

## SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

**COFFEEHOUSE FIVE CHURCH**  
**DAVID-THE MAN AFTER GOD'S OWN HEART**  
**PARTIAL OBEDIENCE IS DISOBEDIENCE**  
**1 SAMUEL 15:1-22**  
**08/27/2017**



### MAIN POINT

God requires our wholehearted obedience, not our partial submission.

### INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

**Growing up, how serious were your parents about your following the rules and guidelines they gave you?**

**How much leeway does your employer (or regulatory agency if a business owner) allow you in how completely you adhere to policy and standards?**

**How much does the IRS permit you to exercise your own best judgment regarding which tax laws you obey and which you overrule in favor of your better idea?**

Our culture likes to celebrate the “American spirit” of the “self-made” person who pulls himself or herself up by the bootstraps. And many times that independent spirit serves us well. Many an immigrant or poverty-stricken child has achieved great business or academic success by refusing to go along with the script of their initial circumstances. We salute, honor, and draw inspiration from individuals who rewrite their life stories for the good.

But we do not have the freedom to edit every script. Some scripts stand right just as they are written. Any effort on our part to rewrite such scripts leads not to stories to be celebrated, but tales of warning to be heeded. King Saul learned this truth the hard way.

### WHAT DOES IT MEAN

Unpack the biblical text to discover what the Scripture says or means about a particular topic.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 15:1-3.**

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**How clear were God’s instructions to Saul through Samuel?**

**What is your reaction to the instructions God gave Saul in verse 3? Why do you think God gave such seemingly harsh instructions to Saul, to “completely destroy everything” related to the Amalekites? What might Saul have thought of these instructions?**

Amalek was the grandson of Esau (Gen. 36:12). His descendants were the first people to attack the Israelites after their exodus from Egypt (Ex. 17:8), even before the receiving of the Ten Commandments. God had determined at the time to “blot out the memory of Amalek under heaven” (v. 14; see also Num. 24:20). God had determined that this was the appropriate time to make good on His word to Moses, and King Saul was the appropriate instrument to use.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 15:7-9,13-15.**

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**What did King Saul do right in these verses? What did he do wrong?**

**How do you think King Saul felt about what he did? Did Saul obey the instructions the Lord gave him? Explain.**

**What would make Saul think offering a sacrifice from that which he was supposed to destroy would be a good idea?**

After King Saul received the instructions to destroy the Amalekites, he gathered his troops (apparently without delay or hesitation) and set about his task (vv. 4-6). The region “from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt” represents a very sizeable geographic area. It was much more extensive than merely an attack on a single city and likely took days, if not weeks, to accomplish. Even so, the campaign was successful as Saul and his army “completely destroyed all the rest of the people with the sword”—all except Agag, their king and the best animals “and the best of everything else.” But other than that, he had pretty much done what he’d been told. And the goods that remained had been spared “in order to offer a sacrifice to the LORD.” Sounds pretty noble, doesn’t it? Because of his fear of the people (v. 24), Saul surrendered what God wanted for what the people wanted.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 15:10-11, 17-19.**

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**How would you characterize God’s and Samuel’s reactions toward King Saul’s efforts regarding the Amalekites? Why would they have had such strong reactions when Saul had done most of what he had been instructed?**

**What lessons should you and I draw from Saul’s example and God’s and Samuel’s reactions?**

Saul’s failure to fully obey God caused God to “regret” that He had made Saul king. The only other time the Bible uses the word “regret” with God is to describe His reason for destroying the world with a flood (Gen. 6:7). God was more than just a little miffed. Even though Saul had done most of what he had been instructed, God declared that Saul had “not carried out My instructions.” Samuel asked Saul, “why didn’t you obey the LORD?” Clearly they understood that partial obedience is really just disobedience.

**HAVE A VOLUNTEER READ 1 SAMUEL 15:22.**

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**Do you see any relevance of verse 22 to our day and culture? Explain.**

**How would you state the principle of verse 22 in your own words?**

Samuel was quite clear with Saul—there is no sacrifice we can offer God that outweighs or substitutes our obedience to Him. We have no skill, ability, or resource that God needs. Why, then, would we ever think that offering Him that which He doesn’t need could in any way make up for withholding from Him that which He wants—our obedience? In response, Saul confessed his sin twice (vv. 24,30), but we have no evidence that he repented of the sin. The remainder of the biblical account of Saul shows him either being ineffective or attempting to kill David, his God-anointed successor. Had he repented, the Bible is clear that God offers forgiveness and cleansing (Isa. 1:18; Acts 3:19; 1 John 1:9).

## WHAT DOES IT MEAN FOR ME

Help your group identify how the truths from the Scripture passage apply directly to their lives.

**It seems so ridiculous when we put it in words, but why do we sometimes think we have ideas that can improve on the instruction God has given us?**

**How do people today sometimes attempt to offer God sacrifices rather than obeying Him? What “regret” have you caused God?**

**What partial obedience do you need to make right with God?**

**Are you trying to avoid full obedience to God, or attempting to appease Him through good works? If so, repent.**

## PRAY

Gracious Father, we are too much like King Saul—we think we can improve on Your plan or placate You with sacrifices rather than obedience. Please forgive us and teach us that all You want from us is our love and obedience.

## COMMENTARY

### 1 SAMUEL 15:1-22

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15:1 Saul’s power and purpose lay in God’s anointing; Israel was His people, not Saul’s. Therefore, Saul needed to heed the divine instructions that Samuel now was giving him.

15:2 Exodus 17:8-16 records Israel’s initial victory over Amalek under Joshua’s leadership. At that time, God promised to oppose the Amalekites continually.

15:3 The phrase destroy everything they have describes the practice of the ban, wherein Israel would destroy everything in a town that had breath, including humans and animals. God had authority over when all life began and ended. In the battle of Jericho (Jos 6:17-21), the plunder went into the Lord’s treasury; at other times, the people were allowed to keep it (Jos 8:27).

15:4 Telaim was probably located in the Negev of Judah (Jos 15:21-24). The men from Judah are again listed separately.

15:5 The city of Amalek may designate the place the Amalekites were living rather than a city, since the group was nomadic.

15:6 Saul’s warning to the Kenites rewarded earlier friendly terms with them (Judg 1:16; 4:11). The kindness to all the Israelites is only mentioned here, but clearly this was part of Israel’s memory in a land where people had long memories (2Ch 20:10-11).

15:7 This extensive campaign covered a broad region, from Arabia almost to Egypt’s border, whose inhabitants included many descendants of Ishmael (Gen 25:18).

15:8 The phrase captured Agag... alive hints at Saul’s coming disobedience to what God had commanded (v. 3).

15:9 The Hebrew text emphasizes that Saul was the one primarily responsible for sparing Agag. The people also spared... the best of everything else, another violation of God’s command (v. 3). Of course, destroying all the worthless and unwanted things was no great sacrifice.

15:11 The verb regret with God as its subject occurs only here and in Gen 6:7, where it denotes God’s regrets over making humanity and His ultimate decision to bring the great flood. In both cases, people made wrong moral choices, and God’s foreknowledge meant He knew what people would do. Nonetheless, it pained Him to see the disobedience come to pass. The word translated turned away commonly means “repent” when it speaks of turning away from sin, but here it describes Saul’s conscious decision to cease following the Lord. Samuel was frustrated by Saul’s failing kingship, particularly as he remembered he had anointed him (10:1). Saul had indeed turned out to be a king just like the ones of “all the other nations” (8:5,20), but the people had persisted in their request despite his sober warnings (8:11-18).

15:12 Perhaps God had told Samuel to get up early during Samuel's intense prayer the previous night (v. 11). Ironically, Saul had gone to Carmel, a town about seven miles south of Hebron in Judah's hill country (Jos 15:55), to erect a monument for himself. This monument presumably would remind the Carmelites of the peace that came to their region because of Saul's victory over Amalek. Gilgal had great historical significance; it lay about 15 miles east of Gibeah, Saul's capital.

15:13 God did not share Saul's perspective on this matter.

15:14 The sound of sheep and cattle was proof that Saul had failed to execute God's command.

15:15 Saul's reference to the Lord your God (not "my God" or "our God") sounds an ominous tone but aptly fits the situation because Saul did not appear to have much of a relationship with the Lord.

15:16 Stop!—The prophet had had enough of Saul's excuses and cut him off, an action most subjects would not dare take with their king.

15:17 God had taken Saul from relatively unimportant status as a common citizen (cp. Saul's own words in 9:21) to king over Israel. The word you is emphasized in the text with respect to Saul to heighten the intensity of Samuel's words.

15:18 The presence of any survivors (in this case, King Agag and the best of the flocks and herds) was a violation of God's command.

15:19 The verbal idea in the phrase rush on the plunder is related to the word for "bird of prey," in this case swooping down on the spoils of war.

15:20 Saul's own description of his actions condemned him because he admitted to sparing Agag and to putting to death only the Amalekites and not their domesticated property as God had commanded (v. 3).

15:21 Sacrifice... at Gilgal would not substitute for obedience on Saul's part; further, God had already claimed the animals and given orders for their destruction (vv. 2-3).

15:22 Samuel's words to obey is better than sacrifice drove home the point that partial obedience of God was really disobedience, and full obedience of God mattered more than any human-concocted alternatives.