

Stress Test

1 Sam 12-15

I'm sure you've heard of a STRESS TEST. In fact, some of you may well have had a stress test yourself. A STRESS TEST. What it does. Is it puts someone or something UNDER PRESSURE.to see how it performs.

You could say it gets past how something looks from the outside. And it tests the mettle of the thing being stressed. Tests what's going on..... on the INSIDE.

So a CARDIAC stress test. Tests your heart. They put you on a treadmill. And they gradually push you harder and harder. They're stressing your heart. To see how it performs under pressure.

And when it comes to other things. They do stress tests on engines and equipment and computers and all sorts of things. When it comes to those things. They pretty much push them until they break.

How long will a car engine run at full revs before it blows up. How many hours can you get out of a dishwasher. Believe it or not the people at choice actually have a walking machine that they put shoes on, and it simulates the action of someone walking. Thousands and thousands of steps. So you can test how far each different type of shoe performs.

Well the nation of Israel have just received a shiny new king. And his name's Saul. And on the outside. He's impressive. As far as kings go. If you remember. Saul's appearance rates in his first couple of mentions. In particular his HEIGHT. He's the

tallest man in the country. And more than that. By chapter 12 we're all together at a place called Gilgal. And we're all pretty happy. Because God's newly appointed king's, with God's help. He's just saved the people of Jabesh from having their eyes poked out by a nasty king called Nahash.

And in the next couple of chapters. The new king's in focus. And Saul's getting a stress test. To see what kind of king he really is. See how he handles a bit of pressure. See what he's really like on the inside.

But here's the thing . It's not the kind of test you might think. It's not a test of his military prowess. It's not a test of his fighting ability. It's not a test to see how far he can fling the javelin. It's a test of his FAITH.

It's a test of who the king will fear. It's a test of who the king's going to listen to under pressure.

See there's one thing God's made clear to the people of Israel. He's made it clear through Samuel. That when they asked for a king. It was a terrible thing to do. An EVIL THING he says. When they asked for a king like the other nations. They were rejecting him. So they could be just like everybody else. And so Samuel says, just so you know how evil it was. I'm going to pray. And in the middle of the dry season. You'll see thunder and lightning. And that's what happens.

Although at the same time. God gives them Saul as king. But verse 13 of chapter 12. There's a warning. This nation. And this nation's king. Is to be nothing like the other nations.

Verse 13

“Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the Lord has set a king over you. If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him (or more literally listen to him) and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God – good! But if you do not (again, listen to the voice of) obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your fathers.

So that’s what we’re looking for in Saul. God’s king. Will he be a king....who is under God. Who obeys. Who doesn’t rebel. Who listens to his God?

But before we focus on Saul. Let me just ask you. How do you go under pressure? Does peer pressure make you compromise? Do you maintain integrity...and faithfulness...when it’s your HONOUR at stake? Do your gospel convictions take a dive at all....when your comfort comes under threat? Do you maintain your high standards? Who do you listen to? How do you act....when the pressure’s on?

About ten years ago now I went on a trail bike ride. A guy by the name of Dion talked me into it. On a trail bike ride you spend all day riding cross country on a trail bike. And if you’re any good. It’s a heap of fun. If you’re not. Well, let’s just say it’s less fun. Unfortunately I’m not very good. And I think I was off the bike more than I was on it. One time. It’s still vivid in my memory. I went down a bank, hit a rock everyone else seemed to be able to dodge, and straight over the handle bars. For me. It was far more FEAR than FUN. And lets just say the words

that came out of my mouth in my fear were not words for polite company. And I said to Dion. I said mate. I'm not that HOLY under pressure.

How do you go?

Well lets look at Saul.

And first impressions aren't that great.

We're in verse 13. And there's two armies. One led by Saul. And the other one by Jonathan. And I don't know if you've come across someone who does this sort of thing. But Jonathan attacks the Philistine outpost in Israel. And he has great success. And then Saul takes the credit. **Jonathan** has done all the work while Saul's been hiding in the hills. But it's **Saul parading around** saying the words in verse 4. And all Israel hears the news, "**Saul** has attacked the Philistine outpost"; and yet it wasn't Saul at all. It was Jonathan.

But that's nothing compared to what comes next. It's a STRESS TEST.

It's an obedience test. It's an obey the voice of the Lord **test**. And I want you to watch how this **king of God's people** performs.

The terms of the test were set back in chapter 10 verse 8. Where Samuel, says to Saul, "Go down ahead of me to Gilgal, and I will surely come down to you to **sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings... but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.**"

Clear instructions. Go to Gilgal. Wait **seven days** for me. I **will come**, and I'll offer sacrifices for you. And on **behalf of the Lord our God, I... will tell you what to do**. Now you need to remember the details of that.

So we're at Gilgal. Chapter 13 verse 7. With the angry and horrendously large army of Philistines just across the valley. More than a little upset because of Jonathan's raid.

And Saul's waiting. **He waits five days**. No sign of Samuel. He waits **six days**. Has **anyone seen Samuel?** He waits **seven days**, verse 8, the time set by Samuel. But still, no prophet. And an army getting smaller by the minute.

So the question is, what's Saul going to do? Who's he going to obey? God's direct word to him through Samuel..... **wait seven days, wait 'til I come** and sacrifice a burnt offering for you and tell you what to do. And as his men begin to scatter Saul says **enough's enough**. Bring **me** the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings. And **Saul**, the end of verse 9, "offered up the burnt offering."

And of course, just as he's finishing, verse 10, **Samuel arrives**. And Saul goes out to say hello.

And in what Samuel says to Saul. You might pick up a phrase you've heard before somewhere. Like maybe.....in the garden of eden.

In Genesis 3 when they've decided to ignore God and they've eaten from the tree of knowing good and evil for themselves, God says to them, "**what is this you have you done?**" And it's almost exactly those same words from Samuel in verse 11.

"What have you done?". Adam and Eve both tried to **blame someone else**, So does Saul. "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you **didn't come at the set time**, and that the **Philistines were assembling at Micmash**, I thought, "now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favour, so I **felt compelled to offer the burnt offering**."

And Saul's talking fast. Like he's protesting to the umpire. And he's shoveling as much blame away from himself as he can.

Now there are so many ways, aren't there, that we can do **right sounding things** for exactly the wrong reason. Things that seem **so logical** and reasonable. When the reality is, we're just **not trusting God**. And not prepared to **wait**.

Samuel says to him, you've been a fool. He says, you have **not kept** the command the Lord your God gave you: if you had, he would have established your dynasty over Israel **for all time**.

But you didn't. So he **won't**. Under pressure. When he's tested. Saul fails the test.

Now..... you might feel a bit for poor old Saul. You put yourself in his position and there's a pretty good chance you or I would have done the same or worse. Maybe you wouldn't have offered the sacrifice. Because you'd have run away. Under a rock somewhere.

By the time all this happens. Saul's down to just 600 men with NO WEAPONS. Against an army with three times as many CHARIOTS...as he has men. Apart from foot soldiers. He DID WAIT.

But before you go down that line of thinking too far. Before you think it's just too much to ask. Just keep reading.

See, if there's going to be a Kingly line that's going to rule over Israel for all time, it's got to be a line built on **a heart that's obedient to God.**

So verse 14, a turning point in the tragedy of Saul, Samuel says, but now, your Kingdom will **not endure**. The Lord has sought out a **man after his own heart** and appointed **him** leader of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.

Your kingdom won't go to your son. It'll go to somebody else. With a line that's going to start with a guy who we'll meet in the next few chapters.

Which is tragic. Even worse when you read on and see that **Saul's son** has actually **got what it takes** to be the leader Saul **should have been**.

Saul's son **Jonathan**, as you see him in action, has all the qualities that are needed to be the leader of God's people. If you think it's too hard. Here's someone who shows how it's done.

at the end of chapter 13, Saul and his son **Jonathan** are the only two men in Israel with a sword. So without telling anyone. Jonathan says to his armour bearer, **let's go.**

He says to his armour bearer the words in chapter 14 verse 6; and they're the best words of faith and leadership we've seen yet.

"Come," he says, "let's go over to the outpost of those uncircumcised fellows. Perhaps the Lord will **act on our behalf**. Nothing can hinder the Lord from saving, whether by **many or by few.**"

Not presuming on the Lord to use them. But **perhaps he will**. And absolutely **confident** that the Lord who's saved Israel in the past can do it again.

And Saul's sitting under the pomegranate tree in Migron. Doing nothing.

And Jonathan and his armour bearer make their way through the valley, and up towards the Philistines. Absolutely confident that God **can save Israel** just as easily with **two men** as he can with an army.

And as you read the details, their **confidence is justified**. **And as Jonathan knocks off a bunch of Philistines, it** sets off a chain reaction. The huge Philistine army goes into panick mode. And the little guys win, and all **Saul has to do** is come in and **mop up**.

There's more stupidity from Saul in the second half of chapter 14.

Saul's Final Disobedience

But it's in chapter 15 the whole thing finally comes **crashing down**. Again, it's just a small thing. Just a detail of obedience. God says when you go into battle with the Amalekites, no souvenirs. Destroy everything. Bring nothing back. No sheep. No cattle. Nothing. But Saul has a better idea. Saul's going to select the **best of everything...** and **bring it home**. And then **lie about it**.

Which he does. He's not going to **destroy stuff** just because God says so. He's going to **keep what he likes**.

But listen to what he says to Samuel this time. Verse 13 And it's almost as though Saul's convinced himself he's done the right thing.

"The Lord Bless you.! I have carried out the Lord's instructions."

He's looking for a pat on the back. But Samuel says.

So what's that I can hear? Why can I hear the bleating of sheep. Why can I hear cattle lowing?

Saul starts a bit of shoveling again. And Samuel says STOP.

He says **how could you possibly disobey?** The Lord **anointed you as king**, the Lord **sent you on a mission**. The Lord said to **destroy everything** as a sign of his judgment on the Amalekites. So **why did you not** listen to the voice of **the Lord?**

Now I guess Saul's a bit bolder this time. He's on a back of a big win. So there in verse 20 he argues the point.

but I did obey. It was **their fault.** Not mine. I went on the mission the Lord assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. "**The soldiers** took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was **devoted to God,**" and get this bit: he says, "in order to sacrifice them to the Lord **your God** at Gilgal."

YOUR GOD Samuel. YOUR GOD.

Which is a bit of a give away.

And at that point, it's really all over. There are some famous words from Samuel. Where he says, "To **obey** is better than sacrifice" don't you realise the Lord's not interested in your **burnt offerings** so much as he is in your **obedience?** - the end of verse 22. God doesn't want your sacrifices or your songs or your church services or your money in the offering plate - God doesn't want the fat of your rams. He wants you to **listen to him.** He wants **your heart.**

And Saul's finished making excuses. And the truth comes out.

Now, let me just say. If anyone tells you that obeying God is simple or easy. You need to point them to places like this. It's not simple. And it's not easy. And again you might have a bit of sympathy for poor Saul.

But the truth is.....Saul's failed the stress test. Remember what God's king's meant to do?

He's meant to fear God. listen to him. And Not rebel against his commands.
Listen to Saul's confession.

1 Samuel 15:24 "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the PEOPLE and so I listened to THEIR VOICE.

So the end of verse 23, Samuel says to him, **because you have rejected the word of the Lord... he... has rejected you as king.**

Now I just want to make two quick application points. And the first one's pretty simple. Number one. God wants his people to listen to his words. To fear him. To NOT REBEL against his words. And to do what he says. To obey.

And God's standard's pretty high. He wants us to do that, even when it's hard. Even when it's NOT CONVENIENT. Even when every bone in our body's saying we ought to do something else.

He's got our good in mind. And he wants us to TRUST HIM.

Which can be very hard. It's hard to keep serving. When you don't feel appreciated. It's hard to keep being loving towards people. When they're not loving back. It may not be convenient to be completely truthful at times. And how hard is it to forgive? It may be tempting to look at that internet page you know you shouldn't. Temptation comes in every shape and size. And every time. God wants us to listen to him. And not rationalize away.

But if we're honest. There's a bit of Saul in all of us. And we just can't do it completely.

And even David Saul's successor couldn't. It's only ultimately David's successor Jesus who could. Which is the second point.

HE's the only one who obeyed every time.

CS Lewis talks about it this way. He says.

No man knows how bad he is 'till he has tried very hard to be good. A silly idea is current that good people do not know what temptation means. This is an obvious lie. Only those who try to resist temptation know how strong it is. After all, you find out the strength of the German army by fighting against it, not by giving in. You find out the strength of the wind by trying to walk against it, not by lying down. A man who gives into temptation after five minutes simply does not know what it would have been like an hour later. We never find out the strength of the evil impulse inside us until we try to fight it; and Christ, because he was the only man who never yielded to temptation, is also the only man who knows to the full what temptation means

Jesus was stressed far more than you or I. But he never gave in. The devil takes him out into the desert. After forty days without bread. The devil says. Why don't you just turn the stone into bread? Jesus says. Man shall not live by bread alone but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God.

The devil puts Jesus through the ringer. Jump off the temple, bow down to me. Provides Jesus with some good rational arguments. Even quotes the bible to him. But Jesus doesn't cave in.

Even to the point where he's in the Garden of Gethsemane. And he's sweating blood because of what's up ahead. Yet he says. Not my will but yours be done.

Hebrews 5:8-9 ⁸ Although he was a son, he learned obedience from what he suffered ⁹ and, once made perfect, he became the source of eternal salvation for all who obey him

There's our model. But more than that. There's our king. The ultimate proof of God's trustworthiness. The one who provided salvation for sinner's who'll turn to him. Who'll follow him. Who'll trust him.