

Opening Scripture: 1 Sam 18:1–5

Introduction: The man who invented the word "Dictator" and applied it to his own rule was a Roman general in (82 BC) named Lucius Cornelius Sulla. As a general, he was enormously popular among the people and his troops. While conducting a military campaign in the east, he got word that his two bitter rivals, Marius and Cinna, had taken control of Rome. Burning with envy, he returned after his campaigns and did something no general in Rome had ever done before, and he did it 33 years before Julius Caesar crossed the Rubicon—Sulla marched on Rome to kill his rivals Marius and Cinna and all their political followers. After serving as Rome's first dictator and casting the die for every future tyrant to seize political control through power, Sulla eventually retired and gave power back to the Senate. Who eventually passed a law stating that no military commander or army could ever cross the river Rubicon to assume the role of a dictator, which served as the geographical boundary marker.

History is littered with the stories of leaders who badly overreached in order to outdo their predecessors or to defeat their political rivals. Tyrants like Alexander the Great, Cleopatra, Henry VIII, Mussolini, Hitler, and Stalin—who all desired not only to surpass the success of those before them or around them but to take what others possessed for themselves. And this is the essence of envy.

Envy and jealousy are feelings of discontent over the perceived success, possessions, or advantages of others, fueling the desire to acquire the same, often accompanied by the desire for one's rivals to be deprived of that blessing.

Or, as C.H. Spurgeon so aptly described it, "Envy is the daughter of pride, the author of murder and revenge, the instigator of secret sedition, and the perpetual tormenter of virtue. Envy is the filthy slime of the soul; it is a venom, a quicksilver that consumes the flesh and dries up the bones. It is a raging fever which cannot bear witness to the happiness of others."

The sight of another's achievements or possessions ignites a dark fire in the envious soul, a burning desire not just for what they lack, but for the very denial of that treasure to their rival.

And we all struggle with it. Mom's struggle as they see the curated lives of others in social media who seem to effortlessly manage children, work, and home life. Men often struggle against envying colleagues or coworkers who have achieved a certain career success, financial stability or recognition. Teenagers become jealous of their peer's popularity, talent, opportunities, or academic success.

Transition: Such is the case in our text today concerning Saul and David. Saul's jealousy of David will fuel his antagonism.

Today, we'll talk about three things in the story: (1) Saul's Envy. (2) David's Humility. (3) God's Sovereignty. And through this story, we'll come to understand a better path than the one Saul takes.

1. Saul's envy. 1 Samuel 18:6–9. As the troops were coming back, when David was returning from killing the Philistine, the women came out from all the cities of Israel to meet King Saul, singing and dancing with tambourines, with shouts of joy, and with three-stringed instruments. ⁷As they danced, the women sang: Saul has killed his thousands, but David his tens of thousands. ⁸Saul was furious and resented this song. “They credited tens of thousands to David,” he complained, “but they only credited me with thousands. What more can he have but the kingdom?” ⁹So **Saul watched David jealously** from that day forward. Now, Jealousy only differs from envy in that jealousy is about fearing losing what one has, while envy is about coveting what someone else has. Both emotions are tangled up together, and it is clear that Saul is both Jealous for his own praises (which he does receive: Saul has slain his thousands); but envious for the praises of David (who has slain his ten thousands—he wants David’s praise and at some point he decides he doesn’t want David to have that). Saul’s initial approval of David’s success intensifies when Saul perceives David as a threat to his own reign, leading him to view David with suspicion and fear. The narrative illustrates how unchecked envy can turn admiration into hostility, leading to destructive consequences.

- **The root of Saul’s envy and jealousy is comparison, insecurity, and covetousness (desiring something off-limits to us).**

Illus. Now, just imagine you’ve got a sandbox filled with action figures, dolls, trucks and cars. All the stuff that kids love to play with. You found these toys at a garage sale or the thrift store and so they are all worn out, the paint is rubbed thin, action figures are missing limbs, the doll’s hair is matted, and missing shoes and accessories.

Then, you introduce a special toy, something unique and very desirable. It’s brand new and still in the package, and you place it right in the middle of the sandbox experiment that you’re running on little children. Suddenly, their joy dims into disinterest for what they have, and they all begin fighting over this brand-new toy. They are wired for happiness, yet envy and jealousy become this invasive species that disturbs inner peace and contentment. The root of it is just wanting what I don’t have, something God hasn’t given me yet or ever, wishing I had what they had.

- **The fruit of Saul’s envy and jealousy is suspicion, which morphs into antagonism, aggression, and constant fear of losing what he has—his Kingdom.** Notice what the text says next, starting in verse 10, “The next day an evil spirit sent from God came powerfully on Saul, and he began to rave inside the palace. David was playing the lyre as usual, but Saul was *holding a spear*, ¹¹**and he threw it**, thinking, “I’ll pin David to the wall.” But David got away from him **twice**. ¹²**Saul was afraid** of David, because the Lord was with David but had left Saul. ¹³Therefore, **Saul sent David away** from him and made him commander over a thousand men. David led the troops ¹⁴and continued to be successful in all his activities because the Lord was with him. ¹⁵When Saul observed that David was very successful, he dreaded him. You see if the root of this is comparison and insecurity and covetousness, then the fruit of it is antagonism, aggression, fear, and scheming.

How do we resist envy? Let me share some keys for resisting envy as an invasive species to the garden of our soul’s virtue.

- Practice Reflexive gratitude. 1 Tim 6:6–7 “But godliness with contentment is great gain. ⁷For we brought nothing into the world, and we can take nothing out.” Gratitude, Paul tells us, is the essence of worship (see Rom 1:18ff). And an obsession with being grateful for what God has done, and given. Gratitude inoculates us from the virulent strains of jealousy, envy, and coveting.
- Rejoice with those who are blessed. Rom 12:15 “Rejoice with those who rejoice; weep with those who weep.” Practice empathy.

Illus. Two pianos in the same room, one had certain keys struck and researches observed the same string vibrating in the other.

That's what empathy is—it's the ability to sympathetically resonate with the joys and sorrows of others. Just become the kind of person who is glad for successes of others. I promise that will come back to you.

- Rest in who God has made you and what he's given you. Paul's **situation in Corinth with the "super-apostles."** What was the complaint of the Corinthians who lived in ancient tinsel town? It's that in his writings he's very erudite, but in person, his preaching—meh. Not so much. And they were comparing Paul to the so-called "super apostles." Paul said, "It's true—I don't have the gifts of elocution, and I didn't come with ornamental rhetoric or a silver tongue—but I came preaching the Gospel with a demonstration of the Spirit's power." I don't need what those other super-talented teachers have. I'm content in who God has made me. Because God has taken the weak things of this world and shamed the strong. He's taken the foolish little rabbi from Jerusalem and shamed the so-called wise.

And folks, we must practice reflexive, automatic gratitude; we must learn to rejoice with those who are blessed; and we must rest in who God has made us. Because mastering these skills is the secret to a contented and godly life.

2. David's Humility. 1 Samuel 18:15–30 When Saul observed that David was very successful, he dreaded him. ¹⁶ But all Israel and Judah loved David because he was leading their troops. ¹⁷ Saul told David, “Here is my oldest daughter Merab. I’ll give her to you as a wife if you will be a warrior for me and fight the LORD’s battles.” But Saul was thinking, “I don’t need to raise a hand against him; let the hand of the Philistines be against him.” ¹⁸ Then David responded, “Who am I, and what is my family or my father’s clan in Israel that I should become the king’s son-in-law?” ¹⁹ When it was time to give Saul’s daughter Merab to David, she was given to Adriel the Meholathite as a wife. Now Saul’s daughter Michal loved David, and when it was reported to Saul, it pleased him. ²¹ “I’ll give her to him,” Saul thought. “She’ll be a trap for him, and the hand of the Philistines will be against him.” So Saul said to David a second time, “You can now be my son-in-law.” ²² Saul then ordered his servants, “Speak to David in private and tell him, ‘Look, the king is pleased with you, and all his servants love you. Therefore, you should become the king’s son-in-law.’”

²³ Saul’s servants reported these words directly to David, but he replied, “Is it trivial in your sight to become the king’s son-in-law? I am a poor commoner.” ²⁴ The servants reported back to Saul, “These are the words David spoke.”

²⁵ Then Saul replied, “Say this to David: ‘The king desires no other bride-price except a hundred Philistine foreskins, to take revenge on his enemies.’” Actually, Saul intended to cause David’s death at the hands of the Philistines.

David’s character is on display in this text. And while it may not seem obvious at first, a closer look reveals that David is exhibiting a kind of instinctive humility.

- **(v.18) He rejects the offer of Merab, Saul’s daughter,** because he is convinced of his own insignificance. What does this tell us? It tells us that David hasn’t let the victories go to his head. He still kind of thinks of himself as that lowly shepherd boy from nowhere Podunk Bethlehem.
- **(v. 23) He doesn’t treat weighty matters flippantly.** He actually asks the king, “Is it a trivial thing to become the Son-in-Law of the King?” This will characterize David’s life for the most part. Sure, he has lapses in judgment, he will at times give in to his sinful nature, showing that he is just like any other person. But on balance David is a man after God’s own heart and he doesn’t take serious things lightly. In Chapters 18–26, David never retaliates against Saul, even when he has the opportunity in a cave in Dullam to do so. He always treats Saul with the utmost respect—not because he respects Saul (though he loves his adopted father) but because he respects the office. He will always refer to Saul as “the Lord’s anointed.” Later in 2 Sam 6 when an incident occurs with a man named Uzzah who reaches out to stabilize the ark of the covenant—this most sacred object in Israel, and when Uzzah touches it—he dies instantly. David takes the matter very seriously, expressing fear of the LORD. David is the kind of man, in humility, who takes weighty and important matters with the utmost seriousness and refuses to treat the holy as profane or to treat the sacred with contempt or flippantly.
- **(v.26–27) He honors a wicked request, trusting himself to the LORD.** Despite Saul’s evil intentions to harm him, to get him out of the way by sending him to the front lines to fight the Philistines, David humbly accepts the challenge and goes the extra mile. He doesn’t bellyache over how dangerous the mission is; he doesn’t gossip about Saul to the troops to ingratiate himself to them. He humbly just gets up and gets the job done.

How do we emulate David in humility? Like David...

- We must humbly submit to authority. Even if those in authority over us are clearly godless, self-promoters. David doesn't take this opportunity to lead a coup. Instead, he humbly lives in the space that the Sovereign Lord has given him in this moment. And this is not some blind allegiance to a flawed man; this is an expression of his allegiance to God as he considers the interests of others—namely Saul's interests in ridding the land of their enemies. I am struck time and again by David's willingness to submit to Saul until it was absolutely impossible to do so. But he gives this flawed leader every benefit of the doubt.

Titus 3:1–3 “Remind them to submit to rulers and authorities, to obey, to be ready for every good work, ² to slander no one, to avoid fighting, and to be kind, always showing gentleness to all people. ³ For we too were once foolish, disobedient, deceived, enslaved by various passions and pleasures, living in malice and envy, hateful, detesting one another.” (See also 1 Peter 2:17 “**Honor everyone**: Love the brotherhood. Fear God. **Honor the emperor**”). Paul and Peter advise us to be obedient citizens, respecting governing authorities and honoring the office they hold. They encourage empathy towards those who may be misguided or disobedient to God's Word, enslaved to their sinful natures and passions, as we ourselves were once in the same position. We submit to those in positions of authority provided they do not command what God forbids or forbid what God commands. We recognize authority as God-ordained and for the good of the commonwealth, promoting social order.

But what about in the church?

Hebrew 13:17 “**Obey your leaders and submit to them**, since they keep watch over your souls as those who will give an account, so that they can do this with joy and not with grief, for that would be unprofitable for you.” Notice the responsibility of the pastor or leader—to shepherd faithfully, keeping watch over the souls of the flock, knowing that we will give account to God for how we have led. But the congregation obeys and submits to the faithful teaching of God's Word.

David is this kind of person. He's humble enough to recognize authority (even a man of flawed character); to submit and contribute to the interests of the King and the Kingdom of God, and he does so until the governing authority makes it absolutely impossible for him to continue to do so.

There will come a time when David engages in civil disobedience because Saul forces him to it. But that time is not now. Instead, he faithfully submits and follows the program.

- We must attribute our success to God. Remember verses 14, echoed in verse 28—David continued to have success in all his military campaigns because the LORD was with him. And Saul realized the LORD was with David. This confidence in God goes all the way back to **Moses'** instruction to the people in Deut 20:4 “For the **Lord your God is the one** who goes with you to fight for you against your enemies **to give you victory**.” Later David will sing, “Now I know that the Lord gives victory to his anointed; he will answer him from his holy heaven with mighty victories from his right hand.⁷ Some take pride in chariots, and others in horses, but we take pride in the name of the Lord our God” (Ps 20:6–7). The humble heart doesn't get swept up in

their own PR and the praises of men. The humble heart, no matter how gifted, how blessed, how successful—knows that everything of value, every victory, every bountiful crop comes from the LORD. He is triumphant in accomplishing his will and his purposes. What’s our response, again, it is inexhaustible gratitude, “But thanks be to **God**, who gives us the **victory** through our **Lord** Jesus Christ!” (1 Cor 15:57).

Like David...

- We should receive the gifts God desires for us. At first his humility will not allow him to accept Saul’s daughter, Merab. Missing that opportunity, he is then offered Michal, who the text makes it clear is just fawning all over him. She is a fan-girl. With the songs of David’s praise ringing in his ears, David tunes it out. Because he knows better. He knows that he’s the least of Jesse’s sons. He knows that he’s from nowhere, from a small, insignificant tribe. He knows what’s true—if it were not for the LORD, I would have none of these triumphs. But eventually, he humbly accepts Michal as his wife. He receives the gifts offered—even if they are offered with ulterior motives.

Let me ask you (I know, it’s a strange question), but are you humble enough to receive the blessings the LORD wants for you so that you may be successful and fruitful in promoting his Kingdom and his gospel in the world?

I ask this because the world is kind of embracing a weird form of asceticism today due to its various apocalyptic visions of the future. It’s a modern fetish for personal deprivation to signal our virtuous character to others. And it’s ungodly and evil.

One example I can think of is the morose and bizarre fascination that certain people have not had children in the name of saving the planet from overpopulation. But this kind of apocalyptic asceticism and morbid fascination with depriving ourselves to save the planet is wrongheaded for two reasons: (1) it violates a direct mandate of God to be fruitful and multiply. And (2) it fast-tracks a nation-state to oblivion—if you don’t have the population to replace the outgoing generation who by retirement or death leave vacancies in industries you cannot survive. Germany, China, now Russia—these nations cannot continue their policies on this.

And while we are aborting an entire generation of people, mutilating our daughters, and permanently sterilizing our sons in the name of “compassion,” Islamic regimes are having large families and migrating into the West from their war-torn Islamic regimes. Listen, children, gas-powered cars, electricity, the exchange of goods in the marketplace, technology—none of these things are inherently evil. They can be instruments for the Kingdom to further the gospel in the world.

David receives the gift of Michal in good faith.

It’s the humble person who is willing to receive those blessings when offered, when available, when necessary.

Listen, maybe in humility (I mean genuine humility) you feel unworthy of the goodness and the gifts that God wants for you.

But maybe, just maybe, sometimes were too prideful and stubborn to receive help and support and blessing from others.

We have a clear contrast between Saul’s envy/jealousy which has metastasized into a nefarious intent and actions to rid the country of David—God’s chosen man.

We have a clear Sovereign affirmation of David as God's choice—and he makes good on the promise of his calling and election because he is man of humility—who humbly respects the authority of his King (flawed as he may be); he humbly attributes his success to God (never forgetting where he came from); and who unassumingly just receives the gifts and goodness offered to him (knowing that ultimately they are gifts from God though they've been delivered through the hands of a tormented, godless king with ill-intentions—a man who in his jealousy is becoming smaller by the day).

Who's life will you emulate?

Who's example will you follow?