

Chapter 10 – Standing Tall, Falling Hard

In every congregation there are Hannahs---women and couples who desperately want to have children but are unable to for some reason.

How can we strike a balance between recognizing and strengthening families and being sensitive to the pain of those struggling with infertility?

Sometimes children are remarkably sensitive to the voice of God. They need encouragement to expect to hear from God, as Eli encouraged Samuel. Apparently Eli did better by Samuel than with his own sons, who became corrupt. In the middle of page 108 we find the now familiar explanation for a person's effective work for God: "The LORD was with Samuel."

Since God is everywhere how should we understand what the Biblical writers mean when they say "The LORD was with" someone?

Nobody does everything right. Despite the presence of God in his ministry, Samuel neglected the moral formation of his own sons, just as Eli had. So when they became leaders and had to make decisions in the people's disputes, they accepted bribes for a favorable decision. It is at this point that the Israelites demand that Samuel appoint a king for them.

According to Biblical writer, why was it wrong for the people to demand a king?

Saul was the first king. He had several sons, but the one who will be important in THE STORY is Jonathan.

What were the factors that led to Saul's being replaced as king by God?

How did Saul respond when confronted with his disobedience?

Can you find evidences of God's grace in this whole sorry mess?

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Chapter 11 – From Shepherd to King

Saul was chosen to be king despite the fact that he was from the tiny tribe of Benjamin and from an insignificant clan. David was the youngest son of his family---regarded as so unimportant that he was not even invited to the feast when Samuel came to visit.

What is God up to, choosing apparently insignificant people to be leaders and rulers? (Hint: remember Gideon and the size of his army?)

How was David able to face a giant when so many others gave way to fear?

After promoting David to high military rank, why did Saul turn against David?

Knowing that he was God's choice to be king, why didn't David kill Saul when he had the opportunity?

Using a play on words, Nathan the court prophet reports God's response to David's plan to build a temple: a "house" for God. Through Nathan, God tells David that not he, but his son will build God's house. But God promises to build David's "house" in the sense of a large extended family stretching over generations. This is the fourth covenant promise:¹ the eternal kingship of the Davidic line.

Thoughts on Christian maturity

When someone confronts us with our sin (or even with something hurtful we have done or said that hardly qualifies as "sin"), the easiest thing to do is to defend our actions or words, or to explain them away. Sometimes we try to have it both ways with the response, "Well, I'm sorry, but"

Can you remember a time when you responded poorly to confrontation?

What about a time when you responded well?

When you have to confront people, either in connection with church, or with work, which response do you get most often: defensive or open and humble, eager to learn and to do what it takes to improve the situation?

If we want to mature in this area, we can let go of defensiveness and surrender it to God, asking for grace and transformation.

¹ (1) All humanity(represented by Noah): rainbow (2) Abraham's descendants: circumcision (3) People of Israel (through Moses): God's teachings/commandments.

By this time in THE STORY we have surely learned that everything we have comes from God and continues to belong to God even after it is entrusted to us to use. This includes not just material things but also abilities, education/training, relationships, etc. What this means is that whatever we appear to do “for God” is actually done through us by God and that our honest mistakes will be used by God for God’s purposes.

But we have to be careful here. Sometimes financial gain or other success that Christians have comes from a kind of spiritual schizophrenia: a person loves God but succeeds by exploiting others and then attributes her or his success to God. A student cheats on an exam and then gives God the credit for good grades. If this were to happen, it would be a 21st century example of first “stealing” and then “misusing the name of God” (page 49). Sometimes what we see as “mistakes” are the result of over-reaching, arrogant refusal to take advice, a (slightly) dishonest scheme that backfires, a “little white lie” to save face that gets exposed. In these cases, God can still redeem the situation for God’s glory but we need to repent and make amends for our bad behavior as well.