthy of respect, but because he was in the position of

being anointed by God, that he felt guilt over cutting off a piece of Saul's wardrobe. He felt he had shown disrespect to Saul. He was bothered by that small thing when Saul was using all of the authority and power of his position to try to kill David. Doesn't that seem that he has an overly sensitive conscience?

David went on to say in verse 6, "the Lord forbid that I should do such a thing to my master, the Lord's anointed." David saw Saul, unrighteous Saul, as his King. He saw him in that position by the will of God. He was the Lord's anointed. God anointed him to be king and in David's mind what he did to Saul he was doing to God. Even cutting a slice off his robe was disrespectful, and David found even a hint of disrespect to God to be abhorrent.

In both chapter 24 and chapter 26 David had good friends who were absolutely certain that the right and godly thing to do was for David to kill Saul. They saw it as God's will. They could build a great case that killing Saul was the right and godly thing to do. But David believed that would be putting himself in the place of God. Choosing to pass up these two opportunities meant further hardship and suffering for David. But he was utterly against doing anything that might have circumvented the will of God. He was totally committed to showing respect to God and his anointed.

This is a completely different way of living from what we saw in Saul. Saul was all about getting and holding on to something for himself and doing whatever he felt was necessary to do it. He would do that without regard to God's will. David was the complete opposite. Even a hint of showing disrespect to God was anathema to him. If obeying the will of God meant continued suffering for him then so be it. He would rather suffer ever violate the will of God.

David was obsessed with a passion for the will and glory of God.

Where did David's deep commitment to doing the will of God and submission to him come from? It derived directly from his deep awe of God and his love for him. Years ago in another ministry I once had a conversation with a person who took issue with how I had presented Laurie in illustrations. This individual said I painted a picture of her that made her sound perfect and it caused some women in to feel bad because they didn't measure up to Laurie's standard. I had two problems with this. First, I am not dishonest. I had not been telling lies about my wife. I presented her as I experienced her. No human being is perfect, but Laurie is the best person I have ever known. If she sounds that way it's because that's what I experience with her. My second problem was that I have no desire to emphasize

whatever small imperfections I might find in her, and I have a hard time even identifying any. The last thing I would ever want is to say anything that might reflect negatively on Laurie. I want to communicate to her and everyone else that I think she is incredible and I am immeasurably blessed to be married to her. I would never, ever want to do anything or say anything that might reflect even slightly negatively on her. That is a bit parallel to David's enormous respect for God.

David had such a passion to submit to God because he had such great reverence and love for God. He would never want to do anything that even came close to reflecting a lack of awe and love for God. Listen to some of the things that David wrote. Psalm 103:2-6 says, "praise the Lord, my soul, and forget not all his benefits, who forgives all your sins and heals all your diseases, who redeems your life from the pit and crowns you with love and compassion, who satisfies your desires with good things so that your youth is renewed like the eagles." In verses 11-13 he wrote, "as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him."

In Psalm 101:1 David wrote, "I will sing of your love and justice; to you Lord, I will sing praise." David saw God as full of love and justice, as merciful and forgiving, as good and great. Because he had such reverence for God and such love for him nothing mattered to him as much as doing God's will. In Psalm 19:7-10 David wrote, "the law of the Lord is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the Lord are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the Lord are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the Lord radiant, giving light to the eyes. The fear of the Lord is pure, enduring forever. The decrees of the Lord our firm, and all of them are righteous. They are more precious than gold, that much pure gold; they are sweeter than honey, and honey from the honeycomb."

David's heart is revealed in Psalm 27:4, "one thing I ask from the Lord, this only do I seek: that I may dwell in the house of the Lord all the days of my life, to gaze on the beauty of the Lord and to seek him in his temple." We have seen that lived out in these two incidents. David only sought that he could live in the house of the Lord and gaze on the beauty of his God. His life was about reverence for God.

Remember the outcomes of these two approaches to life. Saul's approach resulted in him behaving irrationally and even cruelly. In fact he teetered on the edge of insanity. And that is the same thing that will happen to us we choose his approach to life. Oh our choices may not be insane at the same level as his, but they will be

insane. They will lead only to mistreatment of others and to disgrace for ourselves and finally to death.

Kurt Godel was an imminent logician and mathematician of the 20th century. He has had great impact on both logic and philosophy, as well as mathematics. However in his later years he became convinced that someone was trying to poison him. He absolutely had to have complete control over what he ate and drank. He would only trust his wife Adele. She cooked all of his food at home and when they were away from home she had to test all of his food before he ate it. But in 1977 she became ill. She was hospitalized for six months and therefore could no longer help him. He refused to eat, fearing that he would be poisoned and die. His friends did everything they could to try to get him to eat, to no avail. He died in January 1978, weighing 65 pounds. He died of starvation. His fear and his irrational need to have total control over what he ate lest he die from poisoning directly caused his own death. Our efforts to control life, to have the power to gain whatever it is we think we absolutely must have, is insane and will lead to death. Saul insisted on having the power to control life and it destroyed him. David gave up control in favor of reverence and submission to God. He let God have his way and it resulted in glory for God and for David.

David's approach to life meant that he was going to continue to live with some serious discomfort and suffering. But out of his experience came glory to God as manifested in the Psalms that David wrote. Out of his experience came great ministry. Who among us has not found great comfort, hope, encouragement, strength and consolation from reading David Psalms? 3000 years after David has gone he still ministers to people and glorifies God. And as we, out of reverence and love for God, have that same undying commitment to submitting to God no matter what the cost may be, will have the same outcome. Oh our victories in our ministry may not be at the level that David's, but there will be victory and there will be glory to God and there will be ministry to other people as a result.

David's memorable life was so memorable, one of history's largest lives, because of his passion for God. Remove that, and all you have left is an anonymous shepherd boy who had zero effect on this world. His powerful life came right out of his awe of God and his passion for him.

Alvaro Castagnet is perhaps the most respected water color artist in the world. He said, "People who don't care one way or another aren't artists. Artists who can take it or leave it don't create much art. **The prerequisite for making art is passion.**" I

like to think of living as a follower of Jesus as an art. The prerequisite for it is passion. But how do we increase our passion for God?

Get to know God

Did you watch the team handball competition in the Olympics? I watched a little. It looks to me that if lacrosse and basketball had a baby it would look like team handball. When I say I watched a little I mean about 2 minutes, then said "I don't think so." I am not passionate about it. To become passionate about it I would have to get to know something about the game.

But it would take more than knowing something about it. We have some friends who are passionate about Pickle Ball, a tennis offshoot. They explained it, so I know something about the game. I am not passionate about it either. To become passionate I would need to actually become involved and have personal knowledge of it.

We get to know God by finding who he really is from his revelation of himself in his word, and by living through all kinds of situations with him by our side day in and day out. We need to not just know about him but to live with him as part of our experience day to day.

Ask for it.

In Ephesians 1:17-19 Paul prayed, "I keep asking that the God of our Lord Jesus Christ, the glorious Father, may give you the Spirit of wisdom and revelation, so that you may know him better. I pray that the eyes of your heart may be enlightened in order that you may know the hope to which he has called you, the riches of his glorious inheritance in his holy people, and his incomparably great power for us who believe."

We should pray these same things for ourselves. This is a prayer God is sure to answer. We know he wants us to be passionate about him, so if we pray and ask he will grant it. Here is a challenge for you. Try praying 3 times a day asking God to give you ever greater passion for him, to give you a heart after his own heart. Pray it when you start your day, before you eat lunch, and before bed. Do that every day for a month and see what happens.

Choose passion.

Deuteronomy 6:5 says, "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." In other words, love him passionately. That is a command. A command only makes sense if you can choose to obey it. In

Revelation 2:4 the Lord reprimanded the Ephesians because they had left their first love. He told them to choose to return to it.

Give praise and thanks

One of the things that will most increase passion is reminding ourselves of what God has done for us. As we continually give thanks to him for the countless blessings and good he pours out on us we will love him more. As we sing praises that remind us of his goodness and greatness we will love him even more.

Laurie and I went for a walk on the beach. It was spectacularly beautiful. I could just enjoy that, but simply by giving thanks to God for the day and the ocean it increased my awareness of him and my love and passion for him.