

# Making Space for God

## Opening Prayer

*O God, I have tasted Thy goodness, and it has both satisfied me and made me thirsty for more. I am painfully conscious of my need of further grace. I am ashamed of my lack of desire. O God, the Triune God, I want to want Thee; I long to be filled with longing; I thirst to be made more thirsty still. Show me Thy glory. I pray Thee, that so I may know Thee indeed. Begin in mercy a new work of love within me. Say to my soul, "Rise up, my love, my fair one, and come away." Then give me grace to rise and follow Thee up from this misty lowland where I have wandered so long. In Jesus' Name. Amen.*

*From the Pursuit of God by A. W. Tozer*



*Saul and David*

*Acrylic Collage by Steven Stuckey 2014*

## Reflection- Looking Back

Take some times to settle yourself. Review your calendar and think back over where you have been this past month. Focus on answering this one question: **How has the Lord been present to you?** In the events of your life; in your joys and fears; in what has occupied your mind and heart; in what you dream about or long for; in what you are thankful for. Journal these thoughts and offer them to the Lord.

## Scripture Study—1 Samuel 16:1-23- A Spiritual Heart Attack

A stroke or heart attack is a health crisis event that takes place to an individual in a moment of time but the cause of the event is often years in the making. 1 Samuel 15-16 is Saul's spiritual heart attack that took place in about his thirtieth year as king and from which he never fully recovered. He began his reign at age 30 and served 42 years. During his tenure he helped move the nation from a theocracy to a monarchy. He unified a loose federation of twelve tribes into cohesive nation with a standing army that was able to successfully defend itself against enemies on all sides. He created a taxation system to support governmental functions, secured access to trade routes in the south that enabled the flow of commerce, and saw the evolution of technological innovation move from the Bronze Age to the Iron Age. In the end, by one account, he and his son Jonathan died a hero's death in battle.

But along the way, something destructive began to happen to Saul internally. It was imperceptible to most outsiders. The years of wearing the mask of the strong warrior and of having to be on the defensive against enemies without and within hardened something core to his identity. He became increasingly paranoid, strident, vindictive, and wary. He grew more confident of his own opinions and less receptive to the advice of others. He grew in arrogance and began making monuments to himself. And though he revered God outwardly, inwardly God became increasingly distant. Not only that, he became more distant from his true self as his warrior persona took over.

1 Samuel 16 marks a transition point where Saul loses the favor of his primary benefactor, Samuel; where God rejects Saul as his king; where Saul loses his mental health and begins to suffer debilitating bouts of anxiety and depression; and where David is introduced as Saul's eventual successor.

## Reading for Reflection

Perhaps the best metaphor to describe our hurried and distracted lives is that of a car wash. When you pull up to a car wash, you are instructed to leave your motor running, to take your hands off the steering wheel, and to keep your foot off the brakes. The idea is that the machine itself will suck you through. For most of us, that's just what our typical day does to us—it sucks us through. We have smartphones and radios that stimulate us before we are fully awake. Many of us are texting friends, checking Facebook and emails, watching the news, or listening to music or talk radio, talk on our cell phones, and plan the day's agenda. We return to television, conversation, activities, and preoccupations of all kinds. Eventually we go to bed, where we perhaps read or watch a bit more TV. Finally we fall asleep. When in all of this did we take time to think, to pray, to wonder, to be restful, to be grateful for life, for love, for health God? The day just sucked us through.

*From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser*

Why is it so difficult to pray regularly? Some reasons are obvious: over busyness, tiredness, and too many demands on our time. But there are other reasons too, suggested by monks and people we think of as mystics. The problem we have in sustaining prayer, they say, is often grounded in the false notion that prayer needs to be exciting, intense, and full of energy all the time. That is impossible! Nothing is meant to be exciting all the time, including prayer and church services, and nobody has the energy to be alert, attentive, intense, and actively engaged every minute. The solution is not so much new prayer forms and more variety, but rhythm, routine, and established rituals.

*From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser*

The object of prayer is trying to attain a kind of “boldness” with God that grows out of a friendship that touches each other in affection and understanding. We try to reach a point where we are comfortable enough with God to ask for help, just as we would with a trusted friend. But to reach this kind of trust we first must let God touch us in the heart, and not just in insight. This means prayer is not so much a question of having beautiful thoughts about God as it is of feeling God's affection for us. Sadly, that is what we generally miss in prayer: the experience of God's affection.

*From Prayer, Our Deepest Longing by Ronald Rolheiser*

Gabriel Marcel distinguished between approaching life as a problem and entering it as a mystery. If we deal with life as a problem, we reduce it to what we can do something about; we are concerned with figuring out and fixing. And, while there is an important place for figuring things out and fixing them, if that is all that we do we become myopic, managers and mechanics of what is immediately before us, with no peripheral vision and no horizons. We miss most of life. But if we approach life as a mystery, we are forever coming upon meanings that exceed our definitions, energy and resources unguessed in our calculations. “Mystery is not the absence of meaning, but the presence of more meaning that we can comprehend.”

*Eugene Peterson in The Unnecessary Pastor, page 69*

## The Benediction

*You have been reminded that Jesus Christ is your Lord and that you are God's servant. You are loved; you are forgiven; you are empowered and now you are sent to live as God's faithful one. Amen*

*From A Guide to Prayer, page 266*

## Reflection Questions for 1 Samuel 16:1-23

1. Samuel mourned for Saul. Reflect upon their relationship and the possible reasons for his grief.
2. Fear is part of the landscape in verses 2-4. Why?
3. Compare the anointing of David with that of Saul in 1 Samuel 10. What is similar/ different?
4. What function might the story of David's anointing have for the author telling the story of Saul and David?
5. Verse 13—the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon David. Verse 14—the Spirit of the Lord departed from Saul. These verses are a theological way of describing the affects that took place in the lives of two men. Describe those affects.
6. “An evil spirit from the Lord tormented him,” verse 14. What affect does this “spirit” have upon Saul's psyche? What purpose might the “spirit” have? What theological world view does this verse represent? How might this phenomenon be expressed in modern terms?
7. What recommendations do Saul's servants have for how to address Saul's discomfort? Note the positive role that his servants play in this incident and in previous incidents.
8. What do you learn about David and his initial relationship with Saul?
9. How do you identify with this story?