

SESSION 3

RESPECT AUTHORITY

▶ **The Point**

Respect the authorities God has placed in your life.

▶ **The Passage**

1 Samuel 24:3-12

▶ **The Bible Meets Life**

People don't always agree in our society, and that's okay. A married couple may disagree over which 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 others' company.

In short, disagreement isn't the problem today—but disrespect is a problem. A big problem. In fact, according to a recent survey, 79 percent of people in our culture view lack of respect as a serious issue in our society.² The Bible affirms that every human is created in the image of God (see Gen. 1:26-27). Therefore, we should treat everyone we encounter as a person of worth. Still, if we're honest, it's 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 challenge David faced in 1 Samuel when King Saul kept trying to kill him. Through David's example, we'll see that we can respect those in authority without endorsing all they do.

▶ **The Setting**

At the end of 1 Samuel 23, David had narrowly escaped Saul and his men with his life. Advised that the Philistines had raided the homeland, Saul called off the pursuit to fight them. When Saul left abruptly to fight the Philistines, David took the opportunity to find a more secure location. Then, without a hint as to how Saul fared in his latest Philistine scuffle, the king headed back to the wilderness to resume chasing David.

What does the Bible say?

The LORD's anointed

(v. 6)—A person set apart by God, especially a king or other leader. Only God has the authority to remove an anointed person from that position.

1 Samuel 24:3-12

³ When Saul came to the sheep pens along the road, a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave, ⁴ so they said to him, "Look, this is the day the LORD told you about: 'I will hand your enemy over to you so you can do to him whatever you desire.'" Then David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul's robe.

⁵ Afterward, David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the corner of Saul's robe. ⁶ He said to his men, "I swear before the LORD: I would never do such a thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed. I will never lift my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed." ⁷ With these words David persuaded his men, and he did not let them rise up against Saul.

Then Saul left the cave and went on his way. ⁸ After that, David got up, went out of the cave, and called to Saul, "My lord the king!" When Saul looked behind him, David knelt low with his face to the ground and paid homage. ⁹ David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of people who say, 'Look, David intends to harm you'?" ¹⁰ You can see with your own eyes that the LORD handed you over to me today in the cave. Someone advised me to kill you, but I took pity on you and said: I won't lift my hand against my lord, since he is the LORD's anointed. ¹¹ Look, my father! Look at the corner of your robe in my hand, for I cut it off, but I didn't kill you. Recognize that I've committed no crime or rebellion. I haven't sinned against you even though you are hunting me down to take my life. ¹² "May the LORD judge between me and you, and may the LORD take vengeance on you for me, but my hand will never be against you."

GET INTO THE STUDY



10 minutes



Notes

DISCUSS: Question #1 on page 29 of the PSG: **“What have you been taught about respecting authority?”**

Note: If helpful, clarify that you are not necessarily asking what your group members believe about respecting authority; you’re asking what they’ve been taught or told over the years.

ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): Bring a roll of tin foil to your group gathering. Hand out

a sheet of foil to each person in the group and ask them to shape it into something that represents authority in their minds—preferably something that represents authority in your community or in their spheres of influence. Allow 3-5 minutes for everyone to work, and then ask volunteers to share what they’ve created.

Note: You can also use clay or pipe cleaners for this activity. Allowing group members to craft something with their hands is a great way to engage the kinesthetic (hands-on) learners in your group.

GUIDE: Direct group members to “The Bible Meets Life” on page 30 of the PSG. Introduce the theme of respecting authority by reading or summarizing the text—or by encouraging group members to read on their own.

GUIDE: Call attention to “The Point” on page 30 of the PSG: **“Respect the authorities God has placed in your life.”**

PRAY: Transition into the discussion by acknowledging that God is the ultimate Authority in your life, in your church, and across the world. Pray for a better understanding of that authority as you and your group members study His Word.

Dotted lines for taking notes.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

1 Samuel 24:3-7

³ When Saul came to the sheep pens along the road, a cave was there, and he went in to relieve himself. David and his men were staying in the recesses of the cave, ⁴ so they said to him, "Look, this is the day the LORD told you about: 'I will hand your enemy over to you so you can do to him whatever you desire.'" Then David got up and secretly cut off the corner of Saul's robe. ⁵ Afterward, David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the corner of Saul's robe. ⁶ He said to his men, "I swear before the LORD: I would never do such a thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed. I will never lift my hand against him, since he is the LORD's anointed."⁷ With these words David persuaded his men, and he did not let them rise up against Saul. Then Saul left the cave and went on his way.

READ: 1 Samuel 24:3-7 on page 31 of the PSG. Read the text out loud or ask a volunteer to do so.

RECAP: Read the first two paragraphs after the Scripture on page 31 of the PSG:

I often speak to parents of teenagers. When 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, I rarely hear what I consider to be the most important reason: we teach our children to respect authority so they will learn to honor God. After all, how can we help younger generations learn to respect the One they cannot see if they don't learn to respect those God has put in front of them?

GUIDE: Use the final two paragraphs on page 43 of this Leader Guide to offer additional information on David's state of mind after cutting Saul's robe.

DISCUSS: Question #2 on page 31 of the PSG: "How do you typically respond to the authority figures in your life?"

TRANSITION: As we continue with verses 8-11, we'll see how David's words showed respect to Saul as a person in authority.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

When have you been confronted with a difficult authority figure?

1 Samuel 24:3-7 Commentary

Act with grace toward those in authority.

[Verse 3] Working on an informant's tip, Saul and 3,000 men scoured the precarious crags and caves known as "the Rocks of the Wild Goats" to track down David. The area included steep mountains intersected by wadis running down in deep ravines to the Dead Sea, as well as many caverns and caves that would have provided hiding places for David and his men. Feeling the urge of nature, Saul searched out a place where he could **relieve himself** privately. As Saul entered the cave, nobody—not even his personal bodyguard—would have accompanied him, making him quite vulnerable.

[Verse 4] David's men whispered to him, "**Look, this is the day the LORD told you about.**" They assured him Saul's presence in the cave fulfilled God's promise to deliver Saul into David's hands. They pushed David to seize this opportunity and assassinate Saul; to them, God had obviously caused Saul to choose this place to relieve himself.

David remained unconvinced, yet he did see an opportunity to make a statement. He crept stealthily toward the oblivious Saul, who had apparently laid his robe out of the way. David **cut off** a portion of the edge. Saul's robe would have had a distinctive fringe or design reserved only for the king, symbolizing his power and authority. By cutting off **the corner of Saul's robe**, David had symbolically declared a revolt.

[Verse 5] David refused to interpret Saul's stumbling into this particular cave as a sign to harm Saul. Killing an enemy in battle or an attacker in self-defense hardly compared to assassinating a king. Yet after he had cut off the corner of Saul's robe, David immediately recognized the implications of his act. The expression **David's conscience bothered him** literally meant his heart struck him. David had gone too far.

[Verse 6] As he returned with the prize that had soured his heart, David said: "**I swear before the LORD: I would never do such a thing to my lord, the LORD's anointed.**" David knew Saul had been set apart or consecrated by God; as such, he must not be violated. Cutting off the corner of Saul's robe had directly challenged Saul's kingship and authority as **the LORD's anointed**. David's remorse meant he still respected Saul as the one anointed by God. That the Spirit of the Lord had left Saul (see 16:14) did not change David's conviction that Saul was still the one "anointed" by to be Israel's king.

[Verse 7] David had to get quite forceful with his men to prevent them from harming Saul. They wanted to kill him when they had the clear opportunity. However, David **persuaded his men** not do to so. While not clear from most English translations, the Hebrew word for "persuaded" has more punch, because David literally "tore apart" his men as he forcefully stopped their ill-advised scheme and fiercely defended Saul's life. Meanwhile, Saul got up, picked up his robe, and **went on his way**, oblivious that his enemy, David, has just spared his life. David passed a huge test. Israel's next ruler willingly entrusted the matter of his becoming king to God's best timing and judgment.

1 Samuel 24:8-11 Commentary

Speak with grace and conviction toward those in authority.

[Verse 8] After Saul strolled far enough away from the cave for David to come out safely, David called out to him from behind, **“My lord the king!”** Rather than harm Saul, David had proven he would not oppose Saul or act in any detrimental way toward him. Imagine Saul’s shock when he heard David call out from the cave he had just left. David was lying face down on the ground in **homage**, a display of his reverence for and submission to the king. David called Saul both “my lord” and “the king” from a posture of humility. Clearly David wanted to ensure that Saul would get the message. David posed no threat.

[Verse 9] David gave no time for Saul to reply—he immediately articulated his passionate and eloquent plea for reconciliation. David cautiously sidestepped accusing Saul of initiating malicious actions against him. With the skill of an expert lawyer, David tactfully tossed blame for Saul’s behavior upon some of Saul’s servants, asking why he would **“listen to the words of people who say, ‘Look, David intends to harm you.’”** No doubt many in Saul’s court conspired continually to poison Saul’s mind against David with false accusations.

[Verse 10] Continuing to make his case, David called on Saul as his first witness: **“You can see with your own eyes that the LORD handed you over to me today in the cave.”** David credited God with handing Saul over to him, yet David let Saul go unscathed. Saul realized he had escaped death. Unlike Saul, David had refused to listen when **“someone advised me to kill you.”** Instead, David **took pity** on Saul; that is, he looked with compassion on Saul. Most notably, David declared his motive for sparing the king: he recognized Saul was **the LORD’s anointed**. To harm the king would have been rebellion against God, who had enthroned him. David respected Saul’s authority because he respected God’s ultimate authority.

The phrase, **“I won’t lift my hand against my lord, since he is the LORD’s anointed,”** sometimes gets misinterpreted to mean one should never speak against a pastor or leader. But David meant he would not kill Saul. David did, however, humbly confront Saul with his sin, hoping Saul would change his heart. Similarly, sometimes our leaders need correcting. David provided the model for speaking with grace whenever this becomes necessary.

[Verse 11] David saved his material evidence for last, **“Look, my father! Look at the corner of your robe in my hand.”** The term “father” was often used in ancient times as a token of respect by an inferior to a superior. As David held up the corner of Saul’s robe, Saul’s heart must have sunk. If Saul had any doubt about how close he came to dying in that cave, David held all the evidence needed to erase that doubt. Saul’s robe would serve as a reminder of how close he had come to death, and that David had spared his life. With the proof and evidence in his hand, David pronounced the verdict, **“I haven’t sinned against you.”** He was not guilty of wrongdoing or rebellion against the throne. David had not wronged Saul, yet Saul was **hunting** David down like a wild animal to kill him.

1 Samuel 24:12 Commentary

Leave conflict with authority figures in God's hands.

[Verse 12] David did not need to say or do anything more to defend himself before Saul. He referred the matter to the Lord: **"May the LORD judge between me and you."** In making his case, David proved that he had not harmed Saul when he had the opportunity in the cave. Here, David didn't simply say, **"My hand will never be against you."** He made it plain that he had no intention of using any kind of violence against Saul by calling on the Lord to **take vengeance** should He do so.

A day would come when Saul would face judgment. On that day he would lose the throne. David referred the dispute to the Lord as the proper Judge who could both punish the offender and oppressor, and deliver the oppressed. David would take no action to deliver Saul to his judgment. He rested his case entirely in the Lord's hands. In so doing, David set a dynamic example of humility and loyalty. Although driven to insanity by his sinful behavior, Saul was still the ruler of God's people. Therefore, David humbled himself and declared his loyalty to King Saul.

Leaving a conflict with someone in authority in God's hands will often not be the easy choice. At first we may have great intentions as we act and speak with grace and conviction. But over time, if this does not appear to bring about the desired results, temptations might come to join with others to speed up the change we want to see take place by speaking against the person in authority or by taking action to have the individual removed. But even when the authority figure fails to do what is right, we must exemplify Christlike behavior and leave the matter to God.

God in His infinite wisdom has established the authorities in our lives (see Rom. 13:1). He ordained three spheres or institutions of authority: family, church, and government. All three exist because God set them up as the means by which people relate to one another and to Him. Each sphere has leaders that God has ordained. Some are good, while others are not so good.

Usually we can do little about how the authorities in our lives conduct themselves and lead. Our responsibilities lie in the way we conduct ourselves and how we act and speak toward those in authority. We should remember that by submitting to our authorities, we obey God.

Note: For more information on this topic, read the article "En-gedi, David's Hideout" in the Summer 2017 issue of Biblical Illustrator. Previous Biblical Illustrator articles "David as an Outlaw" (Fall 2008), "En Gedi: History and Archaeology" (Spring 2001), and "Saul's Kingship: Its Making and Unmaking" (Spring 1997), relate to this lesson and can be purchased, along with other articles for this quarter, at lifeway.com/biblicalillustrator.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

GUIDE: Direct group members to page 36 of the PSG. Encourage them to consider these suggestions for honoring Christ by respecting the authorities God has placed in their lives:



Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

- ▶ **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..

Wrap It Up

TRANSITION: Read or restate the Conclusion from page 36 of the PSG:

We need disagreements in our world today. We need different perspectives and a robust exchange of ideas. But we don't need disrespect. Instead, choose to honor the authority figures God has placed in your life.

PRAY: Conclude by verbally submitting yourself to God's authority. Pray for the leaders of your community by name, asking that God would bless them as they lead.



Free additional ideas for your group are available at BibleStudiesforLife.com/AdultExtra