

## SESSION 3

# RESPECT AUTHORITY



*What are some ways you've been taught to show respect for authority?*

**QUESTION #1**

#BSFLrelationships

*Respect the authorities God has placed in your life.*

## THE PASSAGE

1 Samuel 24:3-12

## THE BIBLE MEETS LIFE

We live in a society where we don't always agree. A married couple may disagree over what color to paint the living room, but they still love each other. People disagree all the time over sports, politics, entertainment, and more—yet they can still enjoy each other's company.

Disagreement is not the problem; disrespect is. And even though Americans seem to enjoy a spirited discussion, debate, or argument, most of us—79 percent, according to at least one survey—see a lack of respect as a serious problem in our society.<sup>1</sup>

The Bible affirms every human is created in the image of God (Gen. 1:26-27); therefore, we should treat everyone as a person of worth. But if we're honest, it's downright hard to show that type of respect to those who only look out for themselves and fail to treat others with respect. That was the very challenge David faced in 1 Samuel; yet, David showed deep respect for King Saul, the man who was trying to kill him. Through David we see that we can affirm those in authority without endorsing all they do with that authority.

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## **1 Samuel 24:3-7**

**3** And he came to the sheepcotes by the way, where was a cave; and Saul went in to cover his feet: and David and his men remained in the sides of the cave.

**4** And the men of David said unto him, Behold the day of which the LORD said unto thee, Behold, I will deliver thine enemy into thine hand, that thou mayest do to him as it shall seem good unto thee. Then David arose, and cut off the skirt of Saul's robe privily.

**5** And it came to pass afterward, that David's heart smote him, because he had cut off Saul's skirt.

**6** And he said unto his men, The LORD forbid that I should do this thing unto my master, the LORD's anointed, to stretch forth mine hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.

**7** So David stayed his servants with these words, and suffered them not to rise against Saul. But Saul rose up out of the cave, and went on his way.

I often speak to the parents of teenagers, and I ask why they teach their children to respect authority. I hear a variety of responses:

- ▶ “To keep order in the house.”
- ▶ “To teach them how to respect others.”
- ▶ “To help them live as respectable citizens.”

Sadly though, I rarely hear what I consider to be the most important reason: we teach our children to respect authority so they will learn to show honor toward God. How can we help them learn to respect the One they cannot see if they don't learn to respect those whom God has put before them?

In 1 Samuel 24, we see David's relationship with God reflected in how he responded to Saul, the one God had placed in front of him. David's response is remarkable because Saul's treatment of David was far from admirable.

- ▶ In a jealous rage, Saul tried to pin David to a wall with a spear (1 Sam. 18:7-11; 19:9-10).
- ▶ Saul tried to have David killed by the Philistines (18:20-25).
- ▶ Saul tried to convince his son and his servants to kill David (19:1,11).
- ▶ Saul angrily told his son Jonathan he wanted David dead (20:31).
- ▶ Saul killed priests for their allegiance to David (22:6-19).

No matter how wrongly Saul had acted against him, David did not believe he had the right to harm Saul, even when he had opportunity to do so. David called Saul “the LORD’s anointed.” Saul’s position brought with it a certain respect.

David respected Saul, but he was also on the run from him. David did not sit passively in an abusive relationship and just take the abuse. David honored Saul’s position of king, but he also sought to escape from imminent danger. In this passage, David and his men were “in the wilderness of Engedi” (near the Dead Sea) (24:1). Saul got word of this so he went in pursuit, and David hid from him in a cave.

## DIGGING DEEPER



### ANOINTED

The Hebrew verb *mashach* (noun, *mashiyach*) and the Greek verb *chrio* (noun, *christos*) are translated “to anoint.” From ancient times the priests and kings were ceremonially anointed as a sign of official appointment to office and as a symbol of God’s power upon them. The act was imbued with an element of awe. David would not harm King Saul because of the anointing the king had received. Likewise, Israel, and even

Cyrus, are called God’s anointed because of God’s working through them. Israel came to see each king as God’s anointed one, looking forward to the *messiah* who would deliver them from their enemies and establish the nation as God’s presence on the earth.

God’s presence and power are symbolized in the anointing. Christians are anointed by God’s Spirit for ministry.

“Anoint, Anointed,” in *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, gen. eds. Chad Brand, Charles Draper, Archie England (Nashville: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 70.

King Saul needed a bathroom break, but the cave he chose to enter was the very cave where David was hiding! David's men saw this as the opportunity given from the Lord to end Saul's persecution. They urged David to seize the chance he had to rid himself of his pursuer.

David crept up close to Saul with his knife and cut off the corner of his robe. That's it? It may not seem like much, but the act was far from harmless. Saul's robe represented his position as king. By making his robe noncompliant with the law, David dishonored Saul (Num. 15:38-39). By making Saul's kingly robe unacceptable for him to wear, David had symbolically invalidated Saul's role as king.

Even though his act was symbolic, David immediately repented of his action; his "heart smote him" and he directed his men to spare Saul's life. He would not harm someone God had placed in a position of authority.

How do you typically respond to the authority figures in your life?

## QUESTION #2

### **1 Samuel 24:8-11**

**8** David also arose afterward, and went out of the cave, and cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king. And when Saul looked behind him, David stooped with his face to the earth, and bowed himself.

**9** And David said to Saul, Wherefore hearest thou men's words, saying, Behold, David seeketh thy hurt?

**10** Behold, this day thine eyes have seen how that the LORD had delivered thee to day into mine hand in the cave: and some bade me kill thee: but mine eye spared thee; and I said, I will not put forth mine hand against my lord; for he is the LORD's anointed.



**11 Moreover, my father, see, yea, see the skirt of thy robe in my hand: for in that I cut off the skirt of thy robe, and killed thee not, know thou and see that there is neither evil nor transgression in mine hand, and I have not sinned against thee; yet thou huntest my soul to take it.**

Although David had not yet been crowned king, he already exhibited the character of a leader. One of the marks of great leaders is they do not use all the power they have at their disposal.

**What do you like best about David's approach in these verses?**

### QUESTION #3

David had the opportunity and ability to take Saul's life and end the misery the king caused him, but he restrained himself. David showed respect to Saul in six ways.

1. David confronted Saul, but he spoke with honor and respect. David acknowledged Saul's position and status over him when he "cried after Saul, saying, My lord the king."
2. David bowed as a sign of respect to the king.
3. David urged the king not to listen to the advisors who wrongly accused David of seeking Saul's life. Likewise, David refused to listen to his own men who encouraged him to kill Saul.
4. David offered evidence to show his unquestioned respect for the king. This evidence—the corner of Saul's robe—proved David had no desire to commit treason or harm the king.
5. David called Saul "my father."
6. David showed how seriously he took his treatment of the king as a mark of his relationship with God. Although the king sought David's life, David would never sin against him.

I speak a lot on the subject of revival. One way we know we are experiencing personal revival is when we stop confessing everyone else's sins and we focus on our own! It's easy—and tempting—to

try to “rededicate” someone else’s life, especially when we see that person living in a way that dishonors Christ. But that’s not what we see David doing. David could have listed Saul’s shortcomings in general and his evil mistreatment of David specifically, but instead, David focused on his own life and his desire not to sin against Saul or the Lord.

We see something similar in the life of Paul. The apostle lived under harsh leadership and ministered during periods of intense persecution—he was even martyred during the reign of Roman Emperor Nero. But in Paul’s writings, he did not speak against such authority figures, nor did he encourage believers to do so. Instead, Paul urged his readers to pray for those in authority (see 1 Tim. 2:1). Like David and Paul, we also are liable to encounter authority figures with shortcomings, and maybe even evil intentions. In those moments, we’ll do well to remember that we’re also sinners. Our entire lives are built on God’s grace, and we should exhibit that same grace in our responses to those over us.

**What are some ways we can imitate David’s actions and attitudes in our own dealings with authority?**

#### QUESTION #4

### **1 Samuel 24:12**

**12** The LORD judge between me and thee, and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee.

David made a great statement in verse 12, but it’s hard for us to leave conflict with an authority figure in the hands of God. Let’s face it: we all want to maintain control at least to some extent.

Leaving justice in the hands of another is not easy, particularly when we know somebody has done us wrong.

David did not overlook Saul's sin or sugarcoat it because Saul was king, and neither did David believe Saul's sin was without consequence. But he also understood that God's role is to deal with sin, and our role is to walk with God. Walking with God means that, while we ultimately leave the matter in God's hands, we speak with both grace and conviction. We are to follow the example of Christ, who was "full of grace and truth" (John 1:14).

Notice how David exemplified this in verse 12:

- ▶ **Leave judgment in God's hands.** "The LORD judge between me and thee." Why is it that we can trust God with our eternity, but we can't seem to trust Him with our daily relationships?
- ▶ **Leave your reputation in God's hands.** When David said, "and the LORD avenge me of thee: but mine hand shall not be upon thee," he was yielding his reputation to God. The "don't get mad, get even" mentality is common in our culture. Yet when we consider the cost of Christ's death to give us redemption and forgiveness, our perspective should be increasingly God-focused. When that happens, we become less concerned about our reputations and more focused on Christ.
- ▶ **Leave vengeance in God's hands.** Even as David expressed a desire for God to take vengeance, he determined he would not seek vengeance himself. "But mine hand shall not be upon thee."

God alone has the authority to exact such vengeance. We can work with the person to seek justice, and we can work through the governing authorities God has given us to see that justice is done (Rom. 13:1-4). But vengeance is a wholly different matter that only God has the right to demand. "Dearly beloved, avenge not yourselves, but rather give place unto wrath: for it is written, Vengeance is mine; I will repay, saith the Lord" (Rom. 12:19).



The life of faith we live as Christ followers calls us to die to seeking vengeance for ourselves. Instead, we are to trust God as the Just One and to extend His grace to others—including those in authority.

Why is it hard to leave vengeance in the hands of the Lord?

QUESTION #5

PRACTICING SUBMISSION

List several words that describe Saul's attitudes or actions that would make it hard to submit to him. Next, list several words that describe how David displayed attitudes and actions of submission to Saul.

SAUL

DAVID

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What can you learn from the way David respectfully submitted to Saul that you can put into practice with a boss, political leader, law enforcement or other authority figure?

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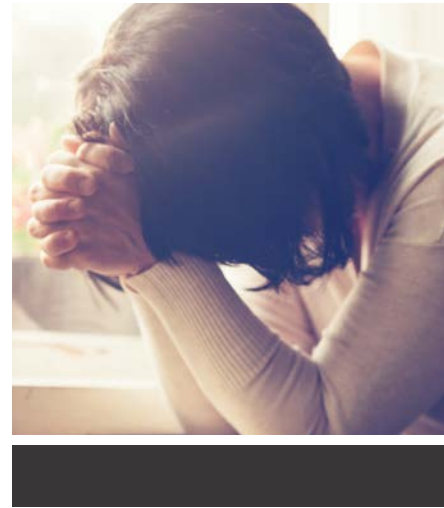
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# LIVE IT OUT

How will you honor Christ this week by respecting the authority figures in your life? Consider the following applications:

- ▶ **Encourage.** We live in a day when authority is questioned more than honored. Be intentional about expressing support and encouragement to an authority figure in your life.
- ▶ **Pray.** Follow the principle in 1 Timothy 2:1 and pray regularly for those in authority. Make this a part of your regular prayer life each day.
- ▶ **Repent.** If there's someone in authority to whom you have failed to show proper honor or respect, confess that to God. Change your attitude and, as appropriate, apologize to that person for your former lack of respect.

We're going to have disagreements in our world today. The sharing of different perspectives and opposing ideas is healthy. But we don't need disrespect. Instead, choose to honor one another, including the authority figures God has placed in your life.



## END NOTES

1 Steve Farkas and Jean Johnson, "Aggravating Circumstances: A Status Report on Rudeness in America," *Public Agenda* [online] [cited 18 September 2016] Available from the Internet: <http://www.publicagenda.org/media/aggravating-circumstances>, 10.

Share with others how you will live out this study: **#BSFLrelationships**