

The Life of David | Responding to Toxic Jealousy | 1 Samuel 18:5-30

January 26, 2025 | Matthew McNutt

[Title slide] We are a few weeks into a series on the life of David, King David, one of the biggest names in the Old Testament. He's a fascinating figure; later in life he'll make some incredibly bad decisions – yet he's the one that God describes as “a man after God's own heart.” Even in his failures his response was such that he turned back to God. But I'm getting ahead of ourselves; we're still at the beginning of David's story, long before those sins will enter the picture.

Last week we looked at David's encounter with Goliath, how in a critical moment, unlike anyone else, including the King the people demanded of God, had the faith to stand against Goliath and the Philistines. David was outraged at the insults tossed at God and his confidence in God's protection for those pursuing His purposes resulted in an incredible victory for the Israelites.

Today's passage dives into the aftermath of that victory, that testimony of David's faith. Basically, Saul doesn't take it well. Warren Wiersbe writes of this passage: **“David didn't create problems for Saul; he revealed the deep-seated problems that were already there.”**¹ I believe the challenge for us today is to ask the question, what do our actions reveal about deep-seated problems hiding under the surface in our lives?

Let's dive in. After his victory against Goliath, David was immediately popular. Scripture records that everything Saul asked him to do, David succeeded.

1 Samuel 18:6-11 (NLT) ⁶ When the victorious Israelite army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. ⁷ This was their song: “Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands!”

We see this play out here all too often. “Pastor Nate preaches, but Matthew? Matthew can preach.”

Did David kill tens of thousands? Did Saul kill thousands? No. They are crediting the victory against the Philistines to the two of them; the thousands that were killed were killed because David defeated Goliath.

⁸ This made Saul very angry. “What's this?” he said. “They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they'll be making him their king!” ⁹ So from that time on Saul kept a jealous eye on David.

Regardless of who killed however many, Saul's jealousy and paranoia had him immediately feeling threatened.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *The Wiersbe Bible Study Series: 1 Samuel* (Colorado Springs, CO: David C. Cook, 2013), 85.

¹⁰ The very next day a tormenting spirit from God overwhelmed Saul, and he began to rave in his house like a madman. David was playing the harp, as he did each day. But Saul had a spear in his hand, ¹¹ and he suddenly hurled it at David, intending to pin him to the wall. But David escaped him twice.

This chapter doesn't tell us what David was thinking; it tells us what everyone else was thinking about David, but it lets us shape our opinions of him based on others. Man, if there was one place I would love to know what David was thinking it's here – poor guy is just playing the harp and suddenly a spear is flying at him. Apparently twice. Like, if you don't like the song, just tell me to stop! If you think your boss is dangerous or your workplace is toxic, don't complain to David!

In all seriousness, though, we do need to look at something a little closer here. The “tormenting spirit from God” that overwhelmed Saul. Some Bible translations describe it as “an evil spirit from God.” Which is alarming to me, maybe you as well. Does God send evil spirits, tormenting spirits, to plague people? Why would He do that?

The ancient Hebrew here is more complex than what our English translations have been able to convey. Dr. Tsumura rightly points out that this is a linguistic problem, not a theological problem.² When Saul was anointed king, Samuel described to him how the Spirit of God would come upon him:

1 Samuel 10:6 (NLT) At that time the Spirit of the Lord will come powerfully upon you, and you will prophesy with them. You will be changed into a different person.

After the death and resurrection of Christ, God gave the Holy Spirit to all of His followers. If you have placed your faith in Jesus, the Holy Spirit is in you. This was not the case before Jesus' time on Earth. It was a rare gift in ancient times for someone to have the Spirit of the Lord, it was reserved for only a handful of individuals. In 1 Samuel 16:14, we are told that the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul, this movement coincided with the Spirit being given to David.

Here is where the linguistic problem comes into play; the idea being communicated is this, God withdrew His Spirit from Saul. That was God's action. This withdrawal created a vacuum that evilness, torment, jealousy, paranoia rushed in to fill.

In Matthew, Jesus describes what happens when we fail to fill these spaces in our lives with good:

Matthew 12:43-45 (NLT) ⁴³ “When an evil spirit leaves a person, it goes into the desert, seeking rest but finding none. ⁴⁴ Then it says, ‘I will return to the person I came from.’ So it returns and finds its former home empty, swept, and in order. ⁴⁵ Then the spirit

² David Toshio Tsumura, *The First Book of Samuel* (Grand Rapids, MI: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 2006), Kindle location 9769.

finds seven other spirits more evil than itself, and they all enter the person and live there. And so that person is worse off than before. That will be the experience of this evil generation.”

It's a terrifying warning; it's not enough to simply get rid of evil behaviors, we need to replace them with good or they will come back. We see some overlap between this and what is going on with Saul. When God's Spirit was taken from him, Saul still could have chosen good. He led a nation filled with individuals who were able to choose to follow God and honor Him without the aid of God's Spirit in their lives. David had incredible faith long before the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. But instead of filling that vacuum with a heart for following God, Saul allowed it to be filled with evil.

Which brings us back to the story. Saul threw the spear at David. Apparently twice, and David escaped twice.

1 Samuel 18:12-30 (NLT) ¹² Saul was then afraid of David, for the Lord was with David and had turned away from Saul. ¹³ Finally, Saul sent him away and appointed him commander over 1,000 men, and David faithfully led his troops into battle.

Saul couldn't bear to be in David's presence so he sent him away, maybe even hoping he would die in battle, but his plan backfired.

¹⁴ David continued to succeed in everything he did, for the Lord was with him. ¹⁵ When Saul recognized this, he became even more afraid of him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David because he was so successful at leading his troops into battle.

¹⁷ One day Saul said to David, "I am ready to give you my older daughter, Merab, as your wife. But first you must prove yourself to be a real warrior by fighting the Lord's battles." For Saul thought, "I'll send him out against the Philistines and let them kill him rather than doing it myself."

Technically, David had already earned the right to marry his daughter. Saul had promised that honor to whoever killed Goliath, but his fear of David's rising status had him concerned about the impact of David becoming son-in-law to the king. So he changed the terms of the deal hoping again to see him die.

¹⁸ "Who am I, and what is my family in Israel that I should be the king's son-in-law?" David exclaimed. "My father's family is nothing!" ¹⁹ So when the time came for Saul to give his daughter Merab in marriage to David, he gave her instead to Adriel, a man from Meholah.

With all innocence of Saul's intentions, David was too humble to take him up on it. So Saul gave her to someone else.

²⁰ In the meantime, Saul's daughter Michal had fallen in love with David, and Saul was delighted when he heard about it.

Because every good father is happy for their children when they fall in love, right? Not quite. He wants to manipulate his daughter's love for his own evil desires.

²¹ "Here's another chance to see him killed by the Philistines!" Saul said to himself. But to David he said, "Today you have a second chance to become my son-in-law!"

²² Then Saul told his men to say to David, "The king really likes you, and so do we. Why don't you accept the king's offer and become his son-in-law?"

Saul learned from the last time that David was going to need some more people chiming in to convince him to take the offer.

²³ When Saul's men said these things to David, he replied, "How can a poor man from a humble family afford the bride price for the daughter of a king?"

²⁴ When Saul's men reported this back to the king, ²⁵ he told them, "Tell David that all I want for the bride price is 100 Philistine foreskins! Vengeance on my enemies is all I really want." But what Saul had in mind was that David would be killed in the fight.

Look, I don't want to go too detailed with this, other than to say, if you don't know what Saul is telling David to do, ask your mother.

Here's the thing, normally a bride price was a sum of money. Obviously, the bride price for a king's daughter would be far too high for David's family to come up with, so Saul was giving him a steep price that was potentially attainable. Asking for foreskins was a little weird though; typically, in those days heads or hands were cut off to prove the number of enemies killed. Remember last week, David parading around with Goliath's head? That's how it was done. So if you're thinking this is weird, you are correct. This is weird. And honestly, my it's just 2025 me talking, but it's kind of nasty.

David had a different reaction than me:

²⁶ David was delighted to accept the offer. Before the time limit expired, ²⁷ he and his men went out and killed 200 Philistines. Then David fulfilled the king's requirement by presenting all their foreskins to him.

Look man, I have some concerns here. Who does extra credit in this kind of assignment?

Once again, Saul's plan backfired. Not only did David succeed, he exceeded. This gave him even more honor in the eyes of the people and it landed David in Saul's family.

So Saul gave his daughter Michal to David to be his wife.

²⁸ When Saul realized that the Lord was with David and how much his daughter Michal loved him, ²⁹ Saul became even more afraid of him, and he remained David's enemy for the rest of his life.

Saul never learns from his mistakes. He double downs. He triple downs. There's never a moment where he realizes he should be pursuing God instead of chasing his own misguided interests. In fact, his paranoia and jealousy ultimately lead to him creating the fulfillment of God's promise to give the kingdom to someone else. His desperate attempts to cling to what he wanted in sinful ways caused him to lose all of it.

³⁰ Every time the commanders of the Philistines attacked, David was more successful against them than all the rest of Saul's officers. So David's name became very famous.

WHAT DO WE DO WITH ALL THIS?

Ladies, do you need to ask your husbands how many foreskins they would have been willing to acquire for your hand in marriage? Is there a culturally relevant number of foreskins we could make future son-in-laws provide? I feel like the appropriate answer is zero. If you had a number other than zero in mind, then we have a new set of issues we need to deal with.

We are removed from the events of this chapter by thousands of years. A lot has changed in the world. What hasn't changed is human nature. What hasn't changed is the destructive power of jealousy, envy, irrational anger. What hasn't changed is the wrongness of manipulating others for our own ends.

When God created humanity, He designed us to be in relationship with Him. We are literally hardwired for that relationship. Sin interrupted it, but through Jesus' death and resurrection, we can have the relationship we were designed to have restored. Why are so many people in this world feeling lost, disconnected, like something is missing? Because there is a vacuum in each one of us as a result of sin that is meant to be filled by God.

Saul allowed that vacuum, that space, to be filled with something else. It doesn't stay empty – by its definition, a vacuum will be filled.

The question for us today, then, is the one I asked at the beginning of the message: what do our actions reveal about deep-seated problems hiding under the surface in our lives? What is my life filled with? What guides me? Saul's actions revealed what was in his heart, what he had allowed to fill that space meant for God. His anger, his jealousy, his bitterness, his paranoia, were all symptoms of a deeper problem – he hadn't given his life and heart to God. Jesus addressed this principle head on in Luke's gospel:

Luke 6:43-45 (NLT) ⁴³ "A good tree can't produce bad fruit, and a bad tree can't produce good fruit. ⁴⁴ A tree is identified by its fruit. Figs are never gathered from

thornbushes, and grapes are not picked from bramble bushes. ⁴⁵ A good person produces good things from the treasury of a good heart, and an evil person produces evil things from the treasury of an evil heart. What you say flows from what is in your heart.”

I feel like every week there’s someone in the news trying to deal with the damage caused by something they said; maybe it was racist, maybe it was sexist, maybe they lost their temper, whatever the case, they did something bad, someone filmed it, and now the world knows. So often part of the apology is a statement saying “that’s not who I am, that’s not the type of person I am.”

Jesus challenges that thought, though, doesn’t He? We may be able to hide it, we may be able to bury it, but that fruit, the actions we do, the words we use, they come from somewhere. Each one of us reveals what is in our hearts through our actions. It’s not a both/and, it’s an either/or. We’re either producing good fruit that honors God, or we are producing evil fruit – it may look good, but if it is not for God it is not good.

1 Corinthians 10:31 (NLT) So whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Saul’s story, while seemingly extreme, is a call to self-reflection. What is the fruit of your life? What are you known for? Is God directing your life? Or is something else? Your ambition, your jealousy, your selfishness?

One of the fascinating things to me about today’s passage is that while David is the star of the story, we don’t get a peek into his thoughts. We read how the people love him, how Saul’s daughter loves him, how Saul is jealous of him. Saul’s jealousy wrecks havoc on Saul’s life; meanwhile, David enjoys God’s blessing over and over. As much as it may seem that our ambition, our jealousy, our goals may be to benefit ourselves, the opposite is true. They bring destruction to you. Meanwhile, David’s focus on God brings him blessing.

WHAT FRUIT ARE YOU KNOWN FOR?

Do your actions reveal deep-seated problems hiding under the surface in your life? Is jealousy controlling your life? Envy, frustration, anger, foul thoughts? Do you wish failure on others? Are you disappointed or upset with their success?

WHAT NEEDS TO CHANGE?

It’s time to allow God’s Spirit to fill your life, to allow Him to take possession of every corner. Come clean with some fellow believers, get some accountability. Come down after the service and pray with someone on our prayer team. Now is the time to pursue God, to turn away from the death of a life pointed away from God.

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