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1 SAMUEL 12

1 Samuel Series

Open your Bibles with me please to 1 Samuel 12. Let's bow our hearts together.

[PRAYER] Lord, we are thirsty people, needing your living water. We thank you that it satisfies, not just a physical satisfaction, but a deep longing inside of our hearts. We are hungry people and we need the bread of life. It has that satisfaction and empowerment and energy producing force in it that changes who we are. Lord, we come to church hopeful. Not out of duty. But we come here because we want connection with you. We want to hear from you. Lord, we need you. We need you to satisfy our souls. We need you to provide answers. We need to walk through our days and our weeks every week. Lord, we face challenging situations in our lives. We need the strength that you provide. So this morning, Father, we take off our shoes as if we're on holy ground as we open your word with anticipation, recognizing that you speak to us. We ask you to do that now in this passage in 1 Samuel 12. Lord, I ask that you'd reveal to each of us things that we need to take with us out of here. That we would take Jesus home into our daily lives and apply the truths that you present in your word today. So as humble people, we come to you as our great God. Thank you for the privilege that we have to read your word and discuss it this morning. In Jesus' name, amen.

1 Samuel 12 is a sermon. It's a sermon from Samuel. If you take the book of 1 Samuel and you go up the first twelve chapters where we've already learned about how Samuel was born and raised, then we saw him rescuing the people, and then we saw him choose the king, King Saul, for the people under their coercion and God's direction. They come to a place now where Samuel is going to preach a sermon. He's older now and he wants to share this message with them.

There's really interesting things in this sermon that apply to our lives. It's really going to help us, I think, stay on target with life. So that's really the theme that I see in this book of 1 Samuel that he's going to teach them. You'll see this today: Stay on target. Stay where you need to be. Stay to truth.

Now when we say the word 'true' it means tight with a standard. So when we say true north, we're saying exactly north. That's what we're saying. We want to be on target.

He's going to lay this out for us in this passage, but he's going to start with himself and he's going to ask a question. Starting in 1 Samuel 12:1 – *Samuel said to all Israel* (so this is his sermon as he's preaching it), *"I have listened to everything you said to me and have set a king over you. Now you have a king as your leader. As for me, I am old and gray, and my sons are*

here with you. I have been your leader from my youth until this day. Here I stand. Testify against me in the presence of the Lord and his anointed. Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated? Whom have I oppressed? From whose hand have I accepted a bribe to make me shut my eyes? (He was a judge so as a judge it might be easy for someone to take a bribe in order to make a judgment for a particular kind.) If I have done any of these things, I will make it right.”

What Samuel is doing right here is establishing his integrity before the people. He’s asking this question about integrity.

I just paused there in my own personal study this week when I came here and I just started asking myself the question about integrity. Do I have integrity? What is my inner life? Is it true north? Is it pointing in the right direction?

The Bible has two words to describe this kind of an experience. It’s the word *pure heart*. To have a pure heart. The idea of pure is uncontaminated heart. You have a heart that’s pure before the Lord. So he says in Psalm 24 – *Who may ascend the mountain of the Lord? Who may stand in his holy place? The one who has clean hands and a pure heart.* A pure heart. Boy, we all need that in our lives.

A pure heart is something that’s very important mentioned in the Old Testament there, but the idea is brought to the New Testament because when Paul is writing to Timothy and helping a young man be successful in his life as a young pastor, he says, “This is what I want you to do and this is why. This is like the most important thing to you.” He says to him in 1 Timothy 1:5 – *The goal of our instructions is love from three things.* Notice he brings this idea of pure heart back in here. You want to have a *pure heart* if you’re going to be effective and lead. It’s going to come from this *good conscience* and a *sincere faith*.

Two pointers that we have inside of us that point us back in our hearts to having that pure heart. So God points out sin in our lives. He points out error, He points out mistakes, He points out offenses, and He points out these things that contaminate us. He says you need to make this right so that you can have this pure heart.

I believe that integrity is essential in our lives because this integrity, this pure heart provides for us the ability to be effective. It helps reduce our anger, reduce our anxiety when we have a pure heart. It helps us to be effective in sharing the message with someone else, to lead because we have a pure heart.

I want to talk to you a moment before we continue the passage about how to get a pure heart because this is what I was thinking. Okay look, I want a pure heart. How do you get a pure heart? How do you have integrity in your life? I would suggest there are three steps to doing this. I’m going to point them out to you and I want you to see them from God’s word.

Step number one if you want to have integrity is you’ll work it out with God. Here’s what’s going to happen. Your conscience is going to prompt you – “Uh oh, that was the wrong thing. I feel guilty about that.” Or the conscience is going to prompt you about something you’ve done in the

past. In fact there are some people who live with regrets because of mistakes they've made. They live with regrets because of sins that they've committed. Those regrets bother them and plague them and hinder their ability to go forward. So it's very important to work this out with the Lord. We need to understand who God is and how God works.

Today we're going to see His faithfulness demonstrated over and over again in this passage we're coming back to. But before we do, I want you to see what God does with your sin when you confess your sin to the Lord.

In Psalm 103:9-14 it says this: *He does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is his love for those who fear him; as far as the east is from the west, so far has he removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear him.*

I like the illustration that sometimes a parent will use with a child – “I love you this big.” The dad will say, “I love you this big,” and the child will say, “I love you this big!” I think that's the picture we have of God here.

As far as the east is from the west He moves those sins so far away from us. And we don't have to be plagued by guilt. We work it out with the Lord. We want to have integrity; we want to have a pure heart. You come before the Lord and you ask Him to save you of your sins. That's what salvation is all about – to get saved, to ask Jesus to forgive you of your sins. But then even after that we come before Him and we say, “God, would you please forgive me of my sins?” So we're continually asking for forgiveness so that we're never plagued by sin in our lives, by past sins.

So the first step is we have to make it right before the Lord. If we want to have a pure heart, if we want to have integrity, then we have to come before God and say, “God, clean me up. I want you to forgive me for my sins,” and He does that.

The second step is that we must work it out with people. I'm reminded of the story of Zacchaeus. When Zacchaeus was told to come out of the tree, Jesus said, “I'm going to go to your house and have lunch today.” It surprised all the religious leaders around because He was eating with publicans and sinners. He was eating with tax collectors, people who would cheat the people. Yet in the midst of that meal as Zacchaeus experienced Jesus in a personal way, Zacchaeus got up from the meal, stood up, and made a proclamation. He makes this proclamation: “If I have cheated anybody out of anything, I will pay back four times the amount.”

In order to have a pure heart, in order to have integrity, you can't just work it out with the Lord. You've got to come and work it out with people. Which means you go back and you think, “Is there anybody that I need to go back and apologize to? Is there anybody I need to go back and confess to them my sin? Is there anybody I need to make it right (do restitution four times the amount in this case)? Is there anybody I need to go back and deal with here because of something I've done wrong?”

I'm not saying all offenses with people are wrong. Sometimes they are offended of what we do and it's their problem, not ours. But if God prompts you inside of your heart that you did

something wrong in a particular area, then going back and dealing with people helps you obtain that clear conscience, that pure heart that we need to do.

So first we work on it with God. That's step number one. Secondly, we work it out with people. Thirdly then, we need to have an ongoing thinking so that we keep it pure, we keep it going forward so that we need to deal with our future offenses quickly. We make a commitment now that if I do something wrong, I'm going to immediately apologize for it. If I do something wrong I'm immediately going to confess that and I'm going to say I'm wrong. I'm going to trust you, Lord, to work that out in my life.

In the verse in Hebrews 12:14 it says – *Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy.* There's this driving movement inside of our hearts to be holy and to do what's right in the midst of any situation ongoing. So we make that determination because we want to keep that heart cultivated before the Lord and keep it pure.

Now if you're in business, this is going to be tough. If you're working in a difficult field in your life, this is going to be hard. Because it's hard to do what's right sometimes in our current culture. It's hard to do the right thing when other people are not doing the right thing. We live in a difficult place.

We don't negotiate with terrorists. Some of you people live with terrorists. I mean living your jobs and you're trying to work with them continually, or you've been in a challenging situation of one kind or another and there's a custody battle going on with kids, or there's some kind of a difficult situation happening at work. So you have to work out this whole idea of integrity. You can't abandon it. And you've got to be tough sometimes.

I don't think Christians need to be weak. That's not what we're saying here. Christians need to be strong. But there's a line. And you know where that line is. That line that you cross and you say, "Okay, now I'm not being fair with this person. Now I'm going beyond what's right. Now I'm getting revenge instead of just going and doing what's right." Our desire as Christians is to follow the passage in Micah 6:8 which says that we *seek justice, love mercy, and walk humbly with your God.*

It's important for us to have this sense of integrity because that's who we are as Christians. We have this internal sense of right and wrong. We don't just explain off things and say, "Well I was justified because this person did this." There's a right and there's a wrong. There's a standard. There's true north that we bring ourselves back to in our lives. We can't do it ourselves. We need God's grace. We need the power of the Holy Spirit to do that in the right kind of way.

Now Samuel is a man of integrity. He was a public official. He was a spiritual leader. His integrity was important to him.

Sometimes I work with young people and the young person has somehow failed in life. They've snuck out of the house, or they've stolen something, or they've gotten involved in something that's wrong. In the midst of that, lying or cheating or whatever they've done, now they're sitting in my office and I'm trying to work with the situation. I have the privilege then to explain to the

young person what integrity is. Integrity is what they need. They need to build it, they need to develop it. It doesn't happen by accident. It doesn't happen just because you live in a Christian home. It happens when you put it into practice and you work on it.

When I'm working with young people I call it the road back. You want to be trusted by your parents? Then you're on a road back to do the right thing. You want to be trusted by your wife or your husband? You're on a road back to do the right thing. It's a challenging place to be.

I define for a young person what integrity is. I'll say to a young person, "Integrity is the inner strength." You know when you use the word integrity to describe a piece of metal? That piece of metal is strong on the inside. Or I'll say a bridge has integrity. If when a truck is going over the bridge, the bridge is able to hold up the traffic that's there. If it's collapsing we say that the bridge lacked integrity. So integrity in essence is this (my definition of integrity): The internal strength to match the pressures of life.

So a person might lie because they want to get something that they couldn't get, or they wanted to get out of trouble, or they somehow want to have people like them so they exaggerate the story. So they don't have the internal strength to match the challenges. But it's not just about lying. There are some people who get angry continually because they don't have the internal strength to match the pressures of life. So pressures of life are out there for all of us. We need that internal strength and God provides that through this integrity inside of our hearts.

A person who has integrity has the internal strength to meet the challenges of life. When a person does the wrong thing under pressure it's because they lack that internal strength. We all need to have that. That's what he's talking about in this passage. When we work on developing integrity in our lives, God uses the conscience. He uses the Holy Spirit. It allows us to listen to Him because we want to be internally motivated to do what's right, not externally motivated because we're going to get some kind of reward or avoid a punishment. We are internally motivated to do what's right because it's the right thing to do and it requires practice.

I would suggest integrity requires practice. So when you're in a challenging situation in life, where you would normally blow up with anger or experience or anxiety, or you're in a challenging situation where you might tend to cut corners or be dishonest, it's in those moments that integrity is practiced, demonstrated. Those are moments when only you know.

So it's often been said that integrity is what you do in secret when no one is watching. That's integrity. It's this ability to do what's right in the midst of those situations. I think we all wrestle with integrity because it's who we are. It's one of the blessings of the Christian life. God has given us truth. That truth is steadfast, it's right in the middle, and we want to be true north. We want to be straight on with God. That's what we want in our lives. We don't want to be cutting corners.

We as Christians are blessed in our lives. We do what's right. We take a stand for life. We care for people who are in need. We recognize that we might suffer for doing the right thing. But we are committed to doing what's right. That's the integrity that we're talking about here. We by definition fight selfishness and we think about others. We all need to be reminded about our own

personal integrity in life. Because it's something that if we stop working on or we allow our guard to get down then life gets the best of us and we start to fall into pressure because we don't have what we need on the inside. God provides that strength.

The question is the important principle is we need to do what's right. What is truth and how do we align ourselves with it? Samuel has this integrity so he says, *"Whose ox have I taken? Whose donkey have I stolen?"* Here's the people's response in verse 4 – *"You have not cheated or oppressed us," they replied. "You have not taken anything from anyone's hand."*

Samuel said to them, "The Lord is witness against you, and also his anointed is witness this day, that you have not found anything in my hand."

"He is witness," they said.

It's nice when other people vouch for your integrity, which is what's happening in this particular passage. But now Samuel is going to turn this around and he's going to make a challenge to these people about their own integrity. Have they done the right thing Are they doing what's right?

Verse 6 – Then Samuel said to the people, "It is the Lord who appointed Moses and Aaron and brought your ancestors up out of Egypt. Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you."

I'm going to stop right here because you're going to see in Samuel's comments today that he's going to do three things. He's going to confront, he's going to pray, and he's going to teach. Those are the three things that he's going to do with the people.

I would suggest that each one of us benefits when we have someone who loves us enough that they will confront, they will pray, and they will teach. Whether it's a parent or a mate or a friend, that we have someone who's going to confront us to keep us on track, to pray for us that we will stay on track, and to teach us how to get back on track. Samuel is going to use all those three words here and in his sermon he's describing what he's going to do.

So I'm going to go back to the beginning of verse 7. *"Now then, stand here, because I am going to confront you with evidence before the Lord as to all the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your ancestors."*

Now there's a number of interesting things in this passage. But it's interesting to me he's saying I'm not going to confront you about your sin (although that's going to come out). I'm going to confront you with the truth that God is faithful. Wow. He's bringing them back to the standard of who God is. I just think that's a beautiful thing that he's saying. He's confronting them with the righteous acts performed by the Lord for you and your ancestors.

Now here's some illustrations starting in verse 8. *"After Jacob entered Egypt, they cried to the Lord for help, and the Lord sent Moses and Aaron, who brought your ancestors out of Egypt and settled them in this place."* So he's giving this story about how God rescued them out of there, out of Egypt.

Notice verse 9 starts with the word *but*. We'll see that word used a couple of times in this passage. *But* what? *"But they forgot the Lord their God; so he sold them into the hand of Sisera, the commander of the army of Hazor, and into the hands of the Philistines and the king of Moab, who fought against them."*

See, they started worshiping other gods. When they started worshiping other gods, they lost that integrity, that truth of staying true to the Lord. Well now we're looking back in history. When they discovered that they had done the wrong thing, then they repented. That's what's happening in verse 10. *They cried out to the Lord and said, "We have sinned; we have forsaken the Lord and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths. But now deliver us from the hands of our enemies, and we will serve you."*

So what they did is they repented. They came back to the Lord. They rededicated themselves to Him. So God, in His faithfulness, rescued them again. We have a contrast between the unfaithfulness or the lack of integrity of people and God's faithfulness over here. They moved back. They said, "Okay, we're going to line ourselves back up with God again. We're going to be faithful to Him." So they do. And they said, "God, will you rescue us, deliver us from the enemy's hands?"

So verse 11 says – *Then the Lord sent Jerub-Baal, Barak, Jephthah and Samuel* (some of your versions say Samson – they're all judges), *and he delivered you from the hands of your enemies all around you, so that you lived in safety.* Those are all judges who rescued the people.

It just demonstrates God's unconditional love for them, His faithfulness. It's so beautiful because no matter what we've done wrong, we can always come back to the Lord. We can come back to Him. Even if we've done things that are wrong, we repent, we change, we come back to Him and we re-establish that internal integrity that lining up with the truth north of who God is. Truth. Truth is the standard. We align ourselves to the standard and that's what integrity is all about.

Look at verse 12. *"But (they're going to sin again now) when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was moving against you, you said to me, 'No, we want a king to rule over us'—even though the Lord your God was your king."*

Now this is a really interesting example in the Bible of God's interaction with us. Because these people chose to be ruled by a king. It was not God's first choice. It's going to be declared evil. It seems to be something that they did wrong. Yet God is going to allow them to make that choice. Samuel is going to anoint this king, God's going to give this king the best shot at being successful and he's going to warn them. I just think it's very interesting that they're making a choice to do the wrong thing. God is right there in His faithfulness in the midst of that difficult situation and He's calling them to do what's right even after they're making a difficult choice.

Verse 13, Samuel is continuing. *"Now here is the king you have chosen, the one you asked for; see, the Lord has set a king over you."* So God gives them what they want. He gives them what they ask for. Even though it isn't His first choice. Even though it isn't the best.

Here's what I think. I think about people who look at their life and say something like, "I've made an important decision in the past and because I realize now it was wrong, I'm now unavailable for God to use. I'm lost. I'm not lost, I'm saved, but God really can't use me now because I made this decision in the past and it was the wrong choice that I made."

For example, someone might say, "I married a person who wasn't a believer. When I married that person who wasn't a believer I realize now it was the wrong decision for me to make that. So now what do I do? I live with this challenge of living with this person. What do I do now?"

That's what Samuel is going to talk about here. What do you do now after you've made a decision that's challenging like that? Notice verse 14 because here's what you do now. He says – *"If you fear the Lord and serve and obey him and do not rebel against his commands, and if both you and the king who reigns over you follow the Lord your God—good! But if you do not obey the Lord, and if you rebel against his commands, his hand will be against you, as it was against your ancestors."*

So he's saying now you have a king. Here's what I want you to do. I want you to fear the Lord, I want you to serve the Lord, I want you to obey Him now. If you don't, there's going to be consequences. We need to be aware of that. If we disobey the Lord we're going to experience consequences. But some people think that if they've sinned in their lives in the past that they are somehow unable to come back to fellowship with God or to be used by God. How does God respond to people like that? God welcomes people back who want to have this pure heart, who want to have integrity before Him. Start obeying now.

Verse 16. This is interesting again in this passage because he's going to show His power. I'm going to show you God's power to reveal that He's in charge and He's in control.

When I'm praying for someone, I often pray that God will reveal His power in this situation. I'm often praying God will heal the person and reveal His power so that person can see that He is powerful. That's not exactly the power that's being demonstrated here, but I want you to see it in verse 16. *"Now then, stand still and see this great thing the Lord is about to do before your eyes! Is it not wheat harvest now?"*

Wheat harvest is when the harvest has come up on its stocks. It's all just ready to kind of fall off. If you touch an orange that's on a tree and it's ready to fall off, it's just fresh and ready to go. So we're at wheat harvest now. *"I will call on the Lord to send thunder and rain. And you will realize what an evil thing you did in the eyes of the Lord when you asked for a king."* So God's power is going to be demonstrated through a damage to the crops in this particular situation. *Then Samuel called on the Lord, and that same day the Lord sent thunder and rain. So all the people stood in awe of the Lord and of Samuel.*

The people all said to Samuel, "Pray to the Lord your God for your servants so that we will not die, for we have added to all our other sins the evil of asking for a king." We don't want to die! They see God's power. I think when we see God's power in all of its majesty, His glory revealed, we go, "Wow. This is amazing." We are stunned into responding to the Lord. These guys are afraid.

So notice the gracious statements that are made next. If you're today afraid of God, if you're today realized you've sinned, you've made a mistake, and you're afraid of what God may do to you, look at verse 20. It says – *“Do not be afraid,” Samuel replied. “You have done all this evil; yet do not turn away from the Lord, but serve the Lord with all your heart. Give Him your whole heart. Serve Him with all your heart. Do not turn away after useless idols. They can do you no good, nor can they rescue you, because they are useless. For the sake of his great name the Lord (in other words He bases His faithfulness not on our actions but on His great name) will not reject his people, because the Lord was pleased to make you his own.”* Even though they failed so many times, He was pleased to make them His own.

As for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the Lord by failing to do two things – by failing to pray for you. Here's Samuel the leader. He's confronted them and now he's talking about praying for them. And I will teach you the way that is good and right.

What a model. I just like that. A great model for any of us. Not only that we find those people that can confront us and pray for us and teach us. But that we be those kind of people that care enough about someone that say, “Look, what you're doing is wrong. You're in danger. Watch out.” We confront and then we pray for those people. We teach them. Here's the right way. Here's what it looks like.

*Verse 24 – But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with **all** your heart; consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish.*

If you look in the verse there, one of the keys that helps us know and to trust the Lord is that one phrase in verse 24. *Consider what great things he has done for you.* If you take your heart back and you say, “Lord, thank you for what you've done. I just want to ponder the great things you've done for me.” It can drive us back to that place where we say, “I want to give you all of my heart. Lord, I've messed up in the past.” But messing up doesn't mean you can't move forward. It's important for us to have integrity, that pure heart that God wants us to have, that uncontaminated heart. He wants us to have that in our lives.

We can obtain that by getting right with Him because He forgives all of our sin. We work it out with other people and we ask them to forgive us and we make things right. We make a commitment to going forward that I'm going to do the right thing. That's one of the things that makes us very different as Christians. That we are committed to doing the right thing, serving the Lord with all of our heart. And that means every day and every aspect of what we're doing. We're making tough choices when you're in difficult situations. You're trusting the Lord and serving Him and loving Him with all your heart. That's integrity, the integrity that all of us need in all of our lives.

Would you stand with me and let's pray together.

[PRAYER] Heavenly Father, it's in moments like this that we are confronted with our own sins, our own failures, our mistakes that often have changed us. Sometimes those mistakes have

callused us. Sometimes they've changed even our desires for you and for your church and for serving you. So Lord, I pray that you would renew a steadfast spirit, that you would provide a clean heart for each person here. Renew that calling inside of each one of us. That calling to be pure, that calling to do what's right. Give us a passion for you, Father, that we would serve you wholeheartedly and not turn away to other idols in our lives. That we would serve you with everything that we are. We do want to love you. We want to serve you. We ask that you would not allow sin to get in the way. Lord, I pray for each of my brothers and sisters here that if there's a sin that's hindering their progress with you that you would cause such great conviction in their lives that they won't have to see that power of God on a negative side. We can see the power that you offer us on that positive side. Lord, that's what we want. We ask for your grace to come in and abound in our lives for you to empower us to do what's right, to clean us up. Lord, use us for your kingdom. We know that revival starts right now and it starts in each one of our hearts. So we ask for you to do that deeper work inside of us as we each wrestle with our own sin, our own frailty, and the forgiveness, and faithfulness that you provide. In Jesus' name, amen.