

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

Most authority figures are good leaders whose authority we can respect. Unfortunately, we encounter other authority figures who, at best, are inept in what they do or, at worst, are self-serving. When it comes to respect, the Bible makes no distinction between the two types of leaders. In the Book of 1 Samuel, David modeled for us how we can respect even the worst kinds of authority figures.

The Setting

As the previous chapter ended, David had narrowly escaped Saul as his men closed in on David. 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, Saul headed back to the wilderness to resume chasing David.

What does the Bible say?

The LORD's anointed

(v. 6)—This phrase referred to 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 (CSB)

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



ACTIVITY (OPTIONAL): In advance, secure a gavel or a picture of one. Ask: "What does this gavel represent?" Discuss that a gavel represents the final authority in a court or other formal meeting. It's used to call order or finalize an order.

DISCUSS: Invite your group members to discuss **Question #1** on page 29 of the PSG (Personal Study Guide): "**What are some ways you've been taught to show respect for authority?**" Allow

time for each person to respond.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 30): We live in a society where we don't always agree. A married couple may disagree over which color to paint the living room, but they still love each other. And, based on talk radio, whether it's sports or politics, we seem to love to disagree with one another.

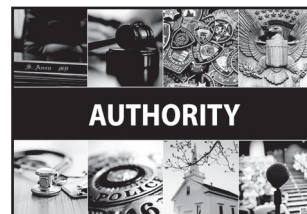
Disagreement is not the problem; disrespect is. And even though Americans seem to enjoy a spirited discussion, debate, or argument, most of us—79 percent, according to at least one survey—see a lack of respect as a serious problem in our society.²

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

LEADER PACK: Bring your group's attention to **Pack Item #3**, "Authority" poster. Use these images to list the various positions of authority we encounter in our daily lives. As you discuss the topic of authority, invite your group members to identify other positions of authority not represented on the poster.

PRAY: Transition into the discussion with prayer. Thank God for being the ultimate authority and for placing godly men and women in roles of authority in your life.

TIP: You know your group better than anyone. Feel free to adapt the questions, activity, or order of the lesson to be the most relevant and impactful for your group.



PACK POSTER:
Pack Item #3
"Authority" poster
PLAYLIST PICK:
"Whatever You Want"
By Gateway Worship



STUDY THE BIBLE

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1 Samuel 24:3-7 (CSB)

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: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 24:3-7.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 31): David respected King Saul, but he was also on the run from him. Saul, jealous of David’s popularity, had tried time and again to have David killed (1 Samuel 18–22). In this passage, David and his men were in a wilderness area near En-Gedi (close to the Dead Sea).

- » Saul got word of this so he went in pursuit, and David hid from him in a cave.
- » Saul needed a bathroom break, but the cave he chose to enter was the very cave where David was hiding! David’s men saw this as the opportunity given from the Lord to end Saul’s persecution. They urged David to seize the chance he had to rid himself of his pursuer.
- » David crept up close to Saul’s robe and cut off the corner of it with a knife. It may not seem like much, but since Saul’s robe represented his position as king, this simple act made the robe noncompliant with the law. David dishonored Saul by symbolically invalidating Saul’s role as king.
- » David immediately repented of his action; his “conscience bothered him” (v. 5). Then, he would not allow his men to cause any harm to Saul.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What are some actions you take to avoid a revenge mentality?

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

TRANSITION: In the next verses, we see David confront King Saul face to face.

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 to assassinate Saul. David remained unconvinced, yet saw 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. 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.

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 and 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 (16:14) did not change David's conviction that Saul was still the one "anointed" by God 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 to do 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 had passed a huge test. Israel's next ruler willingly entrusted the matter of his becoming king to God's best timing and judgment.



STUDY THE BIBLE

NOTES

1 Samuel 24:8-11 (CSB)

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."

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 24:8-11.

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGES 32-33): Because David knew Saul to be "the LORD's anointed" one, David showed respect to Saul in six ways.

1. David confronted Saul, but he spoke with honor and respect. He recognized Saul's authority when he "called to Saul, 'My lord the king!'" (v. 8).
2. David bowed as a sign of respect to the king.
3. David urged the king not to listen to the advisors who wrongly accused David of seeking Saul's life. At the same time, David refused to listen to his own men who encouraged him to kill Saul. David's reasoning? His conviction that Saul was "the LORD's anointed" (v. 10).
4. David offered evidence to show his unquestioned respect for the king. This evidence—the corner of Saul's robe—proved David would not harm the king.
5. David called Saul "my father" (v. 11). While Saul was David's father-in-law, this term also spoke of his feelings for Saul.
6. David showed how seriously he took his treatment of the king as a mark of his relationship with God. David would never sin against Saul.

ALTERNATE QUESTION:

How do David's actions and attitudes compare to what we see in our culture?

DISCUSS: Question #3 on page 33 of the PSG: **"What do you like best about David's approach in these verses?"**

DISCUSS: Question #4 on page 34 of the PSG: **"What are some ways we can imitate David's actions and attitudes in our own dealings with authority?"**

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. 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.”

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.

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. David held up the corner of Saul’s robe. 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.



STUDY THE BIBLE

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

1 Samuel 24:12 (CSB)

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.”**

READ: Ask a group member to read aloud 1 Samuel 24:12.

SAY: “It’s important to note that David did not overlook or sugarcoat Saul’s sin, and neither did David believe Saul’s sin was without consequence. David understood that God’s role is to deal with sin; our role is to walk with God.”

SUMMARIZE THE PSG (PAGE 34): Walking with God means that, while we ultimately leave the matter in God’s hands, we speak with both grace and conviction.

- » **Leave judgment in God’s hands.** “May the LORD judge between me and you” (v. 12). Whether it’s a spouse, family member, friend, co-worker, or someone in authority over us, we certainly need to do our part to make it a good relationship, but then we must leave matters in God’s hands.
- » **Leave your reputation in God’s hands.** When David said, “May the LORD take vengeance on you for me,” (v. 12) he was yielding his reputation to God.
- » **Leave vengeance in God’s hands.** Even as David expressed a desire for God to take vengeance, he determined he would not seek vengeance himself. “My hand will never be against you” (v. 12).

DISCUSS: Question #5 on page 34 of the PSG: **“Why is it hard to leave vengeance in the hands of the Lord?”**

DO: Instruct group members to complete the activity on page 35 on their own. If time allows, invite volunteers to share their responses aloud.

HAND IT OVER: (Note: The PSG includes a scale for each question below.)

- » How easy is it for you to leave judgement in God’s hands?
- » How easy is it for you to leave your reputation in God’s hands?
- » How easy is it for you to leave vengeance in God’s hands and refuse to pursue some kind of payback?

ALTERNATE QUESTION:
What are the benefits of leaving vengeance in God’s hands?



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 had proved that he had not harmed Saul when he had the opportunity in the cave. Here David did not 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 (Romans 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.



5 minutes

LIVE IT OUT

Notes

Dotted lines for taking notes.

SAY: "God has placed authorities over you. How will you honor Christ this week and show them honor and respect?"

GUIDE: Lead group members to consider the responses to the Bible study listed on page 36 of the PSG.



- » **Identify all of the authority figures God has placed in your own life and your relationship with them.** (For example, Mike = boss) Pray for each of them this week.
- » **Refuse to speak or act in anger toward someone in authority.** Keep in mind that God is aware of your situation and ask Him to show you how to proceed in a way that honors Him.
- » **Hand over any unresolved issues with authority figures to God.** Acknowledge His ability to appropriately handle the situation.

Wrap It Up

SAY: "Choosing to honor those in authority with respect is a faith issue. Show respect to your leaders and place your trust wholly in God. **He is fully capable to handle whatever situation you find yourself in and He is trustworthy.**"

**GROUPS
MATTER.**

Grow with other group leaders at the **Groups Ministry blog.**

LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry