



Studies in the life of David

Text

First Samuel 16:14-23

Topic

David's music is able to drive-off the distressing spirit that periodically troubles King Saul

Title

"Exorcise Music"

Introduction

Michael Roizen is a chief wellness officer at the Cleveland Clinic. By studying the medical records of previous U.S. presidents back to Theodore Roosevelt he has determined that the stress and demands put on them because of their office take a heavy toll on their bodies.

"The typical person who lives one year ages one year," Roizen told CNN. "The typical president ages two years for every year they are in office."

It's pretty remarkable to look at before and after pictures of Bill Clinton and George W. Bush. The visual evidence alone shows you the aging-effects their office had upon them.

In our text a young David had recently been made aware that he would be Israel's next king. He would replace the current monarch, King Saul.

Through an extremely odd set of circumstances, David was called to come serve King Saul. Walking into Saul's tent, David saw firsthand the effect that the office had upon Saul.

Only in his case we're not talking about *physical* effects, like gray hair and wrinkles. No, we're talking about *spiritual* effects.

Saul was in bad spiritual shape. On account of his persistent disobedience, "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him."

Could something like that happen to David during his reign as king?

The answer to that is, "Yes!" At least David thought so because he would later write, in Psalm 51, "do not cast me away from Your presence, and do not take Your Holy Spirit from me." David perhaps flashed back in his mind to the time he saw Saul void of the Holy Spirit and feared to end up like him.

I hope to assure you that today, in the church age, the believer in Jesus Christ need not fear that the Holy Spirit will be taken away from him or her. However, we may still ruin our lives through persistent disobedience, make shipwreck our faith, be disqualified from serving the Lord, and suffer the loss of eternal rewards.

That is, unless we stand in the place David stood and take a good, long, hard look at the debilitating spiritual effects of disobedience.

To that end I will organize my thoughts around two points: #1 Take A Long Look At Saul So You Can Avoid Any Similarities, and #2 Take A Longing Look At David So You Can Adopt Every Similarity.

#1 Take A Long Look At Saul
So You Can Avoid Any Similarities
(v14-17)

Consider these initial similarities between Saul and David:

- Saul had been chosen to be king. He'd been anointed by the prophet, Samuel. God the Holy Spirit had come upon him.

- David had been chosen to be king. He'd been anointed by the prophet, Samuel. God the Holy Spirit had come upon him.

Might David have been thinking about these similarities when he first met Saul? Whether or not David was thinking about them, we should. We don't want to have any similarities to the Saul we encounter in this chapter.

1 Samuel 16:14 But the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the Lord troubled him.

This is a big doctrinal mouthful. Let's take it in two manageable portions.

It should come as no surprise to read "the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul." The ministry of God the Holy Spirit, and His relationship to believers, was different in the Old Testament than it is today. It was not uncommon, in Old Testament times, for the Holy Spirit to come upon a believer for a temporary period of empowering or insight, and then to depart, only to return at a future time. I submit Samson as a prime example.

The Holy Spirit's coming and departure had nothing to do with salvation. The people upon whom He came were already saved and they remained saved after His departure.

In the New Testament era, in the church age in which we live, all that has changed. When you are saved, the Holy Spirit comes to permanently indwell you. **He never leaves you.** You are described as being "sealed with the Holy Spirit of promise" (Ephesians 1:13). You are placed by Him into the body of Jesus Christ, sealed unto the day of redemption (Ephesians 4:30). He never, ever departs from the believer.

The New Testament speaks of a further baptism with the Holy Spirit by which you are to be empowered for service. But the Holy Spirit Who is in you never, ever departs.

Now for the second portion of verse fourteen, the "distressing spirit from the Lord." There are three main interpretations:

1. Saul was demon-possessed.

2. Saul was demon-oppressed.
3. Saul developed psychological problems from the combination of God's Spirit departing and the realization he was being disciplined by God.

I rule-out demon possession since I think Saul was saved.

- As hard as it might be to think of him as a believer, in chapter ten he was described as a man to whom God had given “another heart” (v9).
- Towards the end of his life we will read a passage that indicates that in death both he and his sons, including the godly Jonathan, would be where the prophet Samuel was. Where was Samuel? In Paradise.

Saul was severely backslidden but he was nonetheless a believer and, as such, could not be demon-possessed.

Was this psychological? Sure, but not purely psychological. It affected him psychologically, but it was *not* just something in his head. It wasn't *his* spirit being described as distressed. No, the Lord sent a “distressing [or *evil*] spirit.” Thus I conclude he was being distressed by a demon.

Again, this should be no surprise to us.

- Think, for example, about Job. Satan himself was given permission by God to come against Job. The Lord set the parameters, of course. But Satan was allowed to attack Job.
- We see something like this, too, in the New Testament. The apostle Paul spoke of a “thorn in his flesh,” some physical infirmity, but he called it “the messenger of Satan” sent to buffet him.

God is sovereign over the spirit world and can use the devil and his demons to accomplish His eternal purposes. So we conclude that this “distressing spirit from the Lord” was just that - a demon who was given permission to oppress Saul as a discipline for his disobedience.

1 Samuel 16:15 And Saul's servants said to him, "Surely, a distressing spirit from God is troubling you.

1 Samuel 16:16 Let our master now command your servants, who are before you, to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp. And it shall be that he will play it with his hand when the distressing spirit from God is upon you, and you shall be well."

Diagnosis: A distressing spirit from God. Treatment: *Music therapy!*

Don't laugh. Music therapy has existed for centuries. Music therapy has existed in its common current form in the United States since around 1944, when the first undergraduate degree program in the world was founded at Michigan State University and the first graduate degree program at the University of Kansas.

I'm no expert when it comes to music, but I think we would all agree that music can be a very powerful force. It can most definitely set or change the mood of a person or even a group of people.

I can only say this anecdotally, but it's been my experience, and the experience of others, that demons are repelled or at least neutralized by worship of the Lord.

1 Samuel 16:17 So Saul said to his servants, "Provide me now a man who can play well, and bring him to me."

On a personal level, I'm not sure this was the best thing Saul could have done about the distressing spirit. I mentioned the apostle Paul and the messenger of Satan God allowed in his life. What did Paul do in response? He prayed about it until God revealed to him that it was for his good and God's glory. Then Paul gloried in his infirmity, saying that it gave him the opportunity to show God's strength in his weakness.

Saul had none of those thoughts. His only thought was for relief. I like to think God was giving him space to repent, not just to be relieved.

The point we're making is that you don't want to be a Saul. You don't want to start well only to finish poorly. Though the Holy Spirit will not leave you, or be taken from you, He can still be grieved by sin. The New Testament describes believers who make shipwreck of their faith, who are disqualified

in the sense that their testimony is ruined, and who will suffer loss of reward at the judgment seat of Jesus.

If in the course of the next few chapters you can find *any* similarities between yourself and Saul, repent, and get back to walking with the Lord yielded to the indwelling Holy Spirit.

#2 Take A Longing Look At David So You Can Adopt Every Similarity

(v18-23)

A period of four years may have passed between verses thirteen and fourteen. Though chosen, anointed, and now empowered by the Holy Spirit, David continued as a simple shepherd in the little town of Bethlehem.

His life was about to shift into high gear!

1 Samuel 16:18 Then one of the servants answered and said, "Look, I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, and a handsome person; and the Lord is with him."

An unnamed servant said, "I have seen a son of Jesse..." People are watching you, watching us. Not just people we know; people we don't know. Be consistent. Be devoted.

From verse eighteen we can make a list of the similarities we should share with David.

First, he was "skillful in playing..." Don't be too quick to count yourself out. Yes, David was a gifted musician, a singer-songwriter of extraordinary talent who also invented and built instruments. Don't focus on his playing. Focus on the word "skillful." What talents and abilities has God given to you? What have you learned over the years? What can you yet learn? Hone your skills and determine to use your talents and abilities for God's glory.

Second, David was "a mighty man of valor." We'll see in the next chapter that David, as a shepherd, had encountered lions and bears who

threatened his flocks and that he had fought them to protect his sheep. Those episodes would be big news in a small town and had become part of David's resume.

We face off against 'beasts' every day. Our enemies are the world, the flesh, and the devil. The devil is even described as going about like a roaring lion seeking to devour us. We build our resume by resisting the devil, refusing the flesh, and rejecting the world.

Third, David was "a man of war." This makes no sense, initially, since he had never been to war or fought against men. And it's redundant if it's talking about his courage as a shepherd against wild beasts. Therefore I think it is anticipatory. The servant was describing David as a guy who had what it takes to be a man of war. In other words, he'd fit in fine with the king and his hand-picked army.

This speaks to us of flexibility, of fitting-in, so that we might influence those around us. We may need to stretch ourselves, get out of our comfort-zones, in order to reach certain people or groups.

Fourth, David was "prudent in speech." This was pretty important if you were going to be around the king, hearing potentially sensitive things.

The Bible makes so much of our speech. There is speech to avoid, like gossip and slander, and there is speech to applaud as we season our words with grace speaking as the oracles of God. The words you speak can bring help and healing to the hearts of the hurting. Your sharing of the Gospel can bring salvation to those perishing.

Fifth, David was "a handsome person," *like me!* (And you, of course). While David was physically attractive, think more in terms of the inner man, the qualities of the heart. We can (and should) cultivate inner beauty rather than concentrate on the outward.

Sixth (and finally), of David it could be said, "the Lord is with him." David was all about the Lord. The Lord was David's passion. He wrote about the

Lord. He sang to and about the Lord. He had a biblical worldview. His skills were dedicated to the Lord. His heart was undivided.

Remember, all this was true of David while he was a shepherd out in the fields. He wasn't in any kind of ministry or mission. In his regular, everyday, working life, "the Lord [was] with him" and it showed. It's an encouragement to all of us that our central passion will come through. *May it be Jesus!*

1 Samuel 16:19 Therefore Saul sent messengers to Jesse, and said, "Send me your son David, who is with the sheep."

Boom. Just like that David's life changed. So may yours. *Be ready!*

1 Samuel 16:20 And Jesse took a donkey loaded with bread, a skin of wine, and a young goat, and sent them by his son David to Saul.

This was common hospitality. You didn't go to the king without gifts - even if he summoned you.

As believers we ought to be courteous. We ought to follow customs. We should be hospitable. We don't need to flaunt our freedoms and unnecessarily offend others.

1 Samuel 16:21 So David came to Saul and stood before him. And he loved him greatly, and he became his armorbearer.

The remaining verses seem to be a summary of what happened after David's initial arrival. He came and eventually, like after the next chapter, "became [Saul's] armorbearer."

1 Samuel 16:22 Then Saul sent to Jesse, saying, "Please let David stand before me, for he has found favor in my sight."

Saul would have only sent to Jesse *after* David had successfully ministered to him. So, again, this is a summary of their relationship, not a description of their initial meeting.

God granted David favor in the sight of the king. He can do the same for you even if you are serving under some Saul-like person. If He doesn't, you can still do all things through Christ Who strengthens you.

1 Samuel 16:23 And so it was, whenever the spirit from God was upon Saul, that David would take a harp and play it with his hand. Then Saul would become refreshed and well, and the distressing spirit would depart from him.

We get all excited about David fighting Goliath in chapter seventeen. We see him, this young shepherd without any armor and with only a sling and five smooth stones, going out against an experienced cage-fighter who stood over nine feet tall.

Before he mixed it up with Goliath, David was consistently fighting demonic forces far superior to any earthly giant. *That's a battle!*

Whether it was the distressing spirit or Goliath, David was empowered by the Holy Spirit. He could guide his hand on the harp or his hand with the sling.

God will use you as He finds you. You need no special training, although you ought to hone your skills.

Let me leave you with this thought. David became Saul's armorbearer. An armorbearer wasn't just a caddy for your weapons. No, they were themselves skilled and accomplished warriors. In some cases, they were better warriors.

In the New Testament, in the Book of Ephesians, you are given a list of the weapons of your spiritual warfare. You read about "the whole armor of God," including the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, being shod with the Gospel, the shield of faith, and the helmet of salvation.

Now, if you are the one who is going to put on the armor, who is your armorbearer? Well, ***your armorbearer is Jesus Christ!***

In other words, when you go to battle, He is there with you. He's not just a caddy for the weaponry. No, He is a skilled warrior, having defeated death

and sin and Satan to assure you victory over the world, the flesh, and the devil.

All of us start the same way Saul and David started. Take a look at Saul, then be a David and finish well.

