

Main Point

Following God requires us to abandon our pride and submit ourselves fully to His leading.

Introduction

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

How do you tend to handle waiting?

In what situations or circumstances do you most often find yourself growing impatient?

How important is it that we learn patience in our walk with God? Why?

Our culture of instant gratification does not value patience. Because of this, we are often tempted to take matters into our own hands when things do not go our way. This is exactly what Saul did when faced with the prospect of going to war against a fierce army, and the results of his impatience were disastrous. By looking at Saul's example, we will see that impatience is rooted in prideful self-reliance, whereas patiently waiting on the Lord strengthens our faith.

Understanding

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 13:1-7.

Saul's first charge from God as king of Israel was to attack the Philistine's garrison at Geba and wait for further instructions at Gilgal (1 Sam. 9:26-10:13).

How did Saul respond to Jonathan's victory over the Philistines (vv. 3-4)? What does that tell us about Saul?

Compare Saul and Jonathan's forces (v. 2) with that of the Philistine forces that had gathered at Michmash (v. 5). How did this imbalance affect the men in Saul's army (vv. 6-7)? What does that tell us about the Israelites?

Both Saul and the Israelites were unhealthily focused on themselves. Saul took credit for Jonathan's great victory over the Philistine garrison at Geba, saying, "Let the Hebrews hear . . . Saul has defeated the garrison of the Philistines" (v. 4). While Saul was puffed up with pride, the Israelites were petrified with self-doubt as they "hid themselves in caves and in holes and in rocks and in tombs and in cisterns" (v. 6). Both Saul and

the Israelites looked to themselves rather than to the Lord, who had blessed them and promised to fight for them.

| Have a volunteer read 1 Samuel 13:8-15.

Saul summoned his army to meet at Gilgal—the very place where he had been crowned king of Israel. As news of the size and power of the Philistine army spread, so did Saul’s grip on the Hebrew soldiers in his charge.

How did Saul respond to the news that Israelite soldiers were deserting in fear? How should he have responded instead?

What would you have felt if you were in Saul’s shoes? What would you have done?

Where was Saul’s focus when he went ahead with giving up burnt offerings and sacrifices on his own? What caused him to lose patience?

What does impatience reveal about our hearts? What does it communicate about our relationship with God?

Samuel had instructed Saul, by the Word of the Lord, to wait at Gilgal until Samuel arrived to offer sacrifices to the Lord on behalf of the Israelite army. Saul’s focus was not on the Lord, but on the present circumstances of his life. Instead of responding to the Israelite’s desertion by patiently trusting the Lord, Saul took matters into his own hands. Saul fell prey to his own pride and offered sacrifices he was not authorized to make.

How did God respond to Saul’s impatience (vv. 13-14)? What does this tell us about God?

What does God’s response to Saul’s impatient actions tell us about the importance of addressing and combating the impatience in our hearts?

Application

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

Why is patience essential to the building of Christ’s kingdom? Why is it essential at our church? In our community? Among the nations?

In what current situation or circumstance do you find yourself growing impatient? What is one step you might take this week to cultivate a heart of patience before the Lord in that area?

How can we root out the pride in our hearts that drives our impatience? How might spiritual disciplines such as prayer, Bible study, and accountability help in this process?

Pray

Thank God for being patient with us, despite our prideful self-reliance. Ask Him to humble us in order that we would learn to trust His timing and rely on Him to work through us as we seek to join in His kingdom work.

Commentary

| 1 Samuel 13:1-15

13:1. Ancient manuscripts differ on exactly how many years Saul reigned. Based on a comparison of these manuscripts and Acts 13:21, where Paul gives the round number of 40 years, 42 years seems the most likely.

13:2. Israel's new king began to establish a standing military presence for his kingdom. In light of the army's larger size mentioned earlier (11:8), the 3,000 men from Israel may have represented an elite fighting force to protect the king and local interests. Michmash lay about four and one-half miles northeast of Gibeah of Benjamin, Saul's hometown and new capital. Bethel's hill country describes the rugged terrain around the ancient site of Jacob's dream (Gen 28:10-22). Jonathan was one of Saul's sons who would befriend David and become significant later in the narrative (18:1-3; 19:1-3; 20:1-42; 23:16-18).

13:3 The presence of a Philistine garrison... in Geba less than three miles from Gibeah posed a significant threat to Israel's heartland and to Saul's kingdom. News of their defeat at the hands of Jonathan quickly reached the coast, and Saul blew the ram's horn to alert Israel that a larger battle was certainly coming.

13:4. More troops joined the king at Gilgal to ready themselves for a Philistine counter offensive.

13:5. The Philistines responded with chariots and horsemen. Saul's departure from Michmash (vv. 1-4) left the area open for his enemies again.

13:6. The men of Israel... were in trouble. The Philistines controlled the high ground—a clear military advantage. Further, their push to Michmash meant they controlled much of the central Benjamin plateau, effectively cutting Israel in half and limiting Saul's access to the coast. Saul's decision to retreat to Gilgal gave his enemies control of this region; the situation was indeed serious.

13:7. Many of Saul's citizens even crossed the Jordan River and moved northward to the land of Gad and Gilead. They calculated that the Philistines would be content with the territory west of the Jordan River.

13:8. Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal at which time he would come and provide further instructions (10:8). Saul, however, looked around and saw the troops were deserting him as morale weakened.

13:9 Saul offered the burnt offering himself—a task Samuel should have done as Israel’s priest. Years later, King Uzziah also would usurp the priest’s duties and receive God’s judgment for his act (2 Chr. 26:16-21).

13:11. Samuel’s ominous question, “What have you done?” recalls God’s questions to Eve and to Cain (Gen 3:13; 4:10) as well as the sailors’ terrified question to Jonah (Jonah 1:10).

13:12. Saul rightly estimated the seriousness of the Philistine threat. If they reached Gilgal, they would control territory from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River. However, the Lord’s favor did not come through sacrifice but through faithfulness, a fact Samuel would later drive home to Saul (15:22).

13:13. “Foolish” is a word that also would describe later kings who failed to put their trust in the Lord (2 Sam. 24:10; 2 Chr. 16:9).

13:14. God’s purposes would continue for Israel despite Saul’s failures because the Lord had found a man loyal to Him. The phrase “the Lord has appointed him as ruler” indicates how from God’s perspective, His work was already moving ahead and was as good as done, even though David would not become king for several years.

13:15. From Gilgal to Gibeah was a distance of about 15 miles upward—a gain in elevation of about 3,000 feet. Meanwhile, only 600 men (cp. v. 2) remained with the king.

READING ASSIGNMENT FOR NEXT WEEK

1 Samuel 16:1-13