

Prayer

Lord God, our strength and our protection, give us courage as we walk into each situation we face and help us to remember that you are with us. Your care and protection never fail; for even when we feel at our most vulnerable, You never leave our side. Build us up in courage, trust and love, we pray, so that we may become more like You. Praise You, Lord God: AMEN

Other Prayer Suggestions

Weekly Theme: Missions

We will pray during this coming week for church missions. Many say that we have to find new ways to 'do mission'. However, only God's voice can guide us all in what is His work.

On-going prayers

- *Praise God for the blessings of life*
- *Pray for those who are starving because of world food shortages*
- *Pray for aid workers, and the problems they endure to help others*

Meditation

Jesus, You are the brightness which fills my life,
When all around seems dull and cloudy.

Jesus, You are the colour which expands my vision,
Bringing meaning and life to all I see.

Jesus, You are the brilliance which designed the world,
Revealing Yourself through all You've made.

Jesus, You are the complexity which intrigues us,
Leading us to search for more and more.

Jesus, You are the happiness which floods our souls,
Leaving us to want more of God's good gifts.

Jesus, You are the kindness which surpasses generosity,
For all Your good gifts are undeserved.

Bible Study - 1 Samuel 16:18-23

¹⁸ *One of Saul's men said, 'I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who is skilled in playing the lyre, a man of courage, a warrior, a good speaker, and a man with presence. The LORD is with him.'* ¹⁹ *So Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, 'Send me your son David, the one who is with the sheep.'* ²⁰ *Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a kid, and sent them to Saul with his son David.* ²¹ *So David came to Saul, and entered his service. He became a favourite of Saul, who made him his armour-bearer.* ²² *Saul sent to Jesse, saying, 'Let David remain in my service, because I appreciate what he is doing.'* ²³ *Then, whenever the evil spirit from God came on Saul, David took the lyre and when he played it himself Saul would immediately feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.*

Review

In this weekend sequence of stories from the life of David, I will not take every part of every chapter of his story, but select the stories to try and give a feel for the life of the man who

would one day be a leader of His people, indeed, the greatest leader of His people. There are many things about David which are not very well known ever though they are an important part of his story in scripture, and we will try and visit these important texts; for example, did you know that David was anointed king more than once? As we follow the stories in the order that scripture gives them, we will see how crafted the whole narrative is; and out of that we will gain a better overall picture of what God was doing through this extraordinary man.

When Samuel anointed David, all that he knew of him was that God had pointed him out and that he was handsome, and had attractive eyes. Today we read more fully about the qualities of the man, interwoven into a story about the declining life of Saul, the first anointed king of all Israel and Judah. By the time of David's entrance into scripture, Saul had already made fundamental mistakes in his leadership of God's people, taking authority to himself that was not his to grasp (1 Sam 13:8ff, 1 Sam 15:9ff) and Samuel had dismissed his authority as King (1 Samuel 15:24-31). Saul, however, continued in office, and in today's scripture we have a picture of a king who was deeply troubled and in difficulty. The Spirit of the Lord had departed him, and been replaced with an 'evil spirit from the Lord' (1 Sam 16:14).

Some people find it hard to think that God might send an 'evil spirit'. But in the story of Saul, as we can quite clearly see that God's will was being played out, and the evil spirit worked for the wider purposes of God to isolate Saul, though at times it became a great danger to David and others! Previously, Saul has made his own decisions about spiritual matters and therefore caused the Spirit of God to leave him and in so doing had opened the door to the evil spirit; as we read on it becomes obvious that this is all background for the story of the up and coming David. David exercises authority over the evil spirit (16:23) through the craft of music. Evil is clearly afoot in the life of Saul, but God is in charge on a bigger scale, through the emergence of his real servant, David.

This is the first major teaching point of this story. We, like David, have authority over evil, when we act and live out our lives expressly within His will for us. David had given up his family and his home life for a difficult and hazardous life at court, accepting the will of God. This is the root of his authority over the evil spirit, not merely his craft of music. The music was the vehicle of his authority over evil, but not the origin of it. When dealing with what is evil in this world, it is not the prayers, words or action we take which are the source of our authority, they are the means whereby we have authority over evil; but the true authority come from a life directed by the Holy Spirit of God. Those who seek to confront evil therefore, should seek firstly to live according to the authority of God in every area of their lives. Without this, our enemy sits tight and says 'I stay' (as it tried to do in Saul).

We must remember as well that the story here is only a partial one. David does not have complete authority over the evil, because God has plans for David and His people, and they will be played out as the evil spirit takes more and more control over Saul. In this passage David acts out a 'sign' of his authority over the evil spirit in Saul, but he will have to be wary of Saul for many years before the old king finally dies together with the evil. So there is no story of deliverance from evil for Saul, but a story of deliverance of God's people from the evil of Saul, by the actions of David, the new King. The growing and complex story of Saul and David begins with this simple demonstration of the godly authority of David over Saul's evil spirit (from God – v23), and this is the beginning of his influence and authority over Saul himself.

Questions (for use in groups)

1. There are many nuances and touches to this story that I have not commented upon today. Which of them catches your eye, and what does it say to us?
2. Do you have further questions about the matter of 'an evil spirit from the Lord'. What are they? Seek to discuss this with others.
3. Why do you think that the Lord 'sent' an evil spirit upon Saul. Is it important to the story, or would you regard it as incidental?

Discipleship

Personal comment:

Authority over evil and evil spirits is a difficult subject. Naturally, people shy away from it. However, there is no getting away from the fact that there is evil in the world which needs to be confronted, and when it is, it will react violently. You may not have thought of going to the Old Testament to begin to learn about deliverance ministry, but this is the place to start!

Ideas for discipleship programme

- *Take time to consider what you believe to be the nature of evil, and if possible, talk to someone else about it.*
- *Does evil have a special interest in God's plans? If so, talk about this with friends at church. How might the enemy wish to attack your church fellowship?*
- *Write down what you think this change of work must have meant to David, positive and negative.*

Final Prayer

Give me, Lord a heart that is open to Your guidance and Your will O Lord, so that I may always be prepared to go wherever you may call. Give me the discernment to know what is evil and the courage to stand against it; and help me serve others at all times as an expression of Your love. Thanks be to God.