

Part 11 - Seeking God's Kingdom - Pressing on After the Battle - 02.08.26

I wanted to start out by sharing what God has been showing me this week. It all started last Monday morning with an email and a familiar verse in scripture... and surprisingly, the same truth can be seen in our passage today.

So last Monday I received an encouraging email from someone — and in their email, they shared a quote from a book they're reading. The quote said:

[SLIDE 1] “Even though we don't always understand the road or the process grief takes us on, it's vital that we submit to it for a time and let God do His work in us until He says otherwise.”¹

That immediately resonated with Amanda and I
—But God wasn't done showing us something.

Later that evening my family and I sat down to read from Scripture together. We were reading from James 1 which says:

“Consider it pure joy, my brothers and sisters, whenever you face trials of many kinds, because you know that the testing of your faith produces perseverance. Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.”

When Amanda read those words, something stuck out to me...

[SLIDE 2] James 1:4 - “Let perseverance finish its work...”

That's exactly what the author meant when they wrote, “let God do His work in us until He says otherwise.”

The reason this stuck out to me is because I think I've always read James 1:4 as if perseverance is something *I do from my own strength.*

But James *doesn't* say, “just grin and bear it” or “never give up.” He's not telling us to “bite the bullet and persevere harder.”

¹ Daily Prayers for Grieving Hearts (by DaySpring, 2022)

James shifts the focus away from *my strength* and back to *God's work*.

James says, “Let **perseverance** finish **its** work.”

In other words...

[SLIDE 3] We're not meant to be the source of our own perseverance—Jesus is.

We'll face “trials of many kinds,” but it's not up to us to fix everything.

The LORD just asks us to trust Him as He works in us to produce a holy kind of strength and perseverance.

Like Psalm 23 says, “The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing.”
—even in the darkest valley—because He's with us.

So, again, when we're feeling the pressures of life,
James *isn't* saying: **“Do nothing.”**

James *is* saying: **“Don't replace trust with control.”**

Notice it's about how we respond in the pressure.

Because...

[SLIDE 4] When push comes to shove, the way we respond to the pressures of life reveals who we really trust.

And, interestingly enough, that's exactly what 1 Samuel 11 teaches us.

The basic idea of 1 Samuel 11 is this: Israel suddenly found itself under extreme pressure from one of its neighbors. War was on the horizon from a stronger foe, and the question for Israel was: *Who will they trust to rescue them?*

Look at verse 1...

[SLIDE 5] 1 Samuel 11:1 - Nahash the Ammonite went up and besieged Jabesh Gilead. And all the men of Jabesh said to him, “Make a treaty with us, and we will be subject to you.”

Who is Nahash? That's actually important.

Nahash was the king of the Ammonites—Israel's neighbors to the east. These weren't strangers. Israel and Ammon had a long, complicated history, and now that tension was boiling over.

But Nahash wasn't just looking to gain land. He's out to *humiliate* the Israelites.

In verse 2, he threatens to gouge out the right eye of every Israelite man. That's not an empty threat. This was both practical *and* psychological warfare.

In the ancient world, losing your right eye meant disgrace. A soldier with one eye can't fight effectively—but he can still work. So Nahash wasn't just trying to defeat Israel. He was trying to *break* them.

We're meant to see how evil this guy is. In fact...

[SLIDE 6] Nahash is the Hebrew word that means “snake.” It’s the same word used in Genesis 3 for the serpent that deceived Adam and Eve.

Nahash isn't Satan. But any ancient Hebrew reading this would see the connection. **We're meant to see that there are very real forces of evil at work here**, and Nahash is simply a willing participant.

And so, we see in verse 1 that Nahash surrounds an Israelite city called Jabesh Gilead. When a city was put under siege, no one could go in or out without permission from the opposing army. **It's a strategy that either brings you to submit to the enemy—or slowly starve.**

Check this out:

[SLIDE 7] MAP

This map helps us see the pressure Israel was under.

On the right side of the map is **Ammon**, where Nahash and his army come from. They move northwest and surround the Israelite city of **Jabesh-Gilead**.

While they're surrounded, the men of Jabesh try to make a deal. They say, *"If you agree not to wipe us out, we'll agree to serve you."*

This is where Nahash responds with one condition. He says, *"You can serve me—but only if I gouge out the right eye of everyone here."* He wanted to break their spirit permanently by marking them in humiliation.

So the elders of Jabesh say, *"Give us a week. We'll send messengers throughout Israel. If no one comes to rescue us, we'll surrender."*

Nahash agrees.

So the messengers set out, traveling across the Jordan, eventually arriving in **Saul's hometown of Gibeah**.

And when Saul hears what Nahash is doing, the text says, ***"the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him."***

Saul then sends word throughout Israel, calling the people to gather at **Bezek**.

But this wasn't a polite request—he wasn't *asking*—he was *telling*. And he did that by cutting a pair of oxen into pieces, and sending the pieces throughout Israel with a message.

The message read: *"This is what will be done to the oxen of anyone who does not follow Saul and Samuel."*

And just like that, a previously divided nation comes together at Bezek—this time with Saul leading them.

From there, Saul sends messengers to Jabesh-Gilead saying, *"By the time the sun is hot tomorrow, you will be rescued."*

The people of Jabesh respond by telling the Ammonites, *"Tomorrow we'll surrender to you—and you can do to us whatever you like."*

This was a deliberate misdirection. They had no intention of surrendering because the Ammonites didn't know Saul and his army were gathered on the other side of the river.

So, early the next morning—before the Ammonites were ready—Saul’s army broke into their camp and overwhelmed them.

Those who survived ran for their lives.

Now, if you’re remembering what we read last week, you might be thinking...

[SLIDE 8] Where in the world did Saul’s courage and leadership skills come from?!

In chapter 10, he was *silent* and *hiding!*

But now, in chapter 11, he’s *acting* like a king.

What happened? Did a bunch of time pass? Did Saul grow up?

Nope! Look at verse 6...

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 11:6 - When Saul heard their words, the Spirit of God came powerfully upon him, and he burned with anger.

Just like chapter 10, the Spirit of God empowered Saul for the moment he was in. Except this time, Saul ***burned with anger***.

I love this phrase. The Hebrew behind it means “hot in the nose.”

Picture an angry bull getting ready to charge.

Interestingly, the same phrase is often used of the LORD’s anger...

[SLIDE 9.1] Exodus 4:14 says, “Then the LORD’s anger burned against Moses...”

Again, the LORD became *hot in the nose!*

This isn’t an uncontrolled human kind of anger.

This is *righteous anger*.

And sometimes the LORD stirs this kind of anger in **us**—especially *in the face of evil*—which is something we talked about this week on the BIC Life Podcast.

And so, the question we should be asking is this:

Did Saul act in righteous anger?

First, consider the source.

Saul's anger came directly from the LORD.

However, *the way* Saul called people to battle felt a little odd, right?

Cutting up their oxen almost sounds like a Mob threat...

Like: *I'm gonna make you an offer you can't refuse!*

Well, it sounds weird to us because this isn't something we normally do.

Our government leaders stir us up with angry words...

But the ancient world was quite a bit more gruesome.

Cutting up oxen was a normal way to stir people into battle—

Everyone knew it meant something serious was about to happen.

And watch how the people respond...

[SLIDE 10] 1 Samuel 11:7b - Then the terror of the LORD fell on the people, and they came out together as one.

This line is massively significant...

Because the people weren't being *scared* into submission.

The “terror of the LORD” is a phrase in scripture that’s always linked to God’s actions. Either God is about to act—or He already has.

Either way, when people *feel* the “terror of the LORD,” they know something serious was happening.

And so...

[SLIDE 11] “The terror of the LORD” means God has made His presence or purpose unmistakably clear, and people respond accordingly.

And in this moment, God was not only about to act on behalf of the Israelites, But the people knew that ignoring His call would be seen as outright rebellion.

Remember the end of chapter 10 where Israel was divided?
 Some people accepted Saul as king, others didn't.
 But now the terror of the LORD fell on all of them.
 Yahweh was about to move, and nothing would stop Him.

This makes me think of the Chronicles of Narnia. Remember when Mr. Beaver whispered, "*They say Aslan is on the move.*" He meant that there was no stopping what Aslan was about to do—not even the White Queen could stop him.

In the same way, Yahweh was moving against Nahash—the “snake-like” king. And nothing was going to stop Him.

And so, for Israel, it was either get in line and obey God, or get out of the way. But it's worth noticing that the terror they felt led to strict obedience. Their hearts weren't moved by the fear of the LORD. There's a difference...

[SLIDE 12] TERROR vs FEAR

Remember when Paul said that **every knee will bow at the name of Jesus?**²
 Some will bow in terror, others in fear.

Those that bow in terror will do so because it's an unavoidable response to God's Power. But those that fear the LORD bow **willingly**.
 They bow because their love and allegiance are with Jesus.

Israel *didn't* fear the LORD, but they *did* feel the terror of the LORD.
 It was time to get moving—because God was moving with or without them.

Now, considering all of that, let's step back for a minute and consider the wider picture...

[SLIDE 13] The Wide Picture of 1 Samuel 11:1-11

- God's people rejected Him as their King
- His people are then threatened by a man whose name reminds us of the enemy in Genesis 3
- The text asks: *Who will rescue God's people?*

² Philippians 2:10; also Romans 14:11

- The answer is unmistakably, God Himself
- Then God empowers Saul
- Moving Israel to victory

**So everything's good now right? They won.
Thanks to the LORD, they survived their darkest valley.**

However, today's passage is urging us to ask:

[SLIDE 13.1] Now that the battle's over, what kind of people will they become?

Think about that from the perspective of our own life.

After we go through trials...

The work of perseverance isn't done.

God is still forming us in the aftermath.

That's why James says...

[SLIDE 14] James 1:4 - Let perseverance finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything.

Perseverance isn't *only* about God walking with us through the valley.

It's also about how God shapes us *once we're on the other side*.

And that's what hit me this week.

God's work of perseverance in us continues long after the battle.
It doesn't stop once the dust settles.

For the Israelites, they went through the trauma of war.

For us, it might be something else.

[SLIDE 15] So what does perseverance look like in the aftermath?

Well, when we go through something hard, things change. We're not the same person we were before. Our circumstances look different. Nothing feels 'normal,' because nothing will ever be the way it used to be.

But this might be where perseverance impacts us the most.

We're not automatically made mature and complete because the battle is over. That only *begins* to happen in the aftermath. And it's not easy.

Because now we're faced with the unknown.
Life doesn't just magically go back to normal.

After a trial, we're often left asking questions we didn't have before. Questions like: *Who am I now? How do I move forward from this?*

Perseverance doesn't avoid these questions. In a life that no longer looks the same, we persevere by trusting that Jesus is with us and in control.

He will show us how to move forward.
He's our Waymaker after the trial.

The battle scars will always be there.
Life will never be the same again.

But Jesus has the power to make us whole again as we persevere with Him —pressing on in His strength.

This is why Paul said...

[SLIDE 16] Philippians 3:12b - "I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me."

May that be our prayer this morning. Not that we have it all figured out, but that we keep learning to press on even in the pain, trusting that Jesus is with us every step of the way.

Let's Pray