

God Works Through Flawed People

DARRELL DELANEY

Sometimes, the most dangerous moments in life are not the loud, public failures everyone sees. Sometimes the real danger grows quietly over time, through pride, bitterness, fear, and the slow refusal to listen to God. Today on *Groundwork*, we come to the final episode in our series on 1 Samuel. We will look at David, Nabal and Abigail, and then turn to Saul's desperate visit to the medium at Endor, and finally, to Saul's tragic death. Along the way, we will see the difference between a heart that can still be redirected and a heart that keeps resisting God until everything collapses. Stay tuned.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Welcome to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney; and Scott, this is the seventh and final episode in our series on 1 Samuel, and we have covered a lot of ground along the way. In the first episode, we looked at Hannah's prayer, her deep anguish and the birth of Samuel. In the second episode, we looked at Samuel hearing God's voice at a time when the word of the Lord was really rare. In episode three, we learned about Israel's defeat, the capture of the ark, and the downfall of Eli's house.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And then we moved on to the fourth episode, to the story of how Israel asked for a king and God granted that wish. Eventually we were led to Saul, but that did not work out. So in episode five, we saw that David got anointed by Samuel, and that he would be taking Saul's place eventually, even as we saw David facing Goliath. In the previous episode...number six of the seven-part series...we saw the growing unraveling of Saul's leadership, his increasing paranoia about David, his wild mood swings; it was all a very dark story, but it all kind of sets up where we are going to be today, Darrell, here in this final episode of this seven-part series.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; so, today we are going to wrap this series with the stories of David and Nabal and Abigail in 1 Samuel 25, and then move toward Saul's desperate decision to seek out the medium of Endor at Chapter 28; and then finally Saul's death in Chapter 31; but let's begin with some excerpts from Chapter 25.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We are in 1 Samuel 25:10: Nabal answered David's servants, "Who is this David? Who is this son of Jesse? Many servants are breaking away from their masters these days. ¹¹Why should I take my bread and water, and the meat I have slaughtered for my shearers, and give it to men coming from who knows where?" ¹²David's men turned around and went back. When they arrived, they reported every word. ¹³David said to his men, "Each of you strap on your sword!" So they did, and David strapped his on as well. About four hundred men went up with David, while two hundred stayed with the supplies. ²³When Abigail (now, this is Nabal's wife) saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before David with her face to the ground. ²⁴She fell at his feet and said: "Pardon your servant, my lord, and let me speak to you, hear what your servant has to say. ²⁵Please pay no attention, my lord, to (what) that wicked man Nabal (has said). He is just like his name—his name means Fool, and folly goes with him. And as for me, your servant, I did not see the men my

lord sent. ²⁶And now, my lord, as surely as the Lord your God lives and as I live, since the Lord has kept you from bloodshed and from avenging yourself with your own hands, may your enemies and all who are intent on harming my lord be like Nabal. ²⁷And let this gift, which your servant has brought to my lord, be given to the men who follow you.”

DARRELL DELANEY

²⁸“Please forgive your servant’s presumption. The Lord your God will certainly make a lasting dynasty for my lord, because you fight the Lord’s battles, and no wrongdoing will be found in you as long as you live. ²⁹Even though someone is pursuing you to take your life, the life of my lord will be bound securely in the bundle of the living by the Lord your God, but the lives of your enemies he will hurl away as from the pocket of a sling. ³⁰When the Lord has fulfilled for my lord every good thing he promised concerning him and has appointed him ruler over Israel, ³¹my lord will not have on his conscience the staggering burden of needless bloodshed or of having avenged himself. And when the Lord your God has brought my lord success, remember your servant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

³²David said to Abigail, “Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel, who sent you today to meet me. ³³May you be blessed for your good judgment and for keeping me from bloodshed this day and from avenging myself with my own hands.

Then a little bit later, David accepted from her hand what she had brought, and said, “Go home in peace.” So, interesting story. David blows his top. He got disrespected by this guy named Nabal, or however you want to pronounce it, and he is going to go kill him. Nabal’s wife is far wiser...Abigail...she goes out, meets David, kind of lays it on thick...flatters him pretty good, but also speaks the truth, that God is going to be with David, so don’t sully your reputation with this; and she stops him...she stops David cold in his tracks and he does not carry out that planned slaughter of Nabal and his men.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is interesting because David...he almost loses himself right there. So, Nabal disrespects him. He is like: Who does this guy think he is talking to? He is like, I am going to get my guys to strap up and go take care of this guy. So, there is this moment where he feels disrespected, and he wanted to avenge his reputation. So, even though he was about to do that, Abigail comes in and actually talks sense into him, because Nabal is very disrespectful. He insults him, he dismisses him, and he talks about him in this weird way, and the good news is, David listens. So, what is really interesting to me is the fact that even though you are a Christian and you are saved and you have these things in your life...if you think about your life...I think about my life...I am not exempt from people offending me; I am not exempt from people frustrating me; and I actually need the Lord to keep me from making a mistake that I might not be able to fix.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And sometimes God, in his good grace and mercy, sends somebody to head us off at the pass, right? Stop, Scott! Stop, Darrell! Stop, David, Abigail says. Here is a clear contrast here Darrell, in 1 Samuel: One of the hallmarks of Saul is that he resists correction; no matter when somebody tries to dissuade him...tries to talk him down off the ledge; tries to talk him out of trying to kill David; Saul does not listen; David does. Here is this woman he has never seen before and has no knowledge of who this Abigail is. She comes out of the clear, blue sky, and says: This is not going to be good for your reputation. This does not honor your God, your God will take care of you. Stop! And he does. So, David, unlike Saul, is able to take correction when it is offered to him.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes, it is a beautiful thing; and so, David’s moment of greatness is not that he almost made a terrible decision; his greatness is that he listened before it was too late; and I think if we paid attention to that in our own lives, we would understand: We are not exempt from being offended; we are not exempt from being disrespected. There is plenty of trouble in the world for Christians and believers alike, but the fact that he listened to someone and then changed his direction is actually key. I think that we can learn something from

that.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you never know who that is going to be who might keep you from doing something that you will always regret. There is sort of that old adage: Speak when you are angry and you will make the best speech you will ever regret. You have to watch your impulses, right? I mean, I think of President Harry Truman: Whenever Harry Truman got angry and frustrated, he would write a burning letter to somebody, but he would never mail it. He would get it out of his system and he put it on paper and he would throw it in a drawer, except one time when his daughter got insulted by a newspaper critic, and he wrote the angry letter and he sent it and he regretted it for the rest of his life. You know, we have to have somebody or something to check our worst impulses...and God, by his Holy Spirit now, as people of Pentecost, Darrell...God will do that for us; and then, like David, we have to be willing to be chastised; we have to be willing to be chastened; we have to be willing to take the correction.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and we have been thinking about this series, and in 1 Samuel it has been rarely about leadership failures that happen instantly. We have seen collapses, not just happen in the final moment, but it goes through repeated resistance to wisdom, correction, and dependence on God.

But in just a moment, we are going to see Saul reach the point where fear completely overtakes him and desperation drives him toward something that God had forbidden. So, stay tuned.

Segment 2

SCOTT HOEZEE

You are listening to *Groundwork*, where we dig into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives. I am Scott Hoezee.

DARRELL DELANEY

And I am Darrell Delaney.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And now we are going to come to sort of what we call the *nadir*—the low point—of Saul's story. We read about it here, Darrell, in 1 Samuel 28 at verse 5: When Saul saw the Philistine army, he was afraid; terror filled his heart. ⁶He inquired of the Lord, but the Lord did not answer him by dreams or Urim or prophets. ⁷Saul then said to his attendants, "Find me a woman who is a medium, so I may go and inquire of her." "There is one in Endor," they said.

So, they go to this woman in Endor, this Witch of Endor she is sometimes called; and Saul says: I want to talk to Samuel. Samuel is dead now, and she conjures up the spirit of Samuel apparently...we will talk about this in a minute...in verse 15:

Samuel says to Saul, "Why have you disturbed me by bringing me up?" "I am in great distress," Saul said. "The Philistines are fighting against me and God has departed from me. He no longer answers me, either by prophets or by dreams. So I have called on you to tell me what to do." ¹⁶Samuel said, "Why do you consult me, now that the Lord has departed from you and become your enemy? ¹⁷The Lord has done what he predicted through me. The Lord has torn the kingdom out of your hands and given it to one of your neighbors—to David. ¹⁸Because you did not obey the Lord or carry out his fierce wrath against the Amalekites, the Lord has done this to you today. ¹⁹The Lord will deliver both Israel and you into the hands of the Philistines, and tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The Lord will also give the army of Israel into the hands of the Philistines." ²⁰Immediately Saul fell full length on the ground, filled with fear because of Samuel's words. His strength was gone, for he had eaten nothing all that day and all that night. Saul conjures up the dead spirit of Samuel because he is afraid, and by the time Samuel is done talking to him, he is way more afraid. It didn't work at all.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; it is interesting that he went to Samuel by the means that God told him not to, and he gets a rebuke. That is what he...the opposite of what he was looking for. I mean, this whole scene from the beginning is really heavy because Samuel is dead; the Philistine army is gathering; Saul is terrified; and the most unsettling thing about this is the text said that he inquired of the Lord but the Lord was not hearing anything. The Lord did not speak to him; the Lord did not give him anything to work with; and so, now he is desperate; and now he is trying to figure out what to do during this silence. It is really crazy that he takes this next step that is disturbing.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It is disturbing; and let's ask the question that probably all of our listeners are asking right now: Why did this work? We don't believe that you can actually summon the spirits. Grandma died 15 years ago. You cannot go find somebody and actually hear from Grandma, okay? We believe that this does not happen; but it happens here, and I think here is a situation, Darrell, where we have to be careful. This story does not exist in scripture to say this is a way to communicate with the dead...

DARRELL DELANEY

Right.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It happens here, maybe as a unique feature to rebuke Saul. It is definitely not something Christian people are supposed to do. Of course, Saul was not supposed to do it either. There is a law in Leviticus that says: You may not consult mediums...

DARRELL DELANEY

Chapter 19 verse 31...

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes; so, he was not supposed to do it either; but the fact that it works here does not mean it would always work and we should give it a shot if we are desperate or something. No, this was a sin...it was a sin for him to do. Okay, it is weird that it kind of worked, but that may have been God's word of judgment to Saul in this case; so we do not want to take this one-off example and make too much of it.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; the sin that you mentioned is not just one sin for Saul. This is a repeated pattern of sins for Saul. He is always choosing control over surrender; acting impulsively; ignoring instruction; protecting his own image; making excuses for everything he does; and over time, those choices turned into a pattern, and instead of repenting, like we see David has done, he turns toward desperation, and that desperation makes him seek out this medium in Endor—breaking that law that you know he knows, from Leviticus 19, because kings were told that they have to study the law. So, if he did not know when he was a young Benjamite, but he would know from being a king, that this is God's law. You do not do this, and he did it anyway. He went in with eyes open.

SCOTT HOEZEE

All because he was afraid. Fear, Darrell...and I think all of us know this from various experiences of our lives...fear can drive us to do desperate things. We become afraid; we become desperate; we start thinking about things we have never thought of before in our life; and the thing to do, I think, for us believers, Darrell, is we have to do our best to turn that fear over to the Lord. Perfect love casts out fear, we are told in John in the New Testament. So, we have to do our best to turn that fear over to the Lord and not use that fear as an excuse to go against the ways of the Lord like Saul does here. It is not easy when we are genuinely scared. Saul is said here to be terrified. It is not that easy to say: I'll turn it over to the Lord and it will all... But that is what we have to do, because otherwise, we go down very dark paths, as Saul does here.

DARRELL DELANEY

Let's stay with that for a second. You were talking about fear; so, you know, most of the time, generally speaking, when most people are afraid, they are trying to look for the quick fix...the immediate solution...let's get out of this...get me out of here. God, do you not see that I am drowning...that kind of thing. We want an immediate rescue, but when we look for that solution apart from God, now we are getting into trouble. So, the goal would be to bring the fear to God because fear...we would not be the first people to be gripped by fear. We have scriptures where David was gripped with fear; Elijah had experienced fear; in the psalms they talk a lot about fear. But this issue is not just the fear itself, it is where Saul takes the fear. So, if we can take our fear to God, then we would be in a better place.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Exactly; now, Saul here concludes that the phone line between Saul and God has gone dead, and it really has. We know that God has withdrawn from Saul. But in our lives, although God has *not* withdrawn from us, it feels like that sometimes.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes.

SCOTT HOEZEE

It feels like our prayers are bouncing off the ceiling over our heads. God is not there. He is not answering me. We join the psalms of lament, you know: How long, O Lord? Will you ignore me forever? So, the temptation is: the line with God has gone dead, so I've got to try a different line. No. Do what the psalms of lament do: Lament God's silence to God's face, right? God is still there. He really had withdrawn from Saul. He has promised that nothing can separate us from his love in Christ Jesus our Lord (Romans 8). So, we have to keep turning these things over to God, even when we feel like God is silent. Our sense that God has gone quiet is no excuse to then take some ungodly course of action. Still turn it over to God; over and over and over.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; and in Saul's situation...his story...it just reminds us that his private compromises along the way turned into this public consequence. It is tragic how he ends up, because he begins promising, but then he ends up being humiliated by what he has done. And we realize that his insecurity handed him over to this self-protection, and the self-protection handed him over to rebellion; and that progression went down... It did not happen overnight; it happened over time.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Yes, right; it is not a one-off. We all make decisions in our lives. You had reminded me, Darrell, that line from Rumpelstiltskin, where every time he takes a drink, he says: Ah, we won't count that one. Then the author of Rumpelstiltskin says: Yes, but somebody somewhere is always keeping count. So, the little decisions we make shape our character over time, and all of Saul's little compromises ended up in this disaster; and in just a moment, we are going to turn to the final disaster of Saul's life, so stay tuned.

Segment 3

DARRELL DELANEY

I am Darrell Delaney, with Scott Hoezee, and you are listening to *Groundwork*.

SCOTT HOEZEE

And Darrell, let's go now to near the very end of 1 Samuel, Chapter 31, the final chapter of Saul's life.

DARRELL DELANEY

It says: Now the Philistines fought against Israel; the Israelites fled before them, and many fell dead on Mount Gilboa. ²The Philistines were in hot pursuit of Saul and his sons, and they killed his sons Jonathan,

Abinadab and Malki-Shua. ³The fighting grew fierce around Saul, and when the archers overtook him, they wounded him critically. ⁴Saul said to his armor-bearer, "Draw your sword and run me through, or these uncircumcised fellows will come and run me through and abuse me." But his armor-bearer was terrified and would not do it; so Saul took his own sword and fell on it. ⁵When the armor-bearer saw that Saul was dead, he too fell on his sword and died with him. ⁶So Saul and his three sons and his armor-bearer died together that same day.

SCOTT HOEZEE

We have been heading toward this tragic fall for a long time. It has been pointed out before, you know, there is tragedy in the history of Greek theater and so forth. For a story to be truly tragic, somebody has to have fallen from a great height. You know, if somebody falls from a very low height, it is not that tragic. Saul had potential. He was a head taller than everybody. God picked him out as Israel's first king. Saul had potential, and this is how it ends; and that is what makes Saul's story really a tragedy. He had the potential for greatness, and he could not realize it through all of those things we just talked about in the previous segment of this episode; and now, it all ends here in utter and ignominious defeat and death in battle.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; this is the same guy who once looked humble; once looked promising and full of potential; and began with the opportunity to do well. But over time, his life became increasingly shaped by fear, by jealousy, by insecurity and resistance to God; and I think that progression is one of the warnings of this book, because people don't drift away from God all at once. Because hearts gradually harden. The compromise is one leads to another and an act of self-protection makes the next one easier, you know; and so, one refusal to listen can create a greater resistance later on. C. S. Lewis said this. He said: When people leave the faith, it is not because they got argued out of it; they just drift away. In Hebrews Chapter 2 it says: (verse 1) We must pay the most careful attention, therefore, to what we have heard, so that we do not drift away. And that is exactly what Saul did.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Drifted away...that is a really, really good metaphor for what happens to Saul here. You make one compromise and you make another compromise and now you feel terrible at the first compromise, you feel a little less terrible about the second one, and then the third and fourth...they just keep going down easier. Then eventually, all of a sudden, you have found you have moved very, very far away from where you had begun. So, I like that idea of Lewis and Hebrews 2.

Of course, David's narrative in 1 Samuel runs alongside Saul's story. Now, David is flawed too; and we saw he nearly made a horrible mistake with that whole incident with Nabal and Abigail that we looked at in the first part of this episode. Later in scripture, David is going to do other very huge mistakes with Bathsheba and Uriah; but still, at this point, David is still teachable...he is still correctable; and that is always a good thing, you know; I mean, when I have students in seminary in preaching class, even if they struggle initially, if they are teachable, they can come a long way; but if a teacher concludes that somebody is not teachable, there is not much you can do. David is teachable, thankfully, in ways that Saul generally was not.

DARRELL DELANEY

That is one of the defining lessons of this series, Scott, is that God is not looking for flawless people. He is not going to find them. We are all flawed; we are all born totally...total depravity is part of our DNA, but God is looking for hearts that remain open to him. I think that is one of the reasons why they consider David to be one after God's own heart...a man after God's own heart; not because he did everything perfectly, but because he is still teachable. God can still reach his heart. He would still repent and turn back to God; and that has enormous implications for us in our everyday lives, because a lot of us carry the assumption that spiritual growth is...you know, you've got to be perfect; you've got to be strong; you've got to avoid mistakes. But 1 Samuel lets us know that we are going to have these flaws, but are we going to remain humble enough to listen and repent and come back to God when we start that drifting?

SCOTT HOEZEE

And you know, Psalm 51 is often associated with David; it is sometimes associated with David after the bad business with Bathsheba and Uriah; and yet, he is able to say: Create in me a clean heart, O God. And that is something we all need to be able to say.

But, it has been a long series, Darrell. This is episode seven. We did a little recap earlier in this program, but we have moved from Hannah and her trusting God in her grief to having the birth of Samuel and how Samuel grew in the presence of the Lord at the temple at Shiloh. How God began communicating with Samuel in the way he had long stopped doing with Eli and his wicked sons. You know, we've got a lot of ups and downs: the loss of the ark of the Covenant; the rise of David with David and Goliath; and then the slow spiral of Saul. So, if we look back, Darrell, at this whole series, I think we can maybe have three things we could say by way of summary conclusions.

Darrell Delaney;

Yes; the first thing is that hidden formation matters. I mean, David's life reminds us that God does what God does in obscurity, and whatever he does there, it shapes what happens publicly. If we think about David's story...but even with the anointing, he was not even important enough to his father to be brought to the meeting, but he is out there doing the work of being a shepherd, and when he gets anointed, he goes right back to that work; and it took twenty years for him to become king and take that throne, but that time of formation in obscurity is what made his character important; and what God did in his heart was very, very significant.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Secondly, as we have just said, we need to resist the kind of fear that Saul felt, because it always pushes us in bad directions. Then third, being teachable—being correctable. When God puts people in our paths, like Abigail, then we need to take that correction; because we are all going to need it, because, as you said, we are all flawed, but that brings us finally to Jesus. 1 Samuel introduces us to David; add to that the concept that there will be a Son of David, and it makes us long for that final Son of David, and that, of course, is Jesus.

DARRELL DELANEY

Yes; he is the better king...no greater king that 1 Samuel points towards; and because of Jesus, failure does not have to be the end of our story. Hearts can be softened again, and fear can give way to trust, and pride can give way to surrender. Because, the God who worked through flawed people throughout 1 Samuel is still patient, he is still merciful, and he is still forming people today, and for that we say: Thanks be to God.

SCOTT HOEZEE

Well, thanks for listening and digging deeply into scripture with *Groundwork*. We are your hosts, Scott Hoezee and Darrell Delaney; and we hope you will join us again next time as we continue to dig deeply into scripture to lay the foundation for our lives.

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DARRELL DELANEY

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