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1 Samuel 15:1-35

Twenty-fifth Message

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THREE STRIKES AND YOU'RE OUT

SERIES: *THE CROSSING FATES*

The prophet Joel exhorted Israel:

**Return to the LORD your God,
for he is gracious and merciful,
slow to anger, and abounding in steadfast love;
and he relents over disaster. (Joel 2:13 ESV)**

Joel instructs God's people that prophetic oracles of judgment are conditional. If they will humble themselves and repent, the compassionate God promises to "relent" (or "change his mind") and replace his judgment with mercy. God's compassion toward sinners is perhaps his most celebrated attribute among his people. But can we push God too far? Is there a limit to his relenting?

In 1 Samuel, Israel's first king is given three tests of his faith. In chapter 13, Saul fails at the altar and loses the possibility of having an enduring dynasty. In chapter 14, he repeats the sin of Cain in his foiled attempt to put his son to death, and loses the respect of his own people. In this, the third and final test, Saul caves in to blatant compromise and persistent rationalization, and loses the kingdom. For Saul, it is "three strikes and you're out"; the narrator seals it in stone with "God will not relent" (or "change his mind").

In one of the most sobering chapters in the Bible, we shall examine the treacherous road of compromise, the ease with which we fall into compromise, and our amazing ability to rationalize it. But beyond the painful exposure of the darkness of the human heart, the narrative surprisingly reveals the vulnerability of the Lord's heart alongside his uncompromising holiness. The paradox is surprising, but if we can hold these in tension, we will discover the motivating secret to holy living.

I. Amalek Placed Under the Ban (1 Sam 15:1-9)

A. The Command for Holy War (15:1-3)

Samuel said to Saul, "I am the one the LORD sent to anoint you king over his people Israel; so listen now to the message from the LORD. This is what the LORD Almighty says: 'I will punish the Amalekites for what they did to Israel when they waylaid them as they came up from Egypt. Now go, attack the Amalekites and totally destroy all that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys.'" (1 Sam 15:1-3 TNIV)

To our amazement, having failed at the altar in worship, and been found guilty of betrayal and attempted murder, God commissions Saul to be his instrument for justice among the nations. The fact that God continues to entrust Saul with kingly responsibilities after his shameful and despicable failures speaks volumes about God's patience and longsuffering with us. God honors his commitments. He doesn't throw us away whenever we disappoint him. On the other hand, God holds leaders accountable for their choices and actions. God insists that those who lead do so justly, and failure to do so will be met with severe consequences. So to those who live under faithless authority, take courage! God sees it all, and you are not expendable.

To an Israelite, the mere mention of "Amalekite" would have evoked revulsion analogous to what the term "Nazi" would to a Holocaust survivor. The Amalekites were a semi-nomadic tribe that was scattered over a vast territory of the desert wilderness in the western Sinai, south of Palestine. "Most of the Amalekites seem to have occupied the less desirable fringe areas adjacent to land capable of supporting more sedentary populations"¹—which made them dependent on the success of their raiding parties to support their populations. As Israel made their journey out of Egypt, they first encountered the Amalekites at Rephidim, in the southern part of the Sinai Peninsula. In an unprovoked attack, the Amalekites preyed on the weakest in Israel—the young, the elderly, the sick, and pregnant women—who could not keep pace and lagged behind (Deut 25:17-19). Because of these merciless atrocities, God vowed to bring Amalek to justice after he gave his people

rest from all their enemies: "You shall blot out the memory of Amalek from under heaven; you shall not forget" (Deut 25:19).

After six centuries have passed, the time is ripe for justice, and Saul is honored with the high privilege of fulfilling the prophecy given to Moses. He receives explicit instructions for implementing the divine decree, with no deviation allowed. The term "devote to destruction" (*haram*) occurs eight times in the chapter and designates an act of total consecration to God. In war it designated "the consecration of a city and its inhabitants to destruction"²—something that is difficult for us to hear. How can God command "the slaughter of the innocents"?

Though we haven't time to fully explore the issue, let me offer a few thoughts to give you a starting point for building a historical and theological perspective. First, this is not "racial cleansing," but an expression of justice by a holy God who maintains the right to hold his creation accountable for gross injustices. Second, God takes no pleasure in the death of the wicked. He desires that everyone should turn from his evil ways and live (Ezek 18:23, 32). God always offers forgiveness and salvation to those who will repent, as is demonstrated in the case of Rahab, the harlot. When the city of Jericho was devoted to destruction, she repented and she and her father's household were saved (Josh 6:25). To that end, God demonstrated incredible patience with the Amalekites, granting them more than ample time to repent.

Third, their persistent refusal to fear God sowed the seeds of their own destruction. God is patient and slow to anger, "abounding in love and faithfulness" (Exod 34:6); he nevertheless "does not leave the guilty unpunished" (v. 7). Fourth, God's historical judgments are inescapable reminders that there will be a judgment at the end of history, where each one of us will give an account of our deeds (Rom 2:6-8; 14:12; Heb 4:13). Fifth, as severe as death is, it is not final. All are raised to stand before the righteous judge, and we can trust the Judge of the world to do what is right. Sixth, meditating on these events elevates the glory of the cross and gives us a greater appreciation for the price our Savior paid. And seventh, in the age of the New Covenant, believers are called to love their enemies, and "put to death the deeds of the flesh" (Rom 8:13; Col 3:5) in their own bodies with the uncompromising severity of a surgeon's knife upon cancer cells (Mark 9:43-48).³

B. Preparations for holy war (15:4-6)

So Saul summoned the men and mustered them at Telaim—two hundred thousand foot soldiers and ten thousand from Judah. Saul went to the city of Amalek and set an ambush in the ravine. Then he said to the Kenites, "Go away, leave the Amalekites so that I do not destroy you along with them; for you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came up out of Egypt." So the Kenites moved away from the Amalekites. (15:4-6)

With his divine orders in hand, Saul assembles a large force for this solemn task. He positions his troops in a low-lying stream bed (the Brook of Egypt, which served as a major highway), where they prepare an ambush. The ravine gave the troops ample cover for a surprise frontal assault on the city, as well as the ability to attack any Amalekites attempting to escape.

Once the troops are in position, Saul warns the Kenites of the immanent destruction to give them the opportunity to escape. The Kenites, descendants of Moses' father-in-law, had a very positive history with Israel (Judg 1:16; 4:17-21). Saul uses this occasion to repay them for acts of kindness ("loyal-love") they showed to Israel when they came up out of Egypt.

Saul's action seems praiseworthy: it is consistent with God's character; it has historical precedent (Gen 19:12-13); and it receives no rebuke from the prophet later in the chapter. But in a situation of this gravity it betrays a high-handed independence. Saul portrays himself as God's equal, who is quite capable of discerning, without divine consultation, between what should be devoted to destruction and what should be spared without

divine consultation. Even our best deeds when done in the wrong spirit can be faulty. This pre-war interlude strikes an ominous chord foreshadowing later events.

C. Holy war compromised (15:7-9)

Then Saul attacked the Amalekites all the way from Havilah to Shur, near the eastern border of Egypt. He took Agag king of the Amalekites alive, and all his people he totally destroyed with the sword. But Saul and the army spared Agag and the best of the sheep and cattle, the fat calves and lambs—everything that was good. These they were unwilling to destroy completely, but everything that was despised and weak they totally destroyed. (15:7-9)

Saul's victory was swift and impressive, sweeping over a vast area "from Havilah as far as Shur." In the midst of the euphoric victory, Saul and his troops are overcome with the same spirit that tempted Achan to steal some of the spoils devoted to God. Saul set the example, sparing Agag and parading him home like a prized animal for the king's glory. The troops follow suit. They keep the best of the animals for themselves and offer what was "despised and worthless" to God—a sin that continued throughout Israel's history (Mal 1:6-12), and is an all too common occurrence in the church today.

The ease with which Saul and his troops compromised God's holy orders is instructive to how susceptible we are to compromise in the wake of our spiritual victories and earthy successes. When God uses you as his instrument for his glory, it is tempting to tarnish his glory by putting your own name on it. Ray Stedman used to say, "There is no end to the good you can do if you don't care who gets the credit."

The narrator now gives the responses of God and Samuel to Saul's disobedience.

II. Reactions to Compromise (1 Sam 15:10-12)

A. God's grief and regret (15:10-11a)

Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel: "I regret that I have made Saul king, because he has turned away from me and has not carried out my instructions." (15:10-11a)

Saul's selective obedience finds zero acceptance with God. The news comes to Samuel in a nighttime vision, similar to the one he first experienced as a youth, regarding God's judgment on the house of Eli, the high priest. This short summary gives us insight into God's heart and how it pains him to do what Saul has now forced him to do. Because he has turned his back on God, God must now turn away from the king. Robert Bergen observes: "The only other occasion in Scripture where the Lord stated that he was 'grieved' over peoples' actions was when he observed the wickedness of humanity that led to the universal flood (Gen 6:7). The employment of the term here suggests that the Lord was deeply concerned—or, suffered emotional pain—regarding choices Saul made of his own volition."⁴

B. Samuel's anger (15:11b)

Samuel was angry, and he cried out to the LORD all that night. (15:11b)

Samuel is devastated when he receives the news. The fact that this new venture of the monarchy has just gone up in smoke puts the prophet over the edge. His anger rises beyond the boiling point and, as Fokkelman explains, for good reason: "[T]he introduction of the monarchy and the anointing of Saul are the greatest acts of Samuel's life and have meant all the more to him because they required considerable self-sacrifice on his part. God had to persuade, and even order him in fact, before he could be involved... Now, however, ... [t]he same Lord who first had to win him over to the monarchy now flatly announces that he is cancelling it and declares Samuel's life work worthless."⁵

Anger is the natural response of the human heart. Experiencing the emotion is not wrong, for without it we would not be human. The key is what we do with our anger. Rather than denying or suppressing it, Samuel learned well from his mother, pouring it out before the living God. Though the concept is foreign to us, what Hannah modeled became normative in Israel's worship through the psalms of lament (which account for 50 of 150 psalms). There are great benefits to articulating anger before God. "[Samuel avoids] one of the most vicious traps which ensnare the human psyche: rancour. Rancour is the immobilizing mixture of grief and anger... By allowing and expressing this feeling he prevents himself from becoming emotionally blocked, and remains mobile. As a result he then comes into contact with deeper layers within him and experiences meanings which, in humans, so

often form the other side of anger: pain, despair and sorrow run deeply through him. That is why 'he entreated all night long.'"⁶

After taking full advantage of the night to vent his anger and articulate his pain before a God who listens, soothes and gently corrects, by morning Samuel is sufficiently calm and prepared to address the king. Unfortunately, Saul is nowhere to be found.

C. Saul's self-congratulation (15:12)

Early in the morning Samuel got up and went to meet Saul, but he was told, "Saul has gone to Carmel. There he has set up a monument in his own honor and has turned and gone on down to Gilgal." (15:12)

In contrast to God's grief and Samuel's rage, Saul is euphoric. After the day's triumph, he is oblivious to his sin and ready to throw a party. But, overcome with impatience to receive accolades from the prophet, he stops the royal procession halfway to congratulate himself in his own version of the Academy Awards. He builds the stage, lays out the red carpet, welcomes the audience of one, takes the microphone as MC and, his face lit with excitement, announces the winners:

"For this year's best actor in a war film, the Oscar goes to... King Saul!" Saul applauds himself, then humbly accepts and thanks the academy for their recognition of his hard work and sacrifice.

"For this year's best playwright of a royal cover-up, the Oscar goes to... King Saul!" The king, now a little embarrassed by all the attention, makes a shorter speech.

"And for the best producer of a foreign film, the Oscar goes to... King Saul! Oh, I can't wait to see Daddy's face when he reads the morning headlines: 'A clean sweep at the Oscars for Benjamin's Favorite Son!'"

Disgusting, isn't it? But how often do we in more subtle and sophisticated ways create stages of self-congratulation? Pride runs deep. It takes Samuel three rounds of confrontation to get Saul to own up to his sin. Perhaps you'll hear Saul's reasoning resonating in your heart as he uses every weapon in the human arsenal to rationalize his sin: First he deflects the blame, then justifies it, then denies it, and finally minimizes it.

III. Confronting Compromise (1 Sam 15:13-31)

A. First confrontation: Regarding the animals (15:13-19)

1. Saul deflects the blame and justifies the sin (15:13-15)

When Samuel reached him, Saul said, "The LORD bless you! I have carried out the LORD's instructions." But Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of sheep in my ears? What is this lowing of cattle that I hear?" Saul answered, "The soldiers brought them from the Amalekites; they spared the best of the sheep and cattle to sacrifice to the LORD your God, but we totally destroyed the rest." (15:13-15)

Blinded by his self-satisfying ego, Saul runs out to embrace Samuel like a schoolboy coming home with an A+ on his report card. Unfortunately, his blessing and self-congratulation do not sit well with the prophet amidst the *baa-ing* of sheep and the *lowing* of oxen. Taken aback by Samuel's sharp question, he immediately shifts the blame to the people and justifies their action with "a pious objective: 'to sacrifice to Yahweh, your God.'... With the sweet 'your God' Saul tries to involve Samuel in the design."⁷

2. Samuel's rebuttal: You did not obey (15:16-19)

"Enough!" Samuel said to Saul. "Let me tell you what the LORD said to me last night." "Tell me," Saul replied. Samuel said, "Although you were once small in your own eyes, did you not become the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel. And he sent you on a mission, saying, 'Go and completely destroy those wicked people, the Amalekites; make war on them until you have wiped them out.' Why did you not obey the LORD? Why did you pounce on the plunder and do evil in the eyes of the LORD?" (15:16-19)

Saul's child-like excuses so infuriate Samuel that he stops him midstream, refusing to even enter into the discussion. The prophet brings him back to his calling as Israel's king. As the Lord's representative king, he was ultimately responsible to carry out the Lord's command. God's instructions were not complicated, and the seriousness of the mission had been drilled into him. When Saul attempts to place the blame on the people, he condemns himself as a leader. The bottom line is, he did not obey the "voice" of the Lord. Samuel then shatters Saul's justification about pious intentions. Their motivation was not devotion but their fleshly appetites, for they "pounced" on the spoil like voracious vultures to the prey (the same term used in 14:32).

Down but not out, Saul manages a rebuttal, forcing Samuel into a second round of confrontation.

B. Second confrontation: Regarding Agag (15:20-23)

1. Saul's denial, deflection and justification

"But I did obey the LORD," Saul said. **"I went on the mission the LORD assigned me. I completely destroyed the Amalekites and brought back Agag their king. The soldiers took sheep and cattle from the plunder, the best of what was devoted to God, in order to sacrifice them to the LORD your God at Gilgal."** (15:20-21)

In response to Samuel's powerful and penetrating accusation, Saul pushes back with a more forceful denial: "I have obeyed the voice of the Lord." But then he qualifies his innocence with the mention of Agag. I suspect he felt that this one small mistake would still earn him a 98% mark for obedience. But again, the real blame rests on the people, who had good religious intentions. When we run out of excuses for our sin, we have two options: we can either confess and repent of it, or deny it with more force. Saul has had two opportunities to confess his sin, but he refused both. Because of his persistent pride, the hammer of judgment falls.

2. Samuel's rebuttal: Obedience is greater than sacrifice (15:22-23)

But Samuel replied:

"Does the LORD delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD?"

To obey is better than sacrifice,

and to heed is better than the fat of rams.

**For rebellion is like the sin of divination,
and arrogance like the evil of idolatry.**

**Because you have rejected the word of the LORD,
he has rejected you as king."** (15:22-23)

Saul's adamant refusal to take responsibility for his sin is equivalent to calling God a liar (1 John 1:8). So he gets a lesson in theology tailored to his crimes and canonized in poetry. The driving theme of the chapter—"obeying the voice of the Lord"—frames the poem and is explicated in detail and applied to Saul's life in particular. In chapter 13, Saul disobeyed Samuel's command to wait for his arrival in Gilgal. Because of his impatience he *rebelled* and took it upon himself to offer "*burnt offerings*" to secure God's favor for the battle. In the most recent battle, Saul disobeyed the voice of God and spared the best of the Amalekite animals to "*sacrifice*" to the Lord. There is nothing wrong with sacrifice *per se*. It was intended to be an authentic, external expression of our relationship with God—what Jesus called "worshiping in spirit and truth." But when the externals of religion are perverted by the rich and powerful to perpetuate their sin, God's name is violated.

In prophetic fashion, Samuel unmasks the evil behind Saul's phony worship. Saul's sin of "*rebellion*" in chapter 13 is heightened by his "*presumption*" in chapter 15. The latter term connotes "to display pushiness," thus to be "stubborn," "arrogant," or "insubordinate." It well characterizes Saul's relationship to Samuel, persistently "pushing" his phony excuses on the prophet. Fokkelman sums it up well: "Samuel's criticism is therefore that religion in the hands of someone as headstrong and pushy as Saul becomes perverted into deceit and magic, and the objects thereof the abomination of idols."⁸

The haunting words of the prophet are literally confirmed, when on the last night of his life, the king disguises himself to court the favors of a witch. The woman refuses, knowing the king has "cut off the mediums and the necromancers from the land," and if she is caught she will be put to death. Saul guarantees her safety with a blasphemous oath: "As the LORD lives, no punishment shall come upon you for this thing" (28:10). Saul breaks every oath he makes in 1 Samuel except this vow to the witch of Endor.

C. Third confrontation: A hard-fought confession (15:24-26)

1. Saul's confession, sort of (15:24-25)

Then Saul said to Samuel, "I have sinned. I violated the LORD's command and your instructions. I was afraid of the men and so I gave in to them. Now I beg you, forgive my sin and come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD." (15:24-25)

Samuel's relentless prosecution finally breaks through all of Saul's resistance. In one instant the king spills out his confession, owning up to his disobedience and irresponsible leadership. But then, as he anticipates the pain and humiliation of exposure, he betrays his divided heart by requesting that Samuel shield him from the ensuing consequences. The scene is all too common in our personal relationships. When people finally say they're "sorry,"

one is not sure if they're "sorry" for their sin or for having gotten caught and having to endure the shame of exposure.

2. Samuel refuses to back down (15:26)

But Samuel said to him, "I will not go back with you. You have rejected the word of the LORD, and the LORD has rejected you as king over Israel!" (15:26)

Samuel remains steadfast: he will not back down from the Lord's verdict. To grant honor to a condemned king would be hypocritical to his office. The prophet is a great example to us of being God's representative in the midst of a crisis. Because of his nighttime vigil with God, Samuel has so far been able to keep his personal anger in check on the one hand, and avoid being overly sympathetic on the other.

IV. Parting Pains (1 Sam 15:27-35)

A. A torn robe, relationship and kingdom (15:27-29)

As Samuel turned to leave, Saul caught hold of the hem of his robe, and it tore. Samuel said to him, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today and has given it to one of your neighbors—to one better than you. He who is the Glory of Israel does not lie or change his mind; for he is not a human being, that he should change his mind." (15:27-29)

As the court adjourns and Samuel turns his back on Saul to leave, Saul's true colors are revealed. When the "pushy" and "rebellious" king can't have his way, things get ugly. He grabs Samuel's robe, the one his mother made him, and it tears. The abusive violation of Samuel's person ignites the Spirit and inspires the prophet to see the revelatory meaning in the symbol of the torn robe. It seems the more Saul resists and pushes back at God, the more he makes the consequences of his choices irrevocable, and the more theology Samuel is obliged to teach him.

Samuel's torn robe becomes symbolic that "this day" God has "torn" the kingdom from Saul and handed it to an associate "who is better than you." The prophet underscores the irrevocability of the tear by giving God a new name, the "Glory of Israel." Our English word "glory" doesn't capture the full range of semantic meaning of the Hebrew, which joins together the ideas "luster," "glory," and "beauty" with "everlastingness" and "permanence." Fokkelman explicates its meaning: "It is, he says, irreconcilable with God's continual care and faithfulness to Israel that he should now go back on his decision. Such 'remorse' would be a form of 'deception.' This might be possible in the case of men, but not in the case of 'the Eminence of Israel.'"⁹

B. Pitiful worship (15:30-31)

Saul replied, "I have sinned. But please honor me before the elders of my people and before Israel; come back with me, so that I may worship the LORD your God." So Samuel went back with Saul, and Saul worshiped the LORD. (15:30-31)

"The immutability of the judgment upon him finally sinks in to the king...Saul no longer dares to ask for forgiveness. Now he clings fast to a last tiny hope, to retain his political authority."¹⁰ His plea arouses compassion in Samuel; he does not completely undermine the king before he selects a new one. Together they return to Gilgal, but only Saul bows down before the Lord. Samuel has other business to attend to.

C. Bloody business (15:32-33)

Then Samuel said, "Bring me Agag king of the Amalekites." Agag came to him in chains. And he thought, "Surely the bitterness of death is past." But Samuel said, "As your sword has made women childless, so will your mother be childless among women." And Samuel put Agag to death before the LORD at Gilgal. (15:32-33)

Samuel has a different view of worship than Saul, for "to obey is better than sacrifice." If the king refused to fulfill the divine directive, Samuel will. How can people worship when spiritual cancer is living in their midst? After a long wait in custody, Agag is brought forth, cheerfully thinking he has been spared. But Samuel shatters his hopes with a painful lesson in Hebrew poetry:

just as / made childless / women / your sword
so / made childless / among women / your mother

"It is a small, but perfect, poem." The verbal repetition works "like a precision lock," and "clicks shut only as a result of the last letter. It is only the very last word that reveals to Agag what awaits him: his execution."¹¹

Samuel doesn't spare any effort to finish what the king had failed to do. The ESV is more graphic than the TNIV: "And Samuel hacked Agag to pieces before the LORD in Gilgal."

D. A house in mourning (15:34-35)

Then Samuel left for Ramah, but Saul went up to his home in Gibeah of Saul. Until the day Samuel died, he did not go to see Saul again, though Samuel mourned for him. And the LORD regretted that he had made Saul king over Israel. (15:34-35)

The scene closes with Samuel and Saul going their separate ways in irreconcilable silence. Though the prophet's role with the king is finished, the emotional pain still stings, and Samuel mourns for Saul. Fokkelman notes: "Mourning usually follows death, but here it precedes it!...[W]e realize that Saul as king is already dead; no stronger expression of the termination of his monarchy can be imagined." But "Samuel is not left alone in his feelings. God puts himself next to him."¹²

Following the day's intense emotional drama, we would expect Saul to be instantly removed from serving in the public arena. But the summary of Saul's military record in 1 Samuel 14:47-42 shows that his military prowess continued unimpaired. As far as we know, Saul lost only one battle (his last) during his entire military career. Saul, like many modern politicians, was extremely resilient and able to function at a high level, even as a rejected king.

For the spiritually minded, this perspective is highly instructive. First, it helps us adjust our expectations. Though Saul has been censured by the prophet, rejected by God and publicly humiliated, one cannot naively assume that he will immediately exit the public arena. He still has a long reign ahead of him (some 13 years), which God will use for his purposes. Secondly, the prophet's pain and holy perspective have the last word and insulate us from being deceived by appearances.

V. Motivating Secrets to Holy Living

A. The uncompromising holiness of God

Eugene Peterson sums up Saul's tragic life as a warning to us about God's uncompromising holiness: "Saul looms out of the past as a tragic figure, a dark, spectral, craggy eminence—a doomsday warning to all men and women who would hear and take seriously God's word in their lives...A thousand years separate Saul and Judas Iscariot, but the two men share the dubious honor of being persons called into positions of leadership, betraying that calling, and ending their lives by suicide."¹³

The author of Hebrews gives a similar warning to believers who were taking refuge from persecution under the legal umbrella of Judaism. This compromise of their commitment to Christ was placing them in the extreme danger of suffering a fate similar to Saul's:

For it is impossible, in the case of those who have once been enlightened, who have tasted the heavenly gift, and have shared in the Holy Spirit, and have tasted the goodness of the word of God and the powers of the age to come, and then have fallen away, to restore them again to repentance, since they are crucifying once again the Son of God to their own harm and holding him up to contempt. (Heb 6:4-6 ESV)

Though this text seems contradictory to the doctrine of election and eternal security, the New Testament equally affirms divine election and human responsibility. The apostles describe as not being authentic believers those who tasted the divine gifts but did not press on to full maturity and fell away. Like a fetus growing within a mother's womb, they showed all the signs of life, yet their existence was made possible by the life of their mother. They had yet to breathe on their own or feed themselves. If a miscarriage occurs before birth, it is impossible to restore life to a fetus. This may be analogous to our spiritual birth. You may call yourself a "believer," but in reality you may be still dependent on the faith of your parents or the life of the Christian community and have not yet made Christ your Lord. The apostles warned that you should never take your calling for granted, but should be diligent to be constantly growing in faith and godly character "to make your calling and election sure" (2 Pet 1:10).

B. Grieving the Holy Spirit

And do not grieve the Holy Spirit of God, with whom you were sealed for the day of redemption. (Eph 4:30 TNIV)

The second motivating secret to holy living is being sensitized to the emotional pain and grief that our sin causes God. It is difficult for us to live with the constant awareness that our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit and that he is deeply affected by what we do, where we go and what we think. One reason we are not sensitive to the Spirit's grief is our ability to harden our hearts to his gentle voice prodding us to turn away from our sin. Another reason is that God never abuses or berates us for the pain we cause him. Just as Saul had no clue of the intense sorrow Samuel endured on his behalf, so we are most often unaware of the heartache we inflict on our heavenly Father. But then there comes a time when the veil is lifted and we catch a glimpse of who we really are at our core. And it is then we begin to comprehend the length, breadth and depth of the Lord's love for us. Peter experienced such a moment in the courtyard of the High Priest's house during our Lord's trial. When questioned a third time by a bystander if he was a disciple of Jesus, Peter replied:

"Man, I don't know what you're talking about!" Just as he was speaking, the rooster crowed. The Lord turned and looked straight at Peter. Then Peter remembered the word the Lord had spoken to him: "Before the rooster crows today, you will disown me three times." And he went outside and wept bitterly. (Luke 22:60-62 TNIV)

Jesus' look of grievous love broke down all of Peter's defenses and allowed him to experience some measure of the Lord's holy grief. He wept bitterly.

C. Welcoming grief

The third motivating secret to holy living is to learn to embrace our grief. We dread the moments when we come face to face with our sin and failure, but in reality these moments are gateways to our healing. God doesn't pretend our sin never happened, nor does he minimize it as if it was painlessly forgiven. Rather, he confronts us in our sin, coming alongside of us in compassion and inviting us to look closely, consider and repent. This process—from grief to repentance—is demonstrated over and over again throughout the Scriptures, from David and the prophets to Jesus and his disciples. After the resurrection, Jesus went searching for Peter to restore him after his threefold denial. Jesus found him exhausted after an unproductive night of fishing. In one of the most intimate scenes in the Bible, he restores his broken disciple with a seaside meal of loving grief:

He said to him the third time, "Simon, son of John, do you love me?" Peter was grieved because he said to him the third time, "Do you love me?" and he said to him, "Lord, you know everything; you know that I love you." Jesus said to him, "Feed my sheep." (John 21:17 ESV)

When broken Peter is finally able to embrace his grief, he receives from Jesus not only forgiveness but also ordination as a pastor! His credentials? The look of love from his Savior.

1. Gerald L. Mattingly, "Amalek," *ABD* 1:169.
2. Jackie A. Naudé, "brm," *NIDOTTE* 2:276.
3. For further discussion of this sensitive issue, see Peter C. Craigie, *The Problem of War in the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1978); John W. Wenham, *The Enigma of Evil: Can We Believe in the Goodness of God?* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1985), 99-101, 119-25, 165-68; and Bruce K. Waltke with Charles Yu, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 376-404.
4. R. D. Bergen, 1, 2 *Samuel* (NAC; Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1996), 170.
5. J. P. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates, Narrative Art and Poetry in the Books of Samuel, Vol. 2* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 1986), 92.
6. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 92-93.
7. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 96.
8. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 100-101.
9. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 106.
10. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 107.
11. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 105.
12. Fokkelman, *The Crossing Fates*, 110.
13. Eugene H. Peterson, *First and Second Samuel* (WBC; Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 1999), 75.