

Waiting for Ministry

1 Samuel 16:6-13

Rev. Paul J. Bucknell

A person eager to serve the Lord will often find himself hindered from going into full-time service. How should he respond to these situations?

This kind of frustration is not uncommon in the scriptures or real life! I know some people who are scared about being called into the ministry. They are not waiting! They are trying to avoid full time service. Perhaps they have seen what it costs. This is not the problem we are focusing on here. Another group of people are eager to get into ministry. They cannot wait for the opportunity. They have worked through many issues to get where they are now at. They are ready, but now for some reasons, often incomprehensible to them, they cannot move ahead. It seems God is not ready now! Fortunately, we have a lot of different scriptural teachings to help us get a grasp on this situation.



Everyone is different

We must first recognize that though we will note a general pattern in how God works, not everyone seems to fit into it in the same way. Part of this stems from the different training each of us has. Some start ahead of others. Others need to catch up on basic heart training. Others are called to various types of difficult tasks. Still others need to undergo specialized training. God knows what kind of temptations each of us will face under upcoming situations. We do not know what we or others will face. Those preparing for ministry should trust the training that God arranges. We tend to think of ourselves as more effective out on the field. Our Lord, however, at times has a varying viewpoint. If we compare ourselves with others, then we put our judgment above God's. This will become a snare and cause unneeded restlessness and frustration.

I personally know of lots of men who are in one stage or another preparing for ministry. While some of their circumstances are different, many are similar. As I hear their testimonies, I realize that many are 'held' up because of certain circumstances. Some of them face parental objection, others lack their spouse's full support, and yet others lack direction. Some think money is the problem. Still others have a 'faith' problem, "Can I really do it?"

Unfortunately, many think that going to seminary solves the problems holding them up from potential ministry. In fact seminary training is often very different than the training God desires to give those entering into the ministry. The training that schools give is focused on theology, research and knowledge skills. The Lord desires humble and obedient servants, knowledgeable of His Word.

Part of the problem is we think that spending tens of thousands of dollars for seminary training produces better training than experiences in the local church. Seminary training produces things different

than what God mostly wants. We simply expect too much out of seminary. Because we think its offer of professional training to be a solution for our lack of knowledge and experience, we are more gullible and can easily lose our original passion for the Lord. In seminary we gain confidence in ourselves and our knowledge. Bible Schools and seminaries will be around for a while and can help in a number of areas of training, but meanwhile, we need to focus on receiving the training God wants us to obtain.

God's Heart Training Program

God is very interested in training. Training is a specialized aspect of discipleship. God is able to use all sorts of situations to test and train our hearts. Our trained hearts are the foundation of a great ministry. Note the kinds of training God provides through His Word. "All Scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, for training in righteousness; that the man of God may be adequate, equipped for every good work" (2 Timothy 3:16-17). The trainings all point to a changed person who is equipped for ministry.

An untrained heart will eventually lead to great disappointment by others as well as toward oneself. Just think of King Saul. He was a great disappointment. He was such a poor king that God sent Samuel out to look for a replacement. Let us look at David's situation to get a greater feel for God's self-designed training program that He has set up for each one seeking service.

Every Christian in fact is expected to serve. God equips them with gifts to serve and because of this, every Christian is being trained by the Lord. But we should not be ignorant of special training necessary for those involved in full-time service.¹ They have become a special target of the evil one because of their increased influence. They will be doing the equipping. If they do a poor job, those associated with them will not properly serve.

God looked throughout the nation of Israel and chose David. He chose David in spite of his lowly origins. He was from a small Judean town named Bethlehem and cared for sheep. Besides this, David was the youngest of the family. God sent Samuel to choose David. We need to consider, "Why did God choose David." Let us look at what God says about His means of selecting David.

*Then it came about when they entered, that he looked at Eliab and thought, "Surely the LORD'S anointed is before Him. But the LORD said to Samuel, "Don't look at his appearance or at the height of his stature, because I have rejected him; for God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart (1 Samuel 16:6-7)."*²

Next Jesse made Shammah pass by. And he said, "Neither has the LORD chosen this one." Thus Jesse made seven of his sons pass before Samuel. But Samuel said to Jesse, "The LORD has not chosen these." And Samuel said to Jesse, "Are these all the children?" And he said, "There remains yet the youngest, and behold, he is tending the sheep." Then Samuel said to Jesse, "Send and bring him; for we will not sit down until he comes here." So he sent and brought him in. Now he was ruddy, with beautiful eyes and a handsome appearance. And the LORD said, "Arise, anoint him; for this is he." Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers; and the Spirit of the LORD came mightily upon David from that day forward. And Samuel arose and went to Ramah (1 Samuel 16:9-13).

¹ In fact, the Lord trains all His people. Training for full-time ministers needs to be more rigorous. More is at stake. "It would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck and he were thrown into the sea, than that he should cause one of these little ones to stumble" (Luke 17:2).

² NASB is used unless otherwise noted.

Choosing the right person for ministry is very important. God had apparently thought very closely on the matter. Of course, finding the right person must require some form of preparation earlier on in his life to make that person the 'right person.' One would think that Samuel would have learned these lessons being able to trace Saul's rise and fall. Evidently, he still had not adequately learned these lessons and needed God's advice. God's reproof in verse 6-7 brought about a corrected perspective so that he could discern the Lord's voice.

Selection is one matter. Training always follows. If we fail in the selection process, however, then we will definitely fail in the training process. God can do miracles, but He follows certain pathways when selecting and training His people. A house needs to be built on a good foundation. So does a man that serves God. Let us look more closely at what God said to Samuel. We find three lessons for Samuel. They are lessons we also ought to master.

#1 People are distracted by what they see.

Samuel was quite convinced that the older son, Eliab, was the right man. Our temptation is to think that a person who looks attractive, is eloquent or otherwise gifted is prepared in their heart. Samuel was caught off guard and so can we be. The danger increases when we evaluate our own lives. "The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick. Who can understand it?"(Jeremiah 17:9).

It is so easy to adopt the views common in the society. What was it that Samuel here saw that made him think Eliab was the chosen one? His stature? His age (being the oldest)? When a person sees as the world sees, he becomes insensitive to God's opinion and judgment. As a result he will make a wrong decision. Samuel almost made a terrible decision here that would have impacted Israel for a long time. What Samuel considered as a good candidate, the LORD rejected. Samuel was a godly praying man and yet he depended upon his sight. All the more we need to humble ourselves before the Lord and seek His mind regarding the preparations that we need for a ministry pleasing to Him.

#2 God observes differently than man.

Man gathers his information from his bodily senses. His judgment is limited to what he sees and hears. God's judgment is differently formed. God's judgment is not, of course, literally formed at all. This is only a figure of speech. God's judgment, His wisdom, has been with Him from eternity. The Lord knows all. He cannot learn. God is not at all distracted by the outward appearance of man.

Just think what it would mean for us to see a person in light of his past, his testings, his gifts and his motives. Well, we would have a whole different set of factors to judge by. When we see how narrow minded we are and the limited amount of information that we depend upon, we should realize that we desperately need to wait upon God for help. We cannot proceed without Him. We do not want to proceed without His careful preparation of our lives.

#3 God scrutinizes the heart.

With all the information that God has, what becomes the critical information that He judges from? This passage says that He judges the heart. "For God sees not as man sees, for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart" (1 Samuel 16:6-7). This is not the only place the scriptures attest to the importance of the heart. God wants us to love Him with all our heart, mind and soul. As the source of our affections, our heart becomes the place where our desires will eventually follow from.

What we desire greatly shapes our decisions and motives. For a time, other factors might shape us: expectations of others, parents, money, etc.. In the end, however, it is our chief affections that will shape what we do with our hearts. We desperately need God to help us see our heart for what it is so that we can eliminate its impurities.

*“The heart is more deceitful than all else and is desperately sick;
Who can understand it?” (Jeremiah 17:9).*

*“Then I will give you shepherds after My own heart,
who will feed you on knowledge and understanding. (Jeremiah 3:15).*

Reflection

Can we work along with the Lord so that He can properly prepare us for His work? We need a humble heart that welcomes His training of our hearts—no matter what it takes.

Can we trust Him to guide us through our circumstances, whether pleasant or difficult? They all become His training ground for our lives.

Waiting for Ministry

We need to visit David in one more place before we close. This is where the chief frustration comes in. David is the right man. He has the right gifts. He was even trained by Saul in royal and governing affairs by being his acquaintance. He is talented, handsome, accepted by the people and has proven himself in battle. He has had enough taste for what is coming that makes this next stage unbelievably hard. David was already anointed as king. All he was waiting for was the opening.

He was wise enough not to 'force' the opening. He easily could have. Why is it then that God had David hunted about the wilderness area for such a long time? God could have taken King Saul's life much earlier. He was already rejected. But like a mad dog on a leash, Saul with his great army kept running after David and his few hundred men.

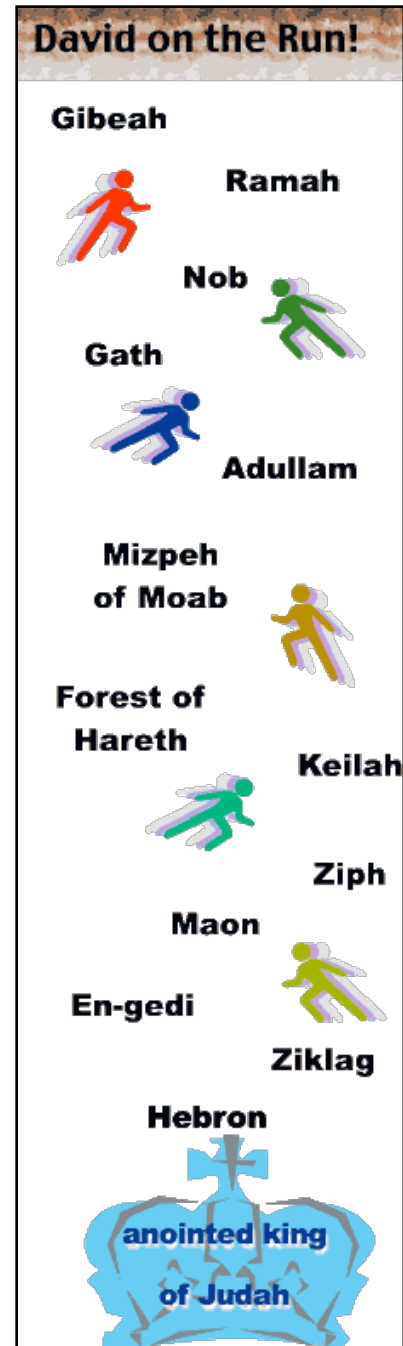
Let us think how God could have made life easier for David.

- God could have held off anointing David until later. Anointing David as king got his expectations up real high. He must have had a hard time trying to persuade his men not to kill King Saul. They expected him to be king too.
- God could have shortened Saul's life. David, the good king, could have just stepped right on in! That would have been easier for all (and better for the people).

Saul's pursuit of David took place over a number of years. David literally ran for refuge from city to city seeking to save his life. No one including David could figure why this time and kind of training was important. It was not a hapless period however. As we look back, we see there are a number of important lessons for David.

David proved his loyalty to King Saul and ultimately to the Lord.

Would David kill Saul or spare him? He decided to recognize Saul as God's anointed. David did not hurt him even though he had numerous chances. These opportunities/testings are showcased for us in I Samuel. One example is found in 1 Samuel 23-24 where David only cuts off a small portion of Saul's robe to prove he could have taken Saul's life if he had desired.



David learned to trust God in troublesome circumstances.

David's psalms were in many cases spoken from circumstances in which he was hunted down and mocked. David was anointed and yet was mocked by others that rejected him. Instead of attacking present authorities, he submitted to them, choosing to wait for God's timing and purpose. What a demonstration of waiting upon God! All through this God was shaping the man so God could greatly bless Israel.

David identified with the poor and oppressed.

David learned a lot about graciousness through his difficult times. He gathered the rough and stubborn runaways and trained them into his disciplined men. He also learned to extend special kindness to those who were down and out such as Miphosheth and others. He was a man after God's own heart. Someone could look to David and find graciousness. They would see God. Power did not go to his head. He learned how to hold power and yet be compassionate.

David deepened his reliance upon God.

David learned how to depend upon God. He describes God as his Rock, fortress or strength more than seventy times. He depended upon God. He knew he had no real strength on his own.

(A Psalm of David.) To Thee, O LORD, I call; My rock, do not be deaf to me, Lest, if Thou be silent to me, I become like those who go down to the pit. (Psalms 28:1).

(A Psalm of David.) Blessed be the LORD, my rock, Who trains my hands for war, And my fingers for battle; My lovingkindness and my fortress, My stronghold and my deliverer; My shield and He in whom I take refuge; Who subdues my people under me. (Psalms 144:1,2).

David was very gifted, but he was not fooled. He learned in the desperate straits of life and death that God alone could and would protect him. He learned to praise God because he was absolutely convinced of the Lord's greatness. He did not allow his giftedness and success hide God's goodness and purpose for his life.

David eventually became King, first over small Judah and then later as king over all the land of Israel. Even with all this training, he did turn his eyes from the Lord a few times, but when confronted, he humbled himself and came back to the Lord. David is such a clear example for us to deepen the value of the training time God has planned for us. It is a time to learn and master God's strength. It is a time to see our giftedness is not as important as our loyalty and ability to follow instructions.

Summary

Waiting for ministry is hard. We do not know how long we will be 'put out to pasture', seemingly being irrelevant as a bee among the flowers. In those very trying circumstances, however, we will find plenty of occasions for service. These will be our proving times, beautifully orchestrated by the One who wants us to succeed. Let us purpose our hearts, then, to pass these tests that our time in training might not be lengthened or found to be ineffective. Let us strive to fulfill all the works that God has designed for us by patiently seeking His training of our lives that His purposes might better be accomplished.