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1 Samuel 15

“A 90% Life”

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If you were to ask most people if 90% was a good percentage for most things, they'd most likely say, "Yes." For example, 90% on a test score or a baby considered to be in the 90% range for height and weight or reducing household debt by 90% or a store sale with everything at 90% off, all of these are good things.

But there are also times when 90% is a bad thing. For example, if the airplane pilot greeted passengers over the intercom by saying, "We have a 90% chance of making it to Cleveland in one piece" or if after surgery the surgeon told you he can account for 90% of the instruments used for surgery or if your scuba diving instructor told you the air tank works 90% of the time, all of these bad things at 90%. Sometimes 90% is great, and sometimes 90% is just not good enough.

When it comes to obedience and faithfulness to God, 90% is just not good enough. The good news is that when we fall short, there is grace. After all, only Jesus was 100% obedient and faithful to God. In the Christian life, 90% should never be the goal, but that's how it was with King Saul. You could say, "He's a 90% kind of guy." When you look at the story of his life, you'll see that he had a personal philosophy in which he thought, "I'll just make it my goal to be obedient to God 90% of the time; that should be good enough." This attitude of the heart and mind would be his undoing, and it would end up costing him the kingdom. In the end, Saul became tormented, jealous, paranoid, and insecure in the latter years of his reign. Things spiraled downward to the point that he even asked a witch to perform a séance in order to get advice from the dead!

In the study last week, we learned that Saul was a reluctant leader, a restrained leader, and a respected leader. Unfortunately, he was also a rebellious leader who had a 10% streak in him that prompted him to do things his way. In this study, we'll see why God rejected Saul and how we can learn from Saul's disobedience.

Saul Was A Rebellious Leader And A Rejected Leader

1. **1 Samuel 10:8** - “[*Samuel said to Saul,*] ‘Go down ahead of me to Gilgal. I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings, but you must wait seven days until I come to you and tell you what you are to do.’ ”
2. **1 Samuel 13:5-14** provides the details about the degree to which Saul followed God’s instructions given to him through the prophet Samuel.
 - a. In this account we see that Samuel wasn’t late in arriving; he just came at the last hour, which was some time before sunset on the seventh day.
 - b. Samuel didn’t come early enough to suit Saul, so he became impatient.
 - c. His lack of patience brought him to the place of his assuming a role that was reserved for a priest (offering the sacrifice animals, burnt offerings, and fellowship offerings).
 - d. In **1 Samuel 10:8** we read that Samuel specifically said, “*I will surely come down to you to sacrifice burnt offerings and fellowship offerings.*”
 - e. Samuel was the prophet-priest from the priestly tribe of Levi, and King Saul, because he was from the tribe of Benjamin, was not qualified to be a priest.
 - f. When Samuel confronted Saul, all Saul could muster were explanations, instead of an apology, including such things as:
 - i. “My men were deserting me.”
 - ii. “You were late.”
 - iii. “The Philistines are coming.”
 - iv. “I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering.
 - g. His 90% mindset shows itself in this account.
 - i. Saul was basically saying, “I was just trying to do something good by offering sacrifices, and I just wanted to get the show on the road, so I figured God wouldn’t mind if I compromised in this one little way.
3. Honorable intentions don’t justify dishonorable actions.
4. Samuel told Saul he acted foolishly by not keeping the Lord’s command, and, if he had kept the Lord’s command, the Lord would have firmly established his kingdom, but that was no longer going to be the case.
5. **1 Samuel 13:14** tells us that Saul’s kingdom would not endure, because God “*has sought out a man after his own heart*” and that man was David.
 - a. If you know the story of David, you may be tempted to say to yourself, “David did something worse than what Saul did, and yet Saul lost the crown while David kept it. How is David more a man after God’s heart than Saul?”

6. Saul would stay in power for approximately 20 more years before David would officially replace him, but this was the beginning of the end for Saul.
7. Saul's life spiraled downward from this point, and he did unthinkable things.
 - a. **1 Samuel 14** tells us that Saul tried to kill his son, Jonathan, over a stupid rule Saul made about not eating honey.
 - b. **1 Samuel 15** tells us that Saul made a monument in his own honor after a victory over the Amalekites.
8. **1 Samuel 15:1-3** - *"Samuel said to Saul, 'I am the one the Lord sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the Lord. This is what the Lord Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'"*
9. God judged the Amalekites for the way they attacked the Israelites when they were travelling from Egypt to the Promised Land, and his judgment wasn't partial but complete, and his instructions to Saul were that everything and everyone must be 100% destroyed.
10. It's clear that Saul must not have understood God very well, because **1 Samuel 15:7-9** says: *"Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, to the east of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs - everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed."*
11. **1 Samuel 15:10-23** tells us that Saul believed he had obeyed God's instructions, even though he spared King Agag and *"the best of the sheep and cows."*
 - a. Saul was self-deceived to the point that he really thought he had obeyed and carried out all of the Lord's instructions!
12. Samuel rebuked Saul and said, "If you think you've done what the Lord wanted, where did the bleating of sheep and lowing of cattle come from?"
13. Saul's answer was that the soldiers were responsible for bringing the sheep and cattle as a sacrifice to the Lord.

14. [1 Samuel 15:22-23](#) - *“Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of the Lord? To obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and arrogance like the evil of idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, he has rejected you as king.”*
15. God is never more impressed by what we can do for him than he is by what we can do that's from him.
 - a. The commands that are from the Lord are the ones he wants us to obey, and there is nothing we can do for him that would improve upon that.
 - b. God compares disobedience to witchcraft and idolatry!
16. Saul was rejected because he rejected the Word of God.
17. Saul parsed out the Word of God and decided what part he would obey and what part he wouldn't, and he convinced himself that God would look the other way regarding the other 10%.

God's Grace

18. Thankfully, there's grace for us when we don't obey 100% of the time.
19. [Romans 5:20b](#) - *“But where sin increased, grace increased all the more...”*
20. Grace is a lifeline to rescue those who are drowning.
21. It's wonderful to know that God is not nor has he ever been just 90% for us!
22. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't die for 90% of the world, he died for 100%!
23. When Jesus forgave you of your sins, he didn't forgive 90% of the stuff you've done, he forgave 100%!
24. When Jesus says, “I love you with an everlasting love,” he doesn't mean 90% of the time!
25. Jesus, in [John 14:15](#), said, *“If you love me, you will obey what I command.”*

Discussion Questions

1. Review the introduction to the study guide with your group to provide the appropriate background.
2. Read [1 Samuel 15:1-23](#) to provide an overview for this study.
3. Review and discuss the statistics concerning the results of living in a world that's satisfied 99% of the time.¹

People are human, and that means mistakes are bound to happen. In fact, few of us get through the workday without making a single error. The closer we get to 100 percent, the better, of course. But, should 99.9 percent accuracy be considered good enough? Google the phrase "99.9% is good enough," and see what comes back. You will find that 99.9 percent would leave a lot to be desired. At 99.9 percent accuracy you could expect:

- 810 commercial airline flights to crash every month.
- 1,314 phone calls to be misplaced by telecommunications services every minute.
- 107 incorrect medical procedures to be performed today.
- 18,322 pieces of mail to be mishandled in the next hour.
- 20,000 incorrect drug prescriptions to be written in the next 12 months.
- 22,000 checks to be deducted from the wrong bank accounts in the next 60 minutes.

Some environments, like aviation and medical safety, are certainly high stakes. In these businesses, you just can't depend on a mulligan, a do-over, or a re-load. Other situations present day-to-day examples of defects that while not life threatening can certainly be annoying and costly. Either way, product and service quality are important.

4. Was there a time in your life when you, like Saul, believed honorable intentions justified your dishonorable actions?
5. Allow the people in your group to share their experiences about times when their life spiraled downward because of their disobedience to the Word of God?
 - a. How did the Lord minister his grace to you?
 - b. How did the Lord rescue you?
 - c. How did the Lord remove the consequences from your disobedience or did he permit the negative consequences to remain?
 - d. How are you coping with the lasting effects of these negative consequences?
6. Do you think God is more impressed by how you serve him than by how you obey him?

¹ These statistics were not verified outside of the September 2012 article.
<http://networkingexchangeblog.att.com/small-business/when-99-9-percent-isnt-good-enough/>

7. Do you find yourself making excuses or giving explanations for sin rather than repenting of sin?
8. Read and discuss this statement by Pastor Gary: “God is never more impressed by what we can do for him than he is by what we can do that’s from him.”
9. What are some of the ways you’ve given yourself wholeheartedly to the Lord?
10. Read and discuss [1 Samuel 15:22-23](#).
11. Listen to the song as a group or read and discuss the lyrics to Keith Green’s song *To Obey Is Better Than Sacrifice*.²
12. Close your time in prayer by asking the Holy Spirit to help each person: purpose in their heart to seek the Lord’s forgiveness for sin rather than offer up explanations or excuses; thank the Lord for his grace and his willingness to forgive 100% of our sin; thank the Lord that he has never been nor will he ever be just 90% for them; seek to follow and obey the leading of the Holy Spirit and the Word of God; (have someone be prepared to read [John 14:15](#) and pray the Scripture).

* Unless noted, all Scriptures quoted are from the New International Version (NIV 1984).

² <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=oVvL-Ug6ruY>