

“Surviving the Tensions of Life”

Surviving the Tensions of Life-Samuel and God

God: Samuel?

Samuel: I remember a time when I was a little boy that I had trouble understanding who was calling me. Being raised by the priest, Eli, I knew what I was supposed to do; he had taught me well. He taught me to listen.

God: Samuel?

Samuel: So there's this voice that keeps calling me. There are lots of voices that clamor for my attention. I am a judge and a prophet for the great nation of Israel. Before I was recognized as the leader of our nation, many other judges preceded me. They listened to God, and God regularly spoke to them and to the people also. It was a great system.

God: That is the way I set it up. My reason for creating you and all of humanity was for relationship. I have had quite a history of communicating to my people. Picking Abram turned out to be a great choice; even though he was old, he still trusted and had faith that a great nation would emerge. While his wife thought the idea was hilarious, Abram still believed. Then there was Isaac, Jacob and all his boys, including Joseph the dreamer. Those were some tough times in Egypt during that famine, but again my people were faithful. After a tumultuous time of bondage, I was able to get Pharaoh's attention through Moses. Those times in the wilderness included ups and downs, but I continued to communicate to them. I provided manna and quail so they wouldn't be hungry. I led them by pillars of clouds and fire; they were never by themselves. I told them I would never leave them nor forsake them. I promised them a land, and while it took a while, they finally made it. I continued to speak through the judges, the ones designated to lead the people and to make the big decisions about their future.

Samuel: But I guess that's where I enter the picture.

God: I had a great plan for you too. Your mother couldn't have children, and after she promised to dedicate her first-born to serving me, she became pregnant with you. For her to leave you with Eli the priest was an act of deep devotion; your mother was a godly woman.

Samuel: I know. Many days I remember her example and know that she did the right thing, even when it was tough. That is why the political tension in my life has been so difficult.

God: I know you tried. You did your best to tell my people what I wanted them to hear, but my people have a long history of being hard-headed.

Samuel: Sounds like you are talking about Baptists.

God: Actually, Baptists are hard-headed too, but I was talking about my faithful people, who were called Israel, a name which I had given to Jacob their ancestor.

Samuel: The people wanted a king; they said I was getting too old and they weren't pleased with how my sons were turning out.

God: Neither was I!

Samuel: But the real reason that they wanted a king was to be like the other nations. Because I had the luxury of being able to travel, I was aware of what a king would do. And I have to admit, I felt rejected too, for they were saying that they didn't want me anymore.

God: Actually, what they were saying was that they didn't want *me* anymore. I had always been the one calling the shots through my mouthpiece, whether the person was a judge or just a strong leader. Now, they were saying that they wanted a king. Part of the problem was that they could never see me, and certainly, they couldn't control me. They wanted more independence.

Samuel: But politics is not only reserved for government; political tension also involves any relationship where someone is seeking to gain authority or power. These types of political tensions happen all the time: at work, at church, in families, and in other relationships.

God: Do you remember what I said when I was asking you to coronate one of Jesse's sons to be the

new king? I said, “Look not on his countenance, or on the height of his stature; because I have refused him: for the LORD seeth not as man seeth; for man looketh on the outward appearance, but the LORD looketh on the heart.”

Samuel: And that advice proved to be very sound.

God: With all the drama in the world, there truly is no reason to become seduced by how someone looks, or to make a judgment on what someone wears or doesn't wear. What is most important is a person's heart. Of all people, as a judge, you should know that relationships have merit only because of what is in a person's heart.

Surviving the Tensions of Life-Saul and God

God: Saul?

Saul: Yes? This must be God calling me. I grew up with people telling me how good-looking I was and how regal I looked. I was head and shoulders above everyone else; my height and appearance *commanded* respect. While I looked like a king, I was from the small, seemingly insignificant tribe of Benjamin, so I was always looking for a way to measure up to those who came from the more upscale areas. I came from a good family, one that had wealth and a good name in the community.

God: Do you remember when you met my servant Samuel?

Saul: Sure, I had been instructed by my father to go search for our lost donkeys out in the countryside. You've heard of a wild *goose* chase; well this was a wild *donkey* chase. My servant and I had looked everywhere for these elusive animals but could not locate them. Finally, the servant suggested that we go see Samuel the prophet; maybe he could help. This of course would have never happened in your society. I understand that American males would rather continue driving when lost rather than asking someone for directions or assistance.

God: Meanwhile, I told Samuel that Israel's new king would be paying him a visit, and I told him to anoint you as the first *real* king of Israel. Saul, yours is a great story. Small town boy goes out looking for some lost donkeys and gets anointed by my representative as the new king of Israel. While you certainly looked noble enough to be a king, this possibility probably never crossed your mind. Given these circumstances, I had hopes that your story would have had a happy ending.

Saul: But God, there were so many expectations placed upon me as the first king. I felt like I had to get everything right. I was the *first*; people were depending on me. I understood the importance of trying to abide by the rules, recognizing how important it was for me to live by the Law, after all, that would make me look good, something which I had been trying to perfect since I was a boy.

God: That's the whole problem: you can never be *good* enough. That theological tension of weighting the Law over grace and vice versa is a problem that continues even today. People still struggle with trying to please others and are looking for positive strokes by what they do. Some even think that they can receive my favor by what they do, that if they just work a little harder, give a little more money, read their Bible more regularly, then their problems will be over. But I am not a means to anyone's blissful end.

Saul: I wanted to believe that, but the voices from my childhood continued to haunt me. I was always wanting to measure up to the next person, even though I was the tallest in my class. This quest to be *liked* and the accompanying paranoia eventually became my downfall.

God: Many today are like Saul; their worries can sometimes overtake them. Like Saul, you are out on a wild donkey chase while God is seeking to bless you, and you do not even realize it. Saul had it all, but that was not enough. All of you will have shelter tonight, access to food, and you will even have different clothes to wear tomorrow than what you are wearing right now. Like Saul, God has richly blessed you, yet like Saul you want more. With Saul, I know his life would have been different if he had recognized the honor of being anointed and chosen by me. So this morning, I pose the same

question to you. When will it be enough to recognize the beauty of my grace, that unmerited favor, which I offer freely to you through salvation provided by Jesus Christ? When will my grace be enough?

Surviving the Tensions of Life-David and God

God: David? Do you remember the occasion when I told Samuel, “Looks aren't everything. Don't be impressed with his looks and stature. I've already eliminated him. God judges persons differently than humans do. Men and women look at the face; God looks into the heart.”

David: I was told later that while I was tending sheep during the reign of our first king of Israel, King Saul, that Samuel came to Bethlehem with his horn of oil and scared the elders. Samuel asked my Dad to parade my brothers in front of him. My oldest brother had similar attributes as King Saul; he was tall and stately.

God: That is when I spoke directly to Samuel. Because a tall and stately king was familiar to him, he was going to slip into the same pattern. I will always be amazed at how often humans simply repeat their mistakes by taking the easiest route or doing the same thing over and over again. Albert Einstein once said, “The definition of insanity is doing the same thing over and over yet expecting different results.” Given this definition, churches are *notoriously* insane.

David: But you chose me over my brothers, even though I was the runt.

God: I chose you because of your heart. I once called you “a man after my own heart.”

David: But I didn't always do what was best. While I wanted to make right decisions and I have been called Israel's greatest king, I also had my dark times.

God: Because you are a man after my own heart, you understand how to relate to people, for relationships are from the heart. That is the seat of your emotions, and you cannot have a relationship with me or anyone else without emotion. Sure, you made mistakes, even gigantic mistakes. But you came back to me. You asked for forgiveness. Once Samuel anointed you, my presence never left you. I was always with you, even when you struggled. Sure you experienced relational tension; everyone does. The difference was your *heart*. I was uninterested in your birth order or profession. I was only interested in your heart. That is why I established the covenant with you: “I will raise up your offspring after you . . . I will establish the throne of this kingdom forever . . . whoever commits iniquity will be punished . . . but I will not take my steadfast love away from him, as I took it from Saul.” (II Samuel 7:12-16) Steadfast love is the primary key to this covenantal relationship.

David: How can you continue to love me, even after I did some horrible things? I don't always understand you.

God: You never will, because I am beyond your human comprehension. I am God. You are to be my servant and not vice versa. You exist for my whims; I do not exist for yours. You are to be at my beck and call; your convenience is not the game-plan. I am committed to you, but I refuse to be *controlled* by you. The political, theological, relational and spiritual tensions found in the scriptures which I inspired will insure that I *was* and *am* and always will be a sovereign mystery. These tensions will keep me beyond your understanding, and they keep *you* from reducing *me* to a manageable and predictable Deity. For people today, I'd rather that they spend less time trying to figure out what they will *never* understand and spend more time simply doing what they *already* know they are supposed to do, namely to love me with all their heart, soul, mind and strength, and then do so by loving their neighbors as themselves. As I inspired the Apostle Paul much later, “you may see through a glass dimly now, because you can only understand but so much. So these three still remain: faith, hope and love, but the greatest of these is love.” Want to please me? Love one another, as I have loved you.