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Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Overcoming Fear
1 Samuel 9-10, 15
December 3, 2017, Jeff Germs

Today, we are going to look at a Biblical character who resembles me in a lot of ways, and in many ways he doesn't. For example, the Bible describes him as a head and shoulders above everyone in Israel. He was tall dark and handsome. In those ways, he does not resemble me. He would have looked a bit more like Blake Shelton than me.

There are ways that I do resemble Old Testament, Saul. Saul struggled with fear in a lot of ways, and I have had similar struggles over the years. Fear is neither good nor bad. Sometimes fear is healthy and sometimes it is not. There are some things we should be afraid of, and there are some things that we should not be afraid of.

Most people have an irrational fear or two. How many of you are afraid of going to the dentist? I don't know many people who enjoy going to the dentist. How many of you are afraid of speaking in public? If you Google top fears you come up with all kinds of lists, but here's one of them from an Angus Reid poll just before Halloween this year.

The top twelve fears in Canada.¹

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1. Illness or health care related issues
2. Death or dying
3. Financial fears
4. Nothing
5. Bad people
6. Loss of or injury to family or friends
7. Unsure
8. Trudeau/Canadian government
9. Bad candy
10. Heights
11. Trump/US leadership
12. Spiders...

Some fears are healthy, and some are not. There is a healthy fear of heights and an unhealthy fear of heights. A healthy fear of heights will keep us from doing stupid things. An unhealthy fear of heights will keep us from doing things that are not really dangerous, but become dangerous because of our fear.

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Unhealthy fears can cause us to compensate in unhealthy ways. I might be mistaken, but I think most people who see how I conduct myself in ministry would likely not say that I am a fearful person. Some, who don't know me very well, might even say I am courageous in some ways. The truth is that I have some deep fears, that if I let them rule my emotions, they will rule my behaviour as well. There are times they get the best of me. Not too often anymore, but I have to be constantly vigilant. I have a scripture that pops up every morning in my reminders on my smartphone and computer.

¹ http://www.huffingtonpost.ca/2017/10/30/halloween-poll-from-angus-reid-institute-asks-canadians-to-reveal-their-biggest-fears_a_23260795/

[4]

Proverbs 29:25 (NLT)

25 Fearing people is a dangerous trap, but trusting the Lord means safety.

That is the NLT. I memorized it in the NIV.

[5]

Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)

25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

I really like how Eugene Petersen translated it in *The Message*.

[6]

Proverbs 29:25 (The Message)

25 The fear of human opinion disables; trusting in God protects you from that.

I think that gets to the core of it. There are lots of unhealthy, irrational fears that can incapacitate us and keep us from fully engaging in life the way God intended us to. I grew up with a very unhealthy fear of people, especially peers, and authority figures. And those fears have, at times, incapacitated me. Over the years, as I have walked with Jesus and learned from him, I have in many ways been able to overcome some of those fears, and step out in faith despite my fear, but it is still a daily exercise to purposefully cling to Jesus and learn from him because I know that he is gentle and humble in heart, as he promised in his invitation to learn from him in Matthew 11:28-30.

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Last week we looked at Gideon who hid in fear of Israel's enemies and we saw that once he realized that God was with him he was able to overcome his fears and move forward in obedience. God was able then to do some pretty amazing things through him.

Today we will look at Saul who became the first king of Israel. He had some irrational fears that led him to make some very unwise decisions. Saul was an interesting character. He started off, seemingly, quite humble.

Israel had asked God for a king. Samuel, at that time was their judge and prophet. If you haven't read the account of Samuel make sure you do. Read 1 Samuel. It is very engaging.

Chapter 8 is the background to Saul becoming Israel's first king. Samuel was getting old. He had two sons he had tried to groom to take over from him as judges, but they were greedy and self-centred and corrupt. Some of the elders of the Israelites met with Samuel to discuss the future of Israel and Samuel's succession.

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1 Samuel 8:5 (NLT)

5 "Look," they told him, "you are now old, and your sons are not like you. Give us a king to judge us like all the other nations have."

Samuel was not at all happy with this for a lot of reasons. For one, it undermined his authority. More importantly, however, it showed a distrust in God. They looked around at what everyone else had and wanted to be like the other nations who had kings.

That is why one of the Ten Commandments is ***“Thou shalt not covet.”*** When we look over at our neighbours and covet their car, or house, or clothes, or spouse, if we let that covetousness rule our behaviour we will make some unhealthy choices. We’ll purchase a vehicle we can’t afford just so we can feel good about ourselves and have the admiration of our neighbours. That is an unhealthy fear of man. Or, “My spouse and I are having relationship problems, what would it hurt to go have coffee with someone else? After all, they seem to really get me. And besides, it’s just coffee. What could it hurt?”

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When we really trust God, it keeps us from doing stupid things.

Samuel went to the Lord for wisdom about Israel’s desire for a king and this is what the Lord told him:

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1 Samuel 8:7–9 (NLT)

7 “Do everything they say to you,” the Lord replied, “for they are rejecting me, not you. They don’t want me to be their king any longer. 8 Ever since I brought them from Egypt they have continually abandoned me and followed other gods. And now they are giving you the same treatment. 9 Do as they ask, but solemnly warn them about the way a king will reign over them.”

If our hearts are not right, God won’t keep us from making stupid decisions. If we stubbornly decide that we know best he will say, “Okay, give it a try, but you will be stuck with the consequences of your poor choices.”

Samuel warned the people how they would be treated by the kings they wanted.

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1 Samuel 8:11–18 (NLT)

11 “This is how a king will reign over you,” Samuel said. “The king will draft your sons and assign them to his chariots and his charioteers, making them run before his chariots. 12 Some will be generals and captains in his army, some will be forced to plow in his fields and harvest his crops, and some will make his weapons and chariot equipment.

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13 The king will take your daughters from you and force them to cook and bake and make perfumes for him. 14 He will take away the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to his own officials. 15 He will take a tenth of your grain and your grape harvest and distribute it among his officers and attendants.

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16 He will take your male and female slaves and demand the finest of your cattle and donkeys for his own use. 17 He will demand a tenth of your flocks, and you will be his slaves. 18 When that day comes, you will beg for relief from this king you are demanding, but then the Lord will not help you.”

And that is exactly what happened all through Israel’s history. Read 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings, and 1 and 2 Chronicles. You will see the ebb and flow of Israel’s relationship with the

kings they asked for, and how, for the most part, their relationship with God followed the ebb and flow of their leaders.

Enter Saul on the stage of Israel's monarchical history. At first glance at this résumé, he looked like just the man for the job. The Bible describes him as very handsome and a head and shoulders above everyone else in Israel. He was the kind of guy, who, when he walked into a room, everyone noticed.

Saul had a divine appointment with Samuel. He met the prophet while he was out looking for his father's donkeys. Samuel told Saul that he was going to be Israel's first king. Here's how Saul responded. He had a very humble beginning.

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1 Samuel 9:21 (NLT)

21 Saul replied, "But I'm only from the tribe of Benjamin, the smallest tribe in Israel, and my family is the least important of all the families of that tribe! Why are you talking like this to me?"

Saul felt insignificant. It seems like it was a very good start. You don't want to hire a leader who thinks he is "all that and more." That will go bad every time. However, that feeling of smallness, or insignificance, if not dealt with properly, can lead someone to make unwise decisions that hurt our relationships. That is what was happening here.

Samuel anointed Saul as king. The Spirit of God came powerfully on Saul. All this happened without the knowledge of his family. He did tell his uncle that he had encountered Samuel. When his uncle asked what Samuel said, he didn't tell him that Samuel had anointed him as king. It seems like he was very humble. But there must have been something else going on. Perhaps he was actually allowing his fear to rule his heart.

Samuel was going to make the formal announcement to the people that God had given them their first king. He called all the people to gather for the auspicious proclamation.

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1 Samuel 10:20–24 (NLT)

20 So Samuel brought all the tribes of Israel before the Lord, and the tribe of Benjamin was chosen by lot. 21 Then he brought each family of the tribe of Benjamin before the Lord, and the family of the Matrites was chosen. And finally Saul son of Kish was chosen from among them. But when they looked for him, he had disappeared!

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22 So they asked the Lord, "Where is he?" And the Lord replied, "He is hiding among the baggage."

What? This is the king? That's hilarious. Saul had an extreme, unhealthy fear of man, and it would prove to be his downfall.

23 So they found him and brought him out, and he stood head and shoulders above anyone else. 24 Then Samuel said to all the people, "This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!"

It's a hilarious scene. They go and grab Saul from where he is cowering, hiding out among the baggage, and bring him in front of the people. I imagine his head hanging down in shame, looking very awkward, and then Samuel taking Saul's hand and raising it high like a referee taking the hand of a winning boxer and saying, ***"This is the man the Lord has chosen as your king. No one in all Israel is like him!"*** Wow! That is bizarre.

And all the people shouted, "Long live the king!"

There were some naysayers in the crowd who looked at Saul and did not buy into God's choice for their first king. And again, Saul's response seems very humble.

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1 Samuel 10:27a (NLT)

27 ...there were some scoundrels who complained, "How can this man save us?" And they scorned him and refused to bring him gifts. But Saul ignored them.

That seems like a very humble response. If someone gossips about you, or slanders you, walk away. Do not retaliate. Saul either had a very humble heart or there was something else going on here.

He was immediately thrust into the thick of leadership. He had to make some very difficult decisions. The Ammonites had been brutally oppressing the Israelites. The tribe of Reuben was one of the tribes that stayed on the east side of the Jordan River. The king of Ammon was having fun with them by gouging out all of their right eyes. He continued on this rampage, causing all of Israel to live in fear that they would be next.

[18]

1 Samuel 11:1–3 (NLT)

1 About a month later, King Nahash of Ammon led his army against the Israelite town of Jabesh-gilead. But all the citizens of Jabesh asked for peace. "Make a treaty with us, and we will be your servants," they pleaded. 2 "All right," Nahash said, "but only on one condition. I will gouge out the right eye of every one of you as a disgrace to all Israel!"

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3 "Give us seven days to send messengers throughout Israel!" replied the elders of Jabesh. "If no one comes to save us, we will agree to your terms."

The people found Saul, plowing in his field. Again, he had very humble beginnings. He is their king. He didn't have to plow his own field. He could have forced someone else to do it.

They told him what was happening. The Spirit of God came on him and he was filled with a righteous anger. He gathered an army of 330,000 fighting men and went against the Ammonites and defeated them and became Israel's hero.

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1 Samuel 11:12–15 (NLT)

12 Then the people exclaimed to Samuel, "Now where are those men who said, 'Why should Saul rule over us?' Bring them here, and we will kill them!" 13 But Saul replied, "No one will be executed today, for today the Lord has rescued Israel!"

That is amazing humility. Saul gave all the glory to God here. He did not retaliate. He let the Lord take vengeance if need be. He didn't seem to need to validate himself.

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14 Then Samuel said to the people, "Come, let us all go to Gilgal to renew the kingdom." 15 So they all went to Gilgal, and in a solemn ceremony before the Lord they made Saul king. Then they offered peace offerings to the Lord, and Saul and all the Israelites were filled with joy.

This was King Saul's first of many successful ventures. It was a new era for Israel. Saul became powerful and had the allegiance and admiration of the people. And Saul began to believe his own press. He made a bunch of arrogant decisions showing that he had forgotten his seemingly humble beginnings. He began to feel entitled. That is one of the dangers of success.

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Success is dangerous. Success is far more dangerous than failure.

Remember when Tiger Woods had his big fall from grace. He had been at the top of his game. He was continually told that he was the best golfer the world had ever seen. His dad, apparently, treated him like he was a god. After his fall, he humbly confessed that he had started to believe his own press which led to a feeling of entitlement. He lulled himself into believing that it was okay to cheat on his wife because, after all, he was the greatest. His life unravelled quickly.

That is what happened to Saul. It's a very sad story. Make sure you read it all to get the background.

I told you earlier that I can relate to Saul in a lot of ways. Let me give you a snapshot of that part of my life.

Ruth and I had met in Bible College. She was a senior and I was just starting out. She's not older than me. I just had a late start in life. She immediately fell in love with me and asked me to marry her. Actually, it wasn't exactly like that. I saw her smile across a crowded room and I was irreparably lovestruck. That was 1985. We were married just after Christmas of 1986. It will be thirty one amazing years on December 27th.

Our goal was to be Bible translators. We had talked and prayed and dreamed about our futures together as missionaries and had decided somehow that God was leading us to go to Bhutan, a wee little country in need of the Gospel in the Himalayan mountains of Asia.

I am going to make this very long story, extremely short. Things were not working out for us and we desperately called out to God asking for his guidance. After praying one day, we chatted together and had a brainwave that maybe we should take a couple years out from our pursuit of becoming Bible translators. "Why don't we go somewhere overseas and teach English for a couple years while we try to figure out what to do with our lives?" We were a young couple trying to figure out God's will for our lives. We had no idea how to do that. We prayed again asking God for direction.

No sooner had we said "Amen" than the phone rang. It was our pastor. He asked if Ruth and I would teach an adult Sunday school class on how to find God's will. I said, "Absolutely not! We have no idea how to find God's will." I told him our story and he said, "The other reason I am

calling is to ask if you would consider going to Japan for two years to teach English with our church mission.” We said, “Yes.” And things began to fall into place.

I’m leaving out a whole bunch of details for the sake of time. The main point I want to get across is that while we were there, I very much saw God’s hand on my life. I loved it. We were teaching English classes in the church. I had a couple classes at the university hospital with some Japanese doctors who needed to brush up on their English. I was preaching in the church through a translator. We started an English service and I was gaining the favour of the people and of our pastor. Our church was one of the fastest growing churches in Japan. That had nothing to do with me. Our Japanese pastor was quite famous in Japan. He was an author of a few books. He held several degrees. He had a doctorate in psychology as well as theology. He told me that I had a gift for preaching.

It’s embarrassing for me to admit this, but I had visions of holding large evangelistic crusades like Billy Graham and thousands of Japanese coming to Christ because of my great abilities. My slide down the slippery slope of success began.

We finished our stint in Japan. I felt very good about myself, like God was very lucky to have me on his team. We had no idea what to do for the next chapter of our lives so Ruth’s dad put me to work on his farm until we figured things out.

One day I left the yard on the tractor early in the morning and headed for the field to do some plowing. From the moment I got on the tractor a battle began to rage in my mind. I had no idea what was going on, but it was intense. All day long, from dawn to dusk, I battled.

On my way home, I stopped the tractor and knelt down by the plow and cried out to God asking him what was going on. I got back on and started again. And then all of a sudden I stopped the tractor and I yelled out loud, “Okay, I won’t go into ministry.” I had no idea where those words came from. It was the closest I have ever been to actually hearing the voice of God. As soon as those words came out of my mouth, my shoulders slumped down.

I felt as if God had literally stripped me of my identity. I saw myself as “the pastor.” I was the one who could minister to everyone else. Nobody could minister to me. I didn’t need anyone. I was strong and self-sufficient. I had the answers to life and I had God all packaged up in a nice neat little box. I don’t have time to finish the story. That will be for another time. It took seven years from that tractor experience, as I now refer to it, for the Lord to humble me enough so I was ready to begin full-time ministry.

That was a very painful time in my life, but I see it now as the most gracious thing God could have done. Had I gone into ministry with without the necessary humility I would have been very dangerous. **Success is far more dangerous than failure.**

Back to our narrative about Saul. God had very definitely called him. He had empowered him. He had given him victory. And then Saul had to make some choices along the way. Unfortunately, he chose the way of pride, and entitlement. He spiralled out of control. Power, jealousy, envy, fear, and his ego were his driving forces.

Let’s jump down to chapter 15.

[23]

1 Samuel 15 (NLT)

10 Then the Lord said to Samuel, 11 “I am sorry that I ever made Saul king, for he has not been loyal to me and has refused to obey my command.” Samuel was so deeply moved when he heard this that he cried out to the Lord all night.

Samuel broke the news to Saul. Saul tried hard to justify himself and deflect judgement until he realized he had been caught.

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24 Then Saul admitted to Samuel, “Yes, I have sinned. I have disobeyed your instructions and the Lord’s command, for I was afraid of the people and did what they demanded.

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Proverbs 29:25 (NIV)

25 Fear of man will prove to be a snare, but whoever trusts in the Lord is kept safe.

Let’s bring this home. Today is the first Sunday of the Advent of Jesus coming to earth. He was God incarnate. God made flesh. Almighty God, humbled himself. The King of kings, Lord of lords, Creator of the heavens and the earth, born as a vulnerable baby in a stinky manger. He brought himself low so we could have life if we trust him. He came to die so we could have life in him. He was the ultimate example of humility.

That is completely opposite of what is natural for us. God has called us to bow our necks at the foot of the cross of Jesus and stop trying to vindicate ourselves and justify our own existence. Look at what Paul said about Jesus and what that means for us as his followers.

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Philippians 2 (NLT)

1 Is there any encouragement from belonging to Christ? Any comfort from his love? Any fellowship together in the Spirit? Are your hearts tender and compassionate? 2 Then make me truly happy by agreeing wholeheartedly with each other, loving one another, and working together with one mind and purpose.

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3 Don’t be selfish; don’t try to impress others. Be humble, thinking of others as better than yourselves. 4 Don’t look out only for your own interests, but take an interest in others, too. 5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had. 6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

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7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form, 8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal’s death on a cross.

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9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names, 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

That is the example of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ. He has a different economy than we do. The way up is down. The way down is up.

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1 Peter 5:6 (NLT)

6 So humble yourselves under the mighty power of God, and at the right time he will lift you up in honor.

James 4:10 (NLT)

10 Humble yourselves before the Lord, and he will lift you up in honor.

Sometimes humility and fear of man can look similar on the exterior, but they are very different. Humility puts others first because the love of God rules our hearts. Fear can cause us to do the same, but with very different results. Love breaks down walls and builds relationship. Fear puts up walls and destroys relationships.

Think about the difference between Saul and Gideon. Both had fear, but they responded very differently to it with vastly different outcomes. **Gideon let God be his hero. Saul tried to be his own hero.**

We are going to celebrate communion together right now. We are going to have a couple minutes of silence. Make sure that in the silence you let the Holy Spirit speak to you. Think about Jesus and how he faced fear or temptations. Ask yourself,

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“What difference would it make in my life if fear were not a factor in my choices, relationships, and emotions, and I let God be my hero?”



***Living in HisStory: Revealing the True Wonder of Who God Is
Overcoming Fear
1 Samuel 9,10,15
Week of December 3, 2017***

Objective of this study: To understand how our fears affect our choices and to courageously choose obedience.

[Remember, the main goal of each Growth Group is to allow God's Word to change your heart so that others would see Jesus in you and be likewise changed to be like him. He wants to change the world through us]

Worship (5 – 10 minutes)

1. Sing a song or two of praise and thanksgiving to God.
2. Spend five minutes in silence asking God to prepare your heart for how he wants to speak to you.
3. After the five minutes have someone interrupt the silence and read **Psalm 37:1-9** meditatively to the group. Pause after each phrase letting God speak to you. **Did anything “jump out at you”?**

Welcome (5 minutes)

Do you have any irrational fears?

[It's really important when doing this study that we each think about ourselves specifically and ways we need to grow, not how Christians in general need to grow. Do the hard work of letting the Holy Spirit speak to *your* heart.]

Word (45-60 minutes)

1. Read 1 Samuel 9,10 & 15. As it is being read, note the various ways that Saul showed humility and the other ways he let his pride get the better of him. After you are done reading discuss your findings.
2. Compare Saul with Gideon -- their beginnings, their feelings, and the choices they made that led to very different results.

Work (45-60 minutes)

1. Read Proverbs 29:25 in several different Bible versions. What is fear of man? Describe some scenarios in which fear of man might rear its head.
2. Think about a time when you were tempted by fear of man. What were the choices in front of you?
3. What can you remind yourself of to ensure that you choose to trust in God, rather than fear man?
4. What difference would it make in your life if fear of man were not a factor in choices, relationships, and emotions?

Prayer

1. Spend some time in prayer. Start by worshipping God for who he is and what he has done.
2. Here are some things you can pray about for the church:
 - A. That, as a church, we would actively and purposefully engage in the mission of Jesus in Campbell River.

- B. Our church board and staff as they lead us to live out the mission of Jesus
- C. River Kids ministry as they reach out to kids in our community.
- D. Our church finances. We are about \$20,000 behind. Pray that God would supply our needs so the mission can be carried on in Campbell River and around the world.
- E. **Our missionary of the month:** - Rod and Donna Black in Pakistan - check them out on our website and on the big chalkboard in the foyer. Pray about how you might be a part of supporting them.
- F. **Our missionary of the week:** Aaron and Julie Gole at Camp Homewood
- G. **Local CR church:** Pastors Rick and Brenda Shuttleworth at Church of the Way