

An Obedient Heart

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1 Samuel 26

This is JuJu cat. JuJu is an orange tabby kitten that we got this year. Now most of the time, JuJu is an obedient cat. He uses his litterbox. He lets you pick him up and cuddle, and he's very playful. He's usually a good kitty! But there's one rule in our house that JuJu finds it really hard to obey! Above our front door about ten feet high, we have a big shelf. On that shelf, we have three tall African carvings. Now JuJu knows that he's not supposed to get on that shelf! We yell at him when he gets on it. We clap our hands. We try to block the way. He knows he's not supposed to get on it, but it's really hard for him to obey!

For one thing, it's really easy for JuJu to get up there. All he has to do is jump from the upstairs railing onto the shelf. JuJu figures if we didn't want him up on that shelf, we shouldn't have put it in the house, right? Also following the rule doesn't seem very rewarding. JuJu likes that shelf! He can keep an eye on the whole house from there. He can climb to the top of the carvings and look out the window! He can use the carvings as a scratching post. He wants to be on the shelf! So even though JuJu is normally obedient, he gets on that shelf a lot! There are times when it's really hard for JuJu to obey!

Just like JuJu, there are times when it's really hard for us to obey. Sometimes it's hard for us to do what God tells us to do! Sometimes it's hard to tell the truth. Sometimes it's hard to not cheat at school. Sometimes it's hard not to take things you're not supposed to have, whether that's something that doesn't belong to you or whether that's a second treat out there at our coffee bar. Kids, parents, just kidding! There are times when it's hard to obey God.

Today we are going to look at a story from King David's life about that. We're going to see a time, when it was really hard for David to obey God! Let me invite you to turn in your Bibles to 1 Samuel 26. Actually, this story is going to show us not just one but four kinds of times when it's hard to obey God, four when it's difficult to obey God! Today as we go through this passage we're going to name those four times, and then we'll talk about the secret to obeying God even when it's hard, a secret that David knew, a secret that gave him a different kind of heart, a secret that made him a man after God's own heart! This story shows us four times when it's hard to obey God, four kinds of times when obedience is difficult! The first one is this:

WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE OBEYING GOD ISN'T PAYING OFF

It's hard to follow God when it doesn't seem like God is rewarding us. Sometimes we obey God. We do what's right, but instead of making our life better sometimes things seem to get worse. It can be hard to obey God when that happens! Let me show you what I mean.

The events we're going to look at today happened at a place called "The Hill of Hachilah." The story doesn't start at "The Hill of Hachilah." The story really starts right after David was

anointed. David was anointed by God as the future King of Israel. From the time God anointed David, David has been obeying God. He fights Goliath to defend God's name. He fights in other battles God calls him to. He serves the king. He is obeying God. But as we come to our story, David's obedience of God doesn't seem to be paying off. It only seems to be bringing him trouble!

The first thing God called David to do was defeat Goliath! At first, that seemed to be a good thing! It was just what he needed to be noticed by the whole Israelite army, in fact, by the whole nation! Unfortunately, it caused someone else to notice David too. When King Saul and David returned from defeating the Philistines the crowds in Israel chanted "Saul has slain his thousands, but David has slain his tens of thousands." That did not sit right with Saul. He noticed David and became insanely jealous! Saul knew he had been rejected as king. God sent the prophet Samuel to tell Saul that there was going to choose a new king. Once David killed Goliath, Saul had a pretty good idea who that new king would be! He knew David was going to be the new king.

So from that day forward for the next several years, Saul spent most of his time and energy trying to kill David! In fact if you read the book of 1 Samuel, do you know how many different times Saul tried to kill David before our story today? Seventeen times! Saul tried to kill David seventeen times! He tried everything to get rid of David. Saul tried sending him off to war, so the Philistines would kill him. That didn't work, so he sent him on a dangerous mission, but that didn't work. Saul tried to ambush David at home, but David got away. He tried to chase him in the wilderness and he almost caught him, but Saul had to stop at the last minute! The three times that Saul came closest to killing David, he threw his spear at David and tried to pin him against the wall. Three times Saul did that! Then when his son Jonathan tried to protect David, Saul threw his spear at Jonathan and tried to pin him to the wall! Saul liked that spear a lot!

Now as David went through this, he never tried to kill Saul. Not once. Isn't that amazing? If someone tried to kill me once, I might be shocked! If they tried to kill me twice, I might try to hurt them. If they tried seventeen times, I think I might try to kill them! But not David. There's a command in Exodus that say "You shall not curse the leader of your people." David knew that if cursing the king was wrong, killing him was surely wrong! So David never tried to kill or even hurt Saul.

In fact in chapter 24 (just before our story), David let Saul go. Saul was chasing David in the mountains. He was very close to David, and Saul went into a big cave to, um, do his business and guess who was in the cave? David! So David sneaked up cut off the tassels on Saul's royal robe, and later he showed it to Saul and said "I could have killed you just now, but I didn't because you are God's anointed king. I let you live." Saul said "I'm sorry, David. What I'm doing is wrong. I promise I won't try to kill you any more. God will bless you, and you will become King." That's where we are when we come to our story. After seventeen times of trying to kill David, Saul has promised never to chase David or hurt him again. But as our story begins, Saul breaks his promise! Look at:

Then the Ziphites came to Saul at Gibeah, saying, "Is not David hiding himself on the hill of Hachilah, which is on the east of Jeshimon?"

- 1 Samuel 26:1

The Ziphites were a group of people that lived about twelve miles west of the Dead Sea. For some reason, they did not like David! So someone from Ziph saw David's men in the desert near the town, and they inform Saul. What does Saul do? He breaks his promise! Look at:

So Saul arose and went down to the wilderness of Ziph with three thousand chosen men of Israel (3,000 soldiers!) to seek David in the wilderness of Ziph. And Saul encamped on the hill of Hachilah, which is beside the road on the east of Jeshimon. But David remained in the wilderness. When he saw that Saul came after him into the wilderness, David sent out spies and learned that Saul had indeed come.

- 1 Samuel 26:2-4

So the Ziphites tell Saul where David is, and Saul takes 3,000 soldiers to kill him! Now think for a minute about what David is going through. God anointed David, and David obeyed God. But as we come to our story, it doesn't seem to be paying off. It seems like God is not rewarding David at all! For more than ten years, Saul has been chasing David and trying to kill him. And now, he's trying to kill him again! Sometimes, it must have seemed to David like obeying God only brought him trouble! In fact in some of the Psalms (the songs) that David wrote at this time, David says "Where are you God? I'm obeying you are you going to reward me?"

Sometimes, it's hard to obey when it doesn't seem like God is rewarding us. Sometimes, it seems like if you tell the truth, you won't be rewarded. You'll just get into more trouble. Sometimes, that's true! Sometimes, it seems like not cheating when everyone else is cheating will hurt your grade, like you're going to score less than everyone else. Sometimes, it seems like respecting your parents, or your teacher, or your boss is only going to make your friends disrespect you! So we're tempted to disobey, just like David might be tempted to disobey God and attack Saul as our story starts. I wonder what will David do?

It's hard to obey when obeying God doesn't seem to pay off, right? But there's another time when it's hard to obey. It's hard to obey:

WHEN YOUR FRIENDS SAY DISOBEDIENCE IS OK

Sometimes, your friends tell you that you don't need to obey God. They say "We know it's really hard to obey this command. It's so hard. It almost seems like an unfair rule, so it's OK. No one will blame you if you disobey just this once." Sometimes our friends say things like that, and it makes it hard to obey God.

In our story, David's friends do that. They want him to disobey God and kill Saul. Let me show you what I mean. So, once David realized that Saul himself was at this camp he got a kind of

risky idea. He said "Let's sneak into Saul's camp and see what we can see!" David asked for volunteers, and his nephew Abishai agreed to go with him. Look at:

So David and Abishai went to the army (Saul's Army) by night. And there lay Saul sleeping within the encampment, with his spear stuck in the ground at his head, and Abner and the army lay around him. Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day. Now please let me pin him to the earth with one stroke of the spear I will not need to strike him twice."

1 Samuel 26:7-8

Can you believe it!? David and Abishai sneak into camp. They get right up to Saul, and he's fast asleep. Saul is sleeping like a baby. He's sleeping like your dad sleeps. He's probably snoring and making funny noises. Saul has no idea that David and Abishai are right next to him whispering back and forth with each other. Abishai is whispering that it's OK for David to disobey God and kill Saul. I mean Abishai sees Saul's spear stuck in the ground right in front of him!

Now we've heard about this spear before, haven't we? This is the spear Saul threw at David three times to try to stick him to the wall. This is the spear Saul threw at his own son when he tried to protect David. This is clearly Saul's favorite weapon. It's his symbol of protection and power, and it's right there within reach! Abishai is saying "It's OK, David. I know you don't want to hurt Saul, so it's OK. You don't even have to do it. All you need to do is say the word, and nobody will blame you! This is the same spear he has tried to kill you with three different times! Let me use it! I'll do what he tried to do to you only I won't miss. One shot. No one will blame you, And I'll stick him to the ground. David had to be thinking about it. It was only fair. His friends wouldn't blame him. In fact, they were probably tired of running from Saul. They would probably be frustrated if he didn't do it! So what will David do?

It's hard to obey God when your friends are telling you not to, right? Kids, maybe you have friends (or family) that encourage you to disobey God. Maybe they say "You don't have to obey your parents. Their rules are not fair!" Maybe they say "You don't have to be nice to that kid. They weren't nice to you!" Maybe some of the commands that God gives you, don't even make sense to your friends. They say "Surely, it's OK to disobey just this once."

Or adults, maybe you face the same thing. Maybe your friends say "God can't expect you to stay with your spouse. They're not a nice person! You can do better!" Maybe they say "God doesn't expect you to give a portion of your income. You have to take care of yourself! You've got a boat payment to make!" Maybe they say "God could not possibly ask you to go to the mission field you're doing so much good here. How could he ask that?" Maybe it's something else. But it's hard isn't it?

So it can be hard to obey, 1) when it seems like obeying God is not paying off, and 2) when your friends are telling you it's OK to disobey. But there's another thing that makes it hard to obey God. It's hard to obey:

WHEN IT SEEMS LIKE GOD IS MAKING IT EASY TO DISOBEY

Sometimes, God doesn't make it hard to disobey. Sometimes, disobedience is easy. This can confuse us. As Christians, we believe that God is in control of all our circumstances, right? We believe he's in control of everything the Bible says. He's in control of the number of hairs on our head! So we expect God to arrange our circumstances so that it's hard to sin. God says "The way of the transgressor (person who disobeys) is hard." He warns us that He's going to discipline us if we disobey Him. So most of the time, we expect God to make it hard to disobey Him. But sometimes, God doesn't make it hard. Sometimes our circumstances (circumstances that God is in control of) make it easy to disobey, and that can tempt us to disobey God. Think about our story and think about what Abishai said to David:

Then Abishai said to David, "God has given your enemy into your hand this day."

- 1 Samuel 26:8

What Abishai is saying is "Think about it, David. We just walked through 3,000 soldiers without waking anybody up! We are standing right next to the guy who tried to kill you. The spear he tried to kill you with is within reach. We are having a whispering argument without waking anybody up. Doesn't that seem a little suspicious to you?" Abishai is saying "This is all God's doing. He has brought us to this moment where it's very, very easy for you to disobey just this once." And you know what? Abishai is right. Look at verse 12b. There the Bible tells us how it was that David and Abishai got into and out of Saul's camp so easily:

No man saw it or knew it, (they didn't know they were in camp) nor did any awake, for they were all asleep, because a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen upon them.

- 1 Samuel 26:12b

God was the one who put these guys to sleep. So it was very easy to think that maybe God actually wanted David to disobey.

Sometimes we look at circumstances, and we see how easy it is to disobey God, and sometimes we think it's OK. Sometimes we think like "If God didn't want me to steal the cookies, he shouldn't have put them on the bottom shelf. That's his fault, right?" We can all do this. If you're a kid, maybe you're taking a test at school and the smartest person in the class just happens to sit right where you can see their paper, and you think "I didn't do this. God can't expect me not to look. It's OK if I sneak a peek." If you're an adult, maybe we think "It's so easy to cheat on my taxes a little bit, and no one will know. Surely it's not a big deal to God." Maybe there's a relationship that you know you shouldn't be involved in. But you do it anyway, and you say "Well God brought that person into my life." I've known people who committed immorality, who did things that God told them never to do, broke their marriage vows. Their excuse was "Well if God didn't want me to start a relationship with this person, why did He put them in my life? It must be OK." We can justify disobedience, because God didn't make it hard to sin!

David could have done that. He could have said 1) Obeying God seems like it's not paying off, and 2) My friends are telling me it's OK to disobey, and 3) God is making it easy for me to disobey! All these things could make David say "It's OK to disobey God. Just this once!" But guys, David knows something. He knows something that each and every one of us knows deep in our own hearts. It's NOT OK! It's not OK to disobey God. Look at what David says:

But David said to Abishai, "Do not destroy him, for who can put out his hand against the LORD's anointed and be guiltless?" And David said, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him: his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish. The LORD forbid that I should put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. But take now the spear that is at his head and the jar of water, and let us go."

- 1 Samuel 26:9-11

David knows it will be wrong for him to kill Saul. Even though all those things might make it seem right, he knows it's wrong. He refuses to do it. He says "I'm going to obey God even when it's hard." But before the story ends, we actually see even one more reason that David might have wanted to disobey God. We see one more time when it's hard to obey. It's hard to obey:

WHEN YOU KNOW OBEDIENCE WON'T FIX THE SITUATION

Sometimes, you know that even if you do the right thing, things won't get any better. In fact, they might get worse. Sometimes if you don't gossip about people, they're still going to gossip about you. Sometimes if you tell the truth, other people will still lie. Sometimes you may not cheat, but the other team is still going to cheat and that can make it hard to obey God!

In our story, David obeyed God! He chose not to kill Saul. But he did decide to let Saul know that he could have killed him. So David did something kind of risky again. Remember the spear and the water jug? Well, David and Abishai took the spear and the water jug. They sneaked away until they were a safe distance from Saul's camp, and then they shouted and woke up the soldiers. David yelled at Abner who was Saul's bodyguard. David didn't say who he was but he told Abner "You hoo, Abner, you're not doing a very good job of guarding the king! This very night someone came into your camp that could have killed the king." At first, Abner didn't believe it, but then David said "Where is the King's water jug? Where is that spear he likes so much? Someone took it from right under your nose! I could have killed the King!" Abner didn't know what to say, but Saul didn't wait for Abner to answer. Saul answered David himself:

Saul recognized David's voice and said, "Is this your voice, my son David?"

- 1 Samuel 26:17

Now look at that verse. Saul doesn't sound like a guy who's tried to kill someone seventeen times, does he? He sounds like a kindly old man. He calls David "my son." He sounds really innocent, which is hard to do when you're with 3,000 guys with you that you brought out to kill someone! Do you think David believed Saul? I don't think he did. David says to Saul "Yes, it's me." He asks Saul "Why are you trying to kill me? I'm nothing. I'm like a little bug, I'm not even

trying to hurt you, and you're hunting me down with 3,000 guys!" Now look at what Saul says to David in response:

Then Saul said, "I have sinned. Return, my son David, for I will no more do you harm, because my life was precious in your eyes this day. Behold, I have acted foolishly, and have made a great mistake."

- 1 Samuel 26:21

David doesn't even respond to that. He's seen too many crocodile tears from Saul to believe this. It's exactly what Saul said in the cave when David cut off the tassels of his robe. So here's what David says back to Saul:

And David answered and said, "Here is the spear, O king! Let one of the young men come over and take it. The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation."

- 1 Samuel 26:22-24

You know what David is saying there? He's saying "I know that obeying God and letting you live will not fix the situation. You're telling me that you're not going to try to kill me. But I know it's not true. I can't trust you, Saul, to spare my life like I've spared yours. But I can trust God. And I can pray to him and ask that even though you won't show me the kindness I showed you that God will. So I'm not going to hurt you, Saul."

And you know what? David didn't! He obeyed God. He did not raise his hand against the Lord's anointed. He obeyed God even though 1) it didn't seem like obeying God was paying off even though, 2) his friends were saying disobedience was OK, 3) God was making it easy to disobey and, 4) obedience wouldn't fix the situation. David still obeyed God.

Now, when we think about how this passage relates to you and me, which is what we should always think about when we read a story in the Bible, it raises one big question: How did David do it? How did David obey God when it was so difficult, when there were so many things making it hard? How did David do it? Did he try extra hard? Did he have a strong fear of God? Was he always thinking God was out to get him? Did he punish himself, keep a rubber band on his wrist and snap it every time he thought about disobeying God? We want to know how did he do it? What is the secret to obeying God when it's hard?

The secret is one simple word, the word "trust." David trusted God. David had learned to trust God. Those seventeen times when Saul was trying to kill David, Saul was trying harder and harder, and Saul was growing in his frustration. But you know what David was growing in? David was growing in his trust. Every time David had to trust God, God rescued him. Every time. David learned to trust God. David shows us his trust in this passage. Think about what he said when he was telling Abishai why he wouldn't kill Saul: "

As the LORD lives, the LORD will strike him. Either his day will come to die, or he will go down into battle and perish.

- 1 Samuel 26:10

What David is saying is: "I know it's fair for me to kill Saul. I know that's what he tried to do to me. But I don't have to kill him. God will bring about justice in his own way." David is saying "I can leave this with God, because I trust him." Think about what David said to Saul at the end of the story:

The LORD rewards every man for his righteousness and his faithfulness, for the LORD gave you into my hand today, and I would not put out my hand against the LORD's anointed. Behold, as your life was precious this day in my sight, so may my life be precious in the sight of the LORD, and may he deliver me out of all tribulation."

- 1 Samuel 26:23-24

David is saying "I don't trust you to protect me. But I trust God to protect me. He can spare my life and he can deal with you." David trusted God. He didn't obey God because he was trying hard. He didn't obey because he was afraid of God (like God was out to get him if he disobeyed). It's the opposite. He obeyed because he knew God was good, and he trusted Him. That's the secret to obeying God when it's hard. If we could just trust that God is good, that his plans and his commands are good for us, whether they're easy or hard, we would obey him so much more.

That's what I wish our kitty cat JuJu could know. I know it's easy for him to get on the shelf, and I know the rule doesn't seem very rewarding to him. But it's for his good. We don't want him to fall down and hurt himself! If he could trust our goodness, it would be so much easier for him to obey! That's what we want. We want him to trust our goodness.

That's what David did. He trusted God's goodness completely. That's why he was a man after God's own heart! And that's really what God wants from us. He wants us to trust Him. We can see His goodness, because He loves us so much! He loves us so much He sent Jesus to show us His goodness and to die for our sins, so that we could be with our good God forever. We know God is good, and that's why we can obey Him:

- 1) Even when it doesn't seem to pay off right away
- 2) Even when our friends are telling us to disobey
- 3) Even when God seems to make it easy to disobey
- 4) Even when obedience won't fix the situation.

We can obey because we trust Him.