

# THE THING GOD WANTS MOST

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### PRACTICAL ASSIGNMENT

## INTRODUCTION

I invite you to open your Bibles to 1 Samuel 15. The title of this lecture is “The thing God wants most.” I believe it is good from time to time to look at and emphasize what God wants most from us. Many of you I’m sure will remember the things that are most precious to God. But maybe some of your team members have begun to stray from that. They’ve started to have some other priorities. Not something bad, maybe not something worldly, but another priority than the thing that is most important. I would invite you to take notes and to share this lecture with your team once you get home.

This is the chapter about King Saul, and King Saul receives some instructions from God as to what he has to do. In verse 3 we read, *“go to attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.”* This was a very specific command. Obliterate the Amalekites!

## I. DELIBERATE DISOBEDIENCE!

Leader Saul received a very specific command, “Obliterate the Amalekites!” Well, very strange things began to happen from the time that command was given to the time that command was fulfilled. Very strange things happened. We want to look at the development of these things. The first thing to note is that it was an undiluted command with no room for alterations. Then what happens? What is the first thing we see? Look in verse 9: “But Saul and the army spared king Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs-- everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed.”



We see deliberate disobedience. That’s the title for this section. They spared everything that was good. They destroyed everything that was despised and weak. Here we see that God gives a specific command to a man. A specific command is given to a specific leader with a specific mission-- at a specific time and at a specific place; a specific project needs to be done. The very first thing the leader does is to alter that instruction. The first thing this man does is to alter God’s command. He revises it. He adjusts it to suit himself and to do it according to his own liking.

We also have a way of doing this, you know. The Bible talks about starting new churches.

In the book of Acts Phillip started new churches and other ordinary believers started new churches. But we say, well, we can't do that because we don't have ordained leaders to do it. We begin to alter God's command. Brothers and sisters, we need to share the Gospel as we have never shared it before. God has commanded you to be the best witness that you can possibly be. Not, "well I did it, I did it." But where are the results? Did you really follow God's command? Do you really have the heart of God? God says there is nothing so important in the world as the soul of a man. What shall a man give in exchange for his soul?

Tithing your money is just the same. Are you tithing your money? Are you setting an example with your money of how to share with God? Brothers and sisters, sometimes we don't and it is just plain disobedience! Why is it? Why are we disobedient? Is it that we don't understand it? Is it that we don't know what God wants? Is it that we've never been taught how to do this ministry? Have we not been properly motivated several times over the past few years? It is the result of deliberate disobedience. It is an assumption that somehow we know better than God does. We know better what plan we should have for Ukraine than God has. In this lecture we will see the regression of a disobedient heart.

## II. A DIVINE DISAPPOINTMENT

Verse 10: *"Then the word of the Lord came to Samuel: 'I'm grieved that I made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions.'"* The story here leaves Saul for a moment and focuses on God, His feelings, and His perspective.

Saul was a disappointment to God. I don't know how you are going to live your life, but I can tell you how I want to live my life. I want to live the kind of life, I want to have the kind of transparency, and I want to have the kind of character that will never cause God to feel sorry that He called me to the ministry and that He called me to salvation. ***That is how I want to live.*** That could not be said of Saul. God said, "I'm sorry that I made him the leader of my people. I repent of the fact that I appointed him king. I am sorry that I put him in this position of leadership and I am sorry that I called him to do this special ministry." This is what God said of the life of King Saul.

Let's look at another place in the Bible and learn a little bit more. 1 John 3:21-23. *"Dear friends, if our hearts do not condemn us, we have confidence before God and receive from Him anything we ask, because we obey His commands and do what pleases Him. This is His command: to believe in the name of His Son Jesus Christ and to love one another as He commanded us."*

It is interesting to notice here that our prayers are predicated and are dependent upon the fact that we do His will. That we do what He desires us to do. Brothers and sisters! Disobedience, doing what we want, ***breaks God's heart!*** In Ephesians it says, "Quench not the Spirit in your life." Disobedience cuts off and smothers the Spirit of God in our life. Just because we've sinned we do not lose our salvation. Our salvation does not depend upon our sin. But we do lose our character for a while; we do lose our production for a while. Because of sin we do lose our testimony for a while, we do lose our usefulness for a while and we do lose our fruit-bearing for a while. Here we see a divine disappointment on the part of God. But this is not the end of the story. This is not the end of the regression of a disobedient heart.

## III. DIABOLIC DEIFICATION

The Bible says in chapter 15 verse 23 that to rebel is like the sin of witchcraft. This is exactly what became of Saul. See verse 12. *"Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, 'Saul went to Carmel. There he set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal.'"* On the highest mountain in Israel Saul built his very own idol.

Not only has Saul disobeyed God, not only has he disappointed God, not only has Saul assumed to know better than God, but now Saul has assumed to be God Himself. He has rearranged the commandments of God. Clearly the Ten Commandments stated that nobody should set up any image or anything like that to honor or worship it. He disobeyed God. He disappointed God. He made himself God because he said, "I'm going to do what I want to do." Now he is acting like God; he set up an image for himself to be honored.

What a picture of today's generation of church leaders. Someone came with money from the West; someone gave a person the nice title of 'Mission Leader'. Someone got a car. Someone got a nice building and some people think they have really done something for Jesus. Some others have built buildings. Why? The Orthodox Church says that the church building is a holy building; it's a Holy Place. We also believe that a prayer house is

a holy place. But the Bible says, “God does not live in buildings made with hands.” But they think what God says is not important. We are going to build a building, real big and fancy. Now we have done something for Jesus!

But where are the new converts? Where are the real groups of new believers, the real new churches, not just the buildings? There are many such church leaders. All of us know some of them. Oh, brothers and sisters, I beg you that you would cleanse your own hearts! That you would give yourself to do evangelism! That you would help your students to plant new churches. That you would have a priority to train evangelism and discipleship. That it will never be your student who says, “Why am I studying these Bible courses?” but that everyone knows why they are studying these Bible courses. It is because they are sharing Bible truths with unbelievers and leading them to salvation. Yes, there are still church leaders today that are trying to build their own prestige, their own image, yes, building their own idols. Brothers, **let us be careful**, let us be humble and remain humble before Jesus our Christ. We’ve seen this diabolic deification as another step down in the regression in a disobedient heart.

## IV. DAMNING DETECTION

It was the detection, the finding out of the sin, which brought a damning spirit upon Saul. Look at verses 13 — 16. “*When Samuel reached him, Saul said, ‘The Lord bless you! I’ve carried out the Lord’s instructions.’ But Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle I hear?’ Saul answered, ‘The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the Lord your God, but we totally destroyed the rest.’*” Now we read a very interesting word. “Stop!” Samuel said. That word in the Hebrew actually means, “**Shut up!**” When Samuel came Saul gave a very nice greeting and he covered himself with a nice lie. “I’ve carried out the Lord’s instructions!” Nobody asked him that; he didn’t have to say that. He wanted to make a nice front. But as soon as he said this to Samuel he was condemned. He was detected and condemned. Samuel said, “Well, I’m hearing sheep and I’m hearing cows.” **Have you been honest with God**, Saul? Really? **Really?** What are all the animals you have here? Who knows, maybe there are others things too? Here we notice something that Saul is thinking. He thought, “You can sin all you want to and just cover it up.” They had saved all the nice things for themselves and here comes Samuel. What to do now? Well, we want to offer them to God. He had a very nice sly idea. Was it real? Was that his original plan? You know what the Bible says. The Bible says, “Be sure your sins will find you out.” Sin will come to the surface. For Saul it came to the surface. He covered it up with some nice religious phrases. Whenever sin is covered up there always is another degenerate step of the disobedient heart. It is another step down for the disobedient heart. Saul has been discovered and confronted.

## V. DESPERATE DECEPTION

After he’s been discovered there is **desperate deception**. Saul said in verse 15, “We are going to make an offering to God.” All of a sudden they’ve saved the best to give to God. Do you see what is happening, folks? Have you ever heard something similar to that?



In the last couple of years I’ve heard some interesting excuses for not doing evangelism. It was just impossible. “Oh, we know the Bible! We’ve already finished the course on evangelism and discipleship. We want to do evangelism and start new churches! But everybody is working in their garden right now and we can’t do anything.” Then it was summertime and everybody was so busy with so many things and then it was bad weather and, “You just can’t do it in the summertime.” Of course everybody knows you can’t do it in the fall time, because in the fall time you have to start your Bible classes. Then in the wintertime: “Oh, Abraham! With our bicycle in the wintertime! It is not possible! It is a joke!” But! “We do what the Bible says!”

How quickly that decision was made -- this offering to God. He changed his sin and made it into an offering. Well, I had this nice deal but now that I am discovered I’ll make an offering to God and everything will be just fine! Do you see that the deception is still going on? There is no repentance. He is still deceiving the detective. What is the response in verse 16? “Stop!”

Stop deceiving! Shut up! Samuel said in verses 16 — 19, “Let me tell you what God thinks of it, what God has said!” *“Samuel said, ‘Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The Lord anointed you king of Israel. He sent you on a mission, saying “Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites.” Make war on them until you have wiped them out. Why did you not obey the Lord? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the Lord?’”*

Than we see three more downward steps of the degenerate heart. We see Saul giving three excuses. In verse 20, notice this, pay close attention. *"But I did obey the Lord," Saul said. "I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag, their king."* That's a contradiction! You can't completely destroy the Amalekites and bring home the king. You can't destroy it and then bring it back. What is Saul saying? Saul in a religious way is justifying his deception. In verse 21 look what He says, *"The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the Lord."* This is the second time he lies to justify his deception.

That reminds me of some other people in the Bible. There were some people in the New Testament who just discovered about tithing. They sold some land and they started to count: "O! Ten percent? That is a lot; that may not be necessary. We'll just take some money and we'll say, 'Here!'" That is what Ananias and Sapphira did. Peter said, "Is that all the money you should be giving?" What did they say? "Oh, no, I'm sorry?" No, they lied to cover it up. They lied and they kept back part of the money secretly. Peter said, "Yeah, sure!" And God struck them dead. That brought revival in the church. Maybe the end result was good.

I want you to think about your students. What are your students doing with their lives for Jesus? Are they tithing their money? ***Are they tithing their time?*** Do they want to do spiritual work? Not long ago I again heard about one student from a stationary Bible college. He's nicely paid for going to school. But his church leader said, "But he never does anything for Jesus in our church." Can your church superintendent say the same about your students? What is your reaction? "Well, I didn't lead a course there. Brother Slavic was there and I do not know what he did. What I do is good." You are making some nice religious phrases. "You know... Brother this... and brother that..."

You know what I wonder? I wonder how Saul could live with himself. Have you wondered about that? What about yourself? This is a lesson that warns us about the degenerate steps of a renegade heart. We are going to see another step downward, another step down the path of sin. This was from a spiritual leader, from a man called by God to do this task, to lead His people.

## VI. A DOMINANT DESIRE

We are going to take a look at what God really wants. We are leaving Saul for a moment again and looking at what God wants. Verse 22-23, *"Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as obeying the voice of the Lord?"* Brothers, this is the word of the Lord. Jesus said, "I am the Word" and here in this Bible is everything we need. You better do what it says whether you are ordained or not, whether you have time or not, whether you have a chance or not. It says: in season and out of season. Whether it is comfortable or not, to obey is better than sacrifice.

Verse 23, *"For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry."* Here we note that not doing what the Bible says is the same as worshiping an idol. ***God delights in obedience!*** Saul made the mistake that somehow he can take care of all his sins by bringing a sacrifice. Some of you make the mistake of just working extra hard and being extra busy. You say, "Well, I was busy all the time." But did you have the priorities that the Bible talks about? Did you give a vision to your church staff and students? Samuel lays down a principle here: that to obey is much, much better than a sacrifice.

My prayer for you is that you may become an obedient people, a people that will take the commands of Jesus Christ extremely serious. Many of your students have never yet plugged into a place of service, a place of ministry. They've never learned yet to pour their lives into other people. They have not yet learned how to become a functional individual of the spiritual body of Jesus Christ. There are no little people in the Kingdom of God. Everybody counts. Everybody matters to God. God has called everybody to obedience. You have lots of students that are doing 'Basic Christian Life'. I beg you ***give them the joy of starting a new church***. Give them an opportunity to kneel down with an unbeliever and pray a prayer of repentance. God has 2 dominant desires. First of all, that all people should come to repentance and that none should perish. Secondly that the believers, all believers, should obey Him and serve Him.

Let's look at Isaiah chapter 1. Isaiah chapter one is a very interesting place. Verse 11, the topic here again is that it is better to obey than to sacrifice. Let's look at this. Verse 11- 17, *"the multitude of your sacrifices-- what are they to me?" says the Lord. 'I have more than enough of burnt offerings of rams and the fat of fattened animals; I have no pleasure in the blood of bulls and lambs and goats. When you come to appear before me, who asked this of you, this trampling of my courts? Stop bringing meaningless offerings! Your incense is detestable to me. New Moons, Sabbaths and convocations- I cannot bear your evil assemblies. Your New Moon festivals and your appointed feasts my soul hates. They have become a burden to me; I am weary of bearing them. When you spread out your hands in prayer, I will hide my eyes from you; even if you offer many prayers I will not listen. Your hands are full of blood; wash and make yourselves clean. Take your evil deeds out of my*

sight! Stop doing wrong! Learn to do right! Seek justice, encourage the oppressed. Defend the cause of the fatherless, plead the case of widow.” **God is making a statement for obedience**, not for a sacrifice.

There are more than 20 references in the Scripture to this topic of obedience rather than sacrifices. Brothers and sisters, **it is being busy for God that counts**. It is doing what He wants to be done. He wants church-based leadership training. He wants new church leaders that know how to save people and how to start new churches. God says, “I’m nauseated with your offerings that take the place of your obedience.” Where do these offerings, these sacrifices come from? They come from a life of shame, from a life of disobedience.

You would rather teach, you would rather preach, you would rather do something else than do evangelism. “Get your act together and obey me,” says God. Let’s look at the book of another prophet called Micah. Micah 6:6-8 *“With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before Him with burnt offerings with calves of a year old? Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul? He has showed you, O man, what is good. What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.”*

God wants us to obey Him, not to criticize the unbelievers, but to show mercy to them and to walk humbly with them before God in repentance. He said the same thing to **Habakkuk**. He said the same thing to **Amos**. He said the same thing to **Jeremiah**, and He said the same thing to **Ezekiel**. To obey is a dominant desire on the part of God. To obey! What did he say to James in the New Testament? Be doers of the Word not hearers only. What did Jesus say about this? He says, *“Not everyone who says: Lord, Lord, will enter into the Kingdom of Heaven, but he who does the will of My Father who is in Heaven.”*

We don’t obey Christ in order to build up merit. Our obedience to Jesus Christ is out of our affection and our **burning love** for Him. Jesus said, *“If you love me, obey my commands.”* To obey is better than sacrifice. We have looked at the heart of God and we’ve seen what He really wants. He is not willing that any should perish. We are going to look at point number 7. We are going to look again at King Saul.

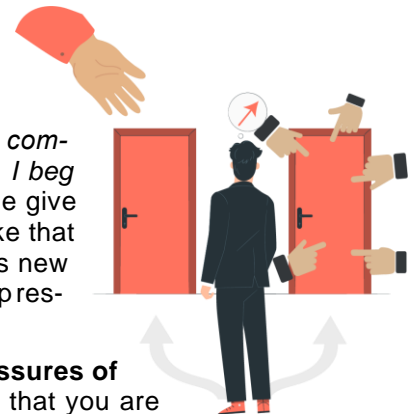
## VII. A DISASTROUS DEPARTURE

Look at verse 24, *“Then Saul said to Samuel I have sinned. I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions. I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them. I beg you, forgive my sins and come back with me, so I may worship the Lord.”* Let me give you a very important principle of leadership. You are all leaders. Here is a mistake that we see Saul making that should be a good lesson for you at the beginning of this new season. The most important mark of leadership is that it does not cave in to the pressures of the culture. Let’s repeat that.

**The most important mark of leadership is that it does not cave in to the pressures of the culture.** If you know what the Bible says and if you have the peace of God that you are doing the right thing, then you must lead your church team and your students to do that. There will always be someone saying, but we’ve never done this before. What does the head office say about that? Did you ask the provincial superintendent? But you haven’t received the laying on of hands yet! You don’t have money. Anybody has lots of money? I need some so I’d like to find out.☺There are all these reasons right within our Baptist culture that tell us, no you can’t start new churches.

But a leader doesn’t cave in. He carefully determines what is the very best for the people, and that is what he does. That’s not easy. Many times you will be alone. It means many nights you will need to pray things through to the end. It means having to say no to some people. Sometimes you just want to give in, you want to collapse. Sometimes I have the same feelings, because I’m tired of fighting. I’m just tired of it. Sometimes I’m just tired of being called a square, a dried up, doubled over old man. Sometimes I just want to give in because I don’t like to hear that I’m a charismatic. I don’t like to hear it, it hurts. There are all the insults and insinuations (subtle attack about your character) that come. For four years people have been telling me what a nice man I am. Now they are saying I’m bad, and I want to bring the American culture into Ukraine. I’m destroying the lives of Ukrainian boys and girls. I’m tired of being called strong willed and bossy. But a leader doesn’t dare cave in to the culture. I mean your church culture. Your Baptist church culture.

Verse 24 he said: “I was afraid of the people and so I gave in.” It looks like he repented here. He says, *“I have sinned, I violated the Lord’s command and your instructions.”* On the surface it looks like he repents. But I don’t really believe that. I’m asking you to look with me a little bit further. If you look below the surface I don’t think that he really repented. I’m not a repentance inspector. I’m not a fruit inspector. You may disagree with me. That is fine. But I do not believe that King Saul was sincere here. I believe there is some shame here, but there is also some fake front. Some cover up.



I believe that Saul is not sorry for what he did, but I believe that he is sorry because he got caught. That's a big difference. Let's look at verses 26 through 30. He asked Samuel to go back with him but Samuel said to him *"I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the Lord and the Lord has rejected you as king over Israel."* Then in verse 30 we read, *"Saul replied, 'I have sinned but please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so I may worship the Lord your God.'"*

Watch out here. Look closely. Samuel does not want to go back with King Saul and Saul says: "Honor me before the people, please." Honor me before my colleagues. That is why the original repentance was not so sincere. He is saying here, "Let me save face. Don't humble me in front of the people here. I'm the king; don't humble me. Don't embarrass me, please. I will give up the leadership, okay? But cover it all up and let nobody know about it. I don't want to be thought less of than what I was thought of before. Let us arrange this thing quietly. It will be better for everybody. Good for you, good for me, good for the soldiers." Folks, genuine repentance is completely different. True, genuine repentance says, "I'm sorry. I was wrong. I am willing to acknowledge it before whomever." That's genuine repentance. I don't see that here looking at Saul.

## VIII. DEFEATED DEATH

For our last point, number 8, "a Defeated Death" we want to look at 2 Samuel 1. There we have the story of Saul's death. I know there are two accounts of the death of King Saul. In 1 Samuel 31 there is an account of his suicide. Saul did commit suicide. But here in verse 8 we see another part of the story. We begin at verse 7. Saul is injured and he is laying there on the ground. *"When he turned around he saw me, he called out to me, and I said 'What can I do?' He asked me, 'Who are you?' 'An Amalekite,' I answered. Then he said to me, 'Stand over me and kill me! I am in the throes of death, but I'm still alive.'"*

Here we see an escaped Amalekite who has another story. Saul did attempt suicide but he was not successful. He was not dead, and here we see Saul dying a defeated man. Saul died defeated, disobedient to God, a man who has disappointed God. Now at the moment of his death, the very thing that God told him to destroy is now standing over him to destroy him. Do you understand that? Here is a dying man who's been disobedient and has disappointed God. The very thing that he did not destroy is now standing over him and destroying him.

There is a principle here. There is a Biblical principle here. Either you root out of your life what God told you to root out and you destroy what God has told you to destroy, or at the very end of your life that very symbol of what God told you to destroy will face you in the eye and will destroy you. Sin is like that. Saul died as a defeated man. Why? Because he disobeyed God and that which God told him to destroy stood over him to destroy him in the last moment of his life.

We'll look at Hebrews 12:1-2: *"Therefore, since we are surrounded by such a great cloud of witnesses, let us throw off everything that hinders and the sin that so easily entangles, and let us run with perseverance the race marked out for us. Let us fix our eyes on Jesus, the author and Perfector of our faith, who for the joy set before him endured the cross, scorning its shame and sat down at the right hand of the throne of God. "*

## CONCLUSION

Brothers and sisters, at the beginning of this year there are two things that we need to do. I'm going to ask your leader if he will come in a minute to pray for us. There are two things you need to think about doing.

- A. Let us throw off everything that trips us up, makes us stumble, and especially that damning sin that entangles us so easily. Everybody has a sin that easily entangles him. It has been following you all of your life already. Brothers and sisters, I ask you to pull it out ruthlessly. Pull it out by the roots. Destroy it completely. Let nothing sidetrack you from winning souls to Jesus Christ.
- B. Run the race looking to Jesus the author and Perfector of your faith.

Two things to do: Get rid of the sin that is holding you. Start running. Give your life to winning souls. Let me ask you a question, and when your leader prays we invite you to come forward to kneel down at the altar or at home. If you want to set a new priority in your life about starting new churches, about winning souls for Jesus Christ and helping your students to do so, we invite you to come forward and kneel. It's a beautiful day, sunny and beautiful. It's almost evening and when we look to the east we see that evening is gathered. If you listen closely maybe you can hear some trumpets. In my mind's eye I can see some lightening of the sky. What if it is Jesus coming here now? Could you go without any difference? Could you join Him with no sin holding you? ***Jesus, I have the right priorities.*** Let's stand and pray, and if there is someone here who wants to repent, why don't

you come forward. If there is a new commitment you want to make, a new priority you decided on, just come forward and we will just kneel down praying together.

Blessings to you, our dear friends!

We are happy to present the video, audio and paper materials that have been prepared by **New Life for Churches**. You have the privilege *upon completion of your practical assignment* to use this lecture with others.

## *Practical assignment*

Completed

- In the space below write one specific item that you have disobeyed God in ☐
- Now, write a covenant with God stating that you are purposing to obey God in this one item. State how you plan to obey Him by planning specific steps ☐
- When you have obeyed God in this area, check the last box. Be prepared to share your experience at the next conference ☐