

Devotional and Reading Plan for 2022, Week Fifteen

Week 15 — April 9th–15th, 1 Samuel 1:9-21:15; 1 Chronicles 9:35-39; Psalm 34, 59

The theme for this week is integrity. This week's readings will cover the last of the judges, Eli and Samuel. Following those two leaders we will meet the first two kings of Israel, Saul and David. All four of these men learned the importance of integrity through their experiences.

Integrity is something that we all can struggle with from time to time. Integrity is something that can be easily lost, but is not so easy to regain without God's help. As the four men we will read about, they learn it is absolutely essential to being a leader in God's kingdom.

April 9th Day 99

1 Samuel 1:9-4:11. "A Legacy of Integrity"

To say the least, Eli's sons were lacking integrity. They disrespected the Lord's offerings (2:12-17), carried on immoral sexual relationships with the young women serving at the tabernacle (12:22), and they did not honor or listen to their father (12:25). I think we are safe to say that, somewhere along the way, Eli dropped the ball as their father and as a priest in authority at the temple.

Why is integrity so essential? At the close of 2006, our nation mourned the loss of President Gerald Ford. As people talked about him and his accomplishments, the one thing that was mentioned most often was his integrity. He may not have been the greatest leader, or accomplished as much as other presidents, but he stood out because of his integrity.

Our integrity, or lack of, leaves a lasting impression on the people around us, especially our families. "The godly walk with integrity; blessed are their children after them" (Proverbs 20:7). Are you living a life of integrity? What kind of legacy are you leaving behind?

April 10th Day 100

1 Samuel 4:12-8:22. "Leadership Requires Integrity"

Samuel was a man of God and a good leader for Israel. However, for all that he did right, he failed in one area. He did not learn from the mistake of his predecessor, Eli. 1 Samuel 8:1-3 reveals that Samuel's sons were lacking in integrity, much the same way that Eli's sons were. We then see this lack of integrity result in Israel demanding a king to rule over them.

When it comes to leadership, integrity or personal character is what gives you the trust of the people. According to Christian leadership expert John Maxwell, "Trust is the foundation of leadership...People will forgive occasional mistakes based on ability. But they won't trust someone who has slips in character."

Israel could not trust Samuel's sons, Joel and Abijah, so their opportunity to lead the nation was taken away. How is your character? Would those who know you best say that you are a person of integrity? Fortunately, God is able and willing to work in your life and help you grow in this area if you ask for His help.

April 11th

1 Samuel 9-12. "Integrity Restored"

In 1 Samuel 8:6-9 the Lord reveals to Samuel that Israel was ultimately rejecting God Himself by asking for a king. In 12:16-19 Samuel reminds the people of their wrongdoing in asking for a king and then uses a sign to reveal to them the level of God's anger.

Certainly, the people did wrong in asking for a king, but Samuel makes it clear that God had not abandoned them as a result of their wickedness. Rather Samuel shared with them that God was willing to restore the integrity of the nation; "...make sure now that you worship the LORD with all your heart and that you don't turn your back on Him in any way...The Lord will not abandon His chosen people" (12:20b, 22a).

The same God that called Israel back and restored the integrity of the nation is the same God that we serve today. So, readers take courage that all is not lost when your integrity is compromised. The invitation to return to following the LORD is there for us the same way it was for Israel. Are you willing to humble yourself and return to following God so He can restore your integrity?

April 12th

1 Samuel 13-14; 1 Chronicles 9:35-39. "Taking Matters Into Our Own Hands"

Can you picture Saul in the situation described in 1 Samuel 13? He had gathered Israel's troops to battle the Philistines, but once they got a glimpse of the Philistine army, they were full of fear. Sensing the fear in his army, Saul becomes anxious and comes to the conclusion that the offerings to the Lord must be offered. However, Samuel has not arrived when Saul was expecting him. Thus, Saul takes matters into his own hands and violates the Lord's command by assuming the priestly function.

Saul's lack of integrity in this matter provides us with a three-part lesson:

1) Basing our decision on fear does not bring glory to God, for perfect love (trust) casts out fear.

2) Our timing is not always the same as God's timing. Samuel was coming, Saul just lacked the patience.

3) Obedience is far more important to God than sacrifice or, for us, you could say it is more important than public worship.

April 13th

1 Samuel 15:1-17:31. "Blame-Shifting 101"

Saul was caught red-handed. He had again disobeyed the Lord and was confronted by Samuel for his actions. His response to Samuel's confrontation was worthy of an Academy Award. In verses 15 and 21 Saul declares that 'the people' are the ones who spared the animals, and then he further justifies the sin by adding the spiritual benefit of sacrificing the animals to the Lord. It takes Saul three times before he admits to Samuel his wrongdoing.

You do not have to be perfect in order to maintain integrity. This is what the discipline of confession is for. Saul was unwilling to admit his sin and to ask for forgiveness. A person of integrity does the exact opposite. David was a prime example of this. David was not perfect, but when he was confronted by Nathan the prophet about his affair with Bathsheba and murder of her husband Uriah, he confessed immediately. Both Saul and David made mistakes just like you and I. Are we going to respond like Saul, denying the sin and blaming others? Or will we respond like David with a soft heart that is quick to confess?

April 14th

1 Samuel 17:32-19:24; Psalm 59. "Crying Out to the Lord"

David never did wrong against Saul, but he was constantly the object of Saul's jealousy. Saul made multiple attempts to kill David or to have him killed by others. However, we recognize that David was innocent in all of this and never lost his integrity. So why the constant attacks? Why did David have to call out to the Lord for help and protection when he was innocent?

The reality is that innocence and integrity don't always protect us from personal attacks and accusations from people. Our innocence and personal integrity will eventually come under attack as no result of our own.

How are we to respond to such attacks? David did not take the opportunity to exact his revenge against Saul (1 Samuel 24:1-7), but rather allowed the Lord to take care of His enemies. He called out to the One who judges rightly to deliver him out of the situation.

May you, like David, seek God first when your innocence and integrity come under attack.

April 15th

1 Samuel 20-21; Psalm 34. "Promises Kept"

Jonathan and David had a special friendship. Chapter 20 gives us a little insight into how close the two were. Unlike his father, Jonathan was not jealous for the throne of Israel, but recognized that the Lord was with David. Thus, as part of their covenant of friendship, Jonathan asked David to continue to show "faithful love" to his descendants even if Jonathan died. David accepted this responsibility as part of their covenant.

Have you ever made a promise without thinking the consequences through? I think all of us as parents have done this at some point. So, how many of our promises are we to keep? If the Lord is the standard for righteousness, then we are to keep them all, for "the LORD is faithful to all His promises" (Psalm 145:13 NIV).

What did David do about the promise he made to Jonathan? 2 Samuel 9 tells us that David, in fact, kept his promise to Jonathan by showing kindness to his son, Mephibosheth.

Are you willing to keep your promises like David did? What about when no one is watching? Do you still keep your promises then?