

MESSAGE — Part 16 — God *Still* Moves the Story Forward — 3.15.26

[SLIDE 0] Why in the world would God send an evil spirit to Saul?

Did that question cross your mind when we read it?

I was thinking about that this week.

We've seen Saul give into fear and sin.

We've even seen him reject the LORD and build a monument to himself.

But sending an "evil" spirit feels like maybe a little much, doesn't it?

Well... we'll wrestle with that today.

But before we do, let's recap where we are in the story.

Last week we saw Samuel grieving the fall of king Saul.

We also watched God move the story forward by anointing a young shepherd boy named David.

And in today's passage, the stories of Saul and David collide.

Look at verses 13-14...

[SLIDE 1] 1 Samuel 16:13-14 (NIV) - and from that day on the Spirit of the LORD came powerfully upon David ... Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

These two verses are a hinge moment in 1 Samuel.

They signal the beginning of David's rise and Saul's downfall.

And it all has to do with the Spirit of the LORD.

Notice that the Spirit *came powerfully upon* David.

In the Old Testament, **the Spirit would come and go.**

We've seen this before.

In 1 Samuel 10 & 11, the Spirit *came powerfully upon* Saul — twice!
Each time it was to empower him for the role of the king.

...But something changes in verse 13.

The Spirit of the LORD is now coming on David — it's the same kind of thing.
The Spirit is empowering him for the role of the king.

But there's a small detail here that's different from any other time the Spirit came upon someone. The writer gives us a quick note that says:

"...and from that day on..."

In other words, *from this day forward*, the Spirit was with David and not Saul.

That's why verse 14 says the Spirit *departed* from Saul.
The Spirit's presence signaled the LORD's choice for Israel's king.

I know we're not used to thinking about the Holy Spirit's role in that way.
But maybe this is helpful:

Later in David's life, he's going to mess up pretty bad.
But unlike Saul, he immediately confessed his sin.
And Psalm 51 is where we see him praying to the LORD,
asking for forgiveness...

[SLIDE 2] Psalm 51:10-12 (NIV) - Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me.

So, after David sinned, he prayed.
He was pleading with the LORD: *Don't take your Holy Spirit from me.*
Why? He would've remembered Saul's sin and how the Spirit departed afterward.

Again, this is different from how the Spirit works today.

[SLIDE 2.1] In Saul and David's day, the Spirit's presence was a sign of the LORD's choice for Israel's king.

Saul still had the throne.

But David now had the Spirit.

This was a tragic, yet hopeful moment for God's people.

The Spirit left Saul — but the LORD was still moving His story forward.

[SLIDE 3] 1 Samuel 16:13-14 (NIV)

But we're still left with a question:

What's the deal with this "evil" spirit?

It seemed strange to me that the LORD would send an evil spirit to Saul.

So I checked the Hebrew word translated here as "evil."

And it turns out, the Hebrew word doesn't always mean *morally* evil.

It can also mean: **harmful, distressing, or troubling.**

That's why some translations say "**harmful spirit**" instead of "evil spirit."

So it *could* be that this spirit was just doing his job.

He was sent to cause Saul distress.

But why would the LORD do that?

Why not just let Saul alone?

Let's keep reading...

[SLIDE 4] 1 Samuel 16:15-16 (NIV) - Saul's attendants said to him, "See, an evil spirit from God is tormenting you. Let our lord command his servants here to search for someone who can play the lyre. He will play when the evil spirit from God comes on you, and you will feel better."

It's interesting that Saul's attendants recognized *right away* that he was being tormented by a spirit.

They're not guessing.
They're sure that's what's happening.

We might read this and think maybe Saul's just sick?
Or maybe he's starting to lose his mind?

But that would assume we understand the situation better than the people who were actually there.

I'm inclined to take their word for it.
There's an *actual* spirit that's oppressing Saul.

In fact, the Hebrew word behind "**tormenting**" carries the idea of being **terrified**.
So, Saul's not just uncomfortable — he's *deeply distressed*.

And notice their suggestion...
They're not calling the priests to cast out a demon.
They're not calling the doctors and healers to help Saul.

Their solution... was to find ***a musician!***

They're *convinced* that Saul *will* feel better...
Assuming they can find someone to play the lyre for him.

[SLIDE 5] Picture of Lyre

The lyre is like an ancient guitar.
It was a common instrument during the time of David.

In fact...
Those of you that play the guitar — Here's a little Bible trivia for ya:

Can anybody tell me:
Who was the first person in history to play an instrument like this?

...

[SLIDE 5.1] Genesis 4:21 - Jubal ... he was the father of all who play stringed instruments.

So, by the time we get to 1 Samuel, musicians grew to play an important role in society.

[SLIDE 6] 1 Samuel 16:15-16 (NIV)

In the ancient world, music wasn't just for entertainment.

People believed music could affect a person's emotions, their state of mind... and even the spiritual realm.

Notice what the attendants said:

He will play ... and you will feel better.

This wasn't strange advice from Saul's attendants.

To them, music was the most natural way to deal with the spirit.

So Saul asks them to find someone who plays well, and bring them to him...

[SLIDE 7] 1 Samuel 16:18 (NIV) - One of the servants answered, "I have seen a son of Jesse of Bethlehem who knows how to play the lyre. He is a brave man and a warrior. He speaks well and is a fine-looking man. And the LORD is with him."

Here's where we find out a little more about David. He's not just a skilled musician...

The servant said:

He's a tough and capable guy.

He speaks well.

He's a fine-looking man.

And — most importantly — **the LORD is with him.**

That's *eye-witness testimony*.
...which I find really interesting.

Whoever this servant was, it was important for them to let Saul know that the LORD was with David.

Again, even though Israel's king rejected the LORD,
The LORD was still moving His story forward through His people.

So Saul sent messengers for David, and things went well...

[SLIDE 8] 1 Samuel 16:21-22 (NIV) - David came to Saul and entered his service. Saul liked him very much, and David became one of his armor-bearers. Then Saul sent word to Jesse, saying, "Allow David to remain in my service, for I am pleased with him."

This scene is exploding with irony.

We've got David, the future king, coming to the current king.
Saul had no idea that David was the man that the LORD chose.
If he had known, this first meeting would have gone very differently.

But as far as Saul knows, David's just another servant.
He's just a shepherd boy playing music for the king.

And things seemed to go well!
Saul was pleased with David.
He seemed like a nice kid — and his music was helpful.

But if Saul only knew who he asked for...

Because there's something deeper in the text here that sets up the irony of these two meetings.

If we all read Hebrew, something would immediately stick out to us:

Their names.

Their names have meaning...

[SLIDE 8.1] Saul means: “asked for” — David means: “beloved”

That’s *incredibly* significant!

At this point in the story, the king the people asked for is now asking for the one who is beloved by God.

Saul had no idea that he just invited his replacement into his home.

And watch what happened when David played his music...

[SLIDE 9] 1 Samuel 16:23 (NIV) - Whenever the spirit from God came on Saul, David would take up his lyre and play. Then relief would come to Saul; he would feel better, and the evil spirit would leave him.

As a musician, there are a couple things I want to say about this.

I already pointed out that the ancient world believed music affects people both physically and spiritually. The same is true today.

I’ve never used music to cure the flu or anything like that.
But music definitely helps me in a few ways...

It helps me emotionally.

When I’m feeling something that’s hard to put into words, certain songs resonate with me — like the song I played for you the other week: *Help Me to Move*.

The song itself literally helps me to pray when I’m feeling stuck in my own grief.

Music also helps me focus.

Every week, when I study God’s Word and write sermons, I have instrumental music playing in the background. I’ve been doing that since my college days — it helps keep my thoughts clear.

And playing music — that’s a whole other level.

Have you ever been doing an activity and you completely lost track of time? Some people call this the “flow state.”

This happens all the time to musicians, artists — really, it can happen to anyone that’s doing something that they really like.

But when that happens, it’s hard to describe — especially with music.

Scientists have actually studied this:¹

- They say that music can calm the brain’s fear center.
- It lowers stress hormones.
- It can even slow your heart rate, lower blood pressure, and calm your breathing.

Personally, I’d say Saul’s attendants said it best: Music can help you feel better.

So there’s scientific benefits.
But there’s also the spiritual reality.

In fact, one of the earliest commands in Scripture is that creation itself would be *ordered with rhythm*.

In Genesis 1 we see the Spirit of the LORD bringing order in the Creation:

- Day and night
- Light and dark
- Seasons of the year

¹ <https://share.google/aimode/U8bPaLwHGM3UdAtwQ>

And, in a way, music mirrors the order of creation.
It's bringing rhythm and harmony to what would otherwise be disorder.

Maybe that's why the angels sing when they praise the LORD?

Throughout Scripture, angels erupt in praise when God brings His peace into a world of disorder.

So, here in 1 Samuel, when David plays —
It's like he's bringing a song from the Spirit of the LORD.
And that song brings relief.

It's like the Spirit of the LORD is using David to bring a little of God's peace back into Saul's chaos...

But it's only temporary.

Look at verse 23 again.

Whenever the spirit put Saul in distress...

David played.
The spirit left.
And Saul would feel better.

**Again, that's great...
But it's only temporary.**

It didn't cure the deeper issue in Saul's heart.

Saul needed to turn his heart back to the LORD.

Which brings me back to my earlier question:

[SLIDE 10] Why didn't God just leave Saul alone? Why send a spirit to cause so much distress?

What this passage shows us is that even though Saul rejected the LORD... **the LORD was still showing Himself to Saul.**

Over and over, Saul was being confronted with God's presence.

But... Saul didn't recognize the Spirit's work.
He's just happy to feel better.

And, unfortunately for Saul, we'll see in the coming weeks that his heart continues to decline.

But David is a different story.

His story will continue to point us forward to the true King — Jesus.

But here's the thing about Jesus...

[SLIDE 11] Jesus didn't come to bring relief. He came to save.

That might be hard to hear.

But Jesus never promised health and wealth.

He never promised that our struggles would disappear.

In fact, Paul wrote in his letter to Timothy that everyone who wants to live a godly life in Christ Jesus will be persecuted.²

And Paul would know.

I think of what he said in **2 Corinthians** when he talked about a "thorn in the flesh." He said:

[SLIDE 12] 2 Corinthians 12:7b-8 (NIV) - Therefore, in order to keep me from becoming conceited, I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me. Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.

[SLIDE 13] 2 Corinthians 12:9 (NIV) - But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I

² 2 Timothy 3:12

will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.

In other words, God didn't just remove Paul's struggle.
He met Paul in it.

This is what God does.

He met Samuel in his grief.
He met Saul in his distress.

The LORD used David's music to show His heart.

To this day, the LORD *still* uses His people to show His heart.

And it's because of the Lord's heart that, even in our weakness,
We can agree with Paul...

[SLIDE 14] The Lord's grace is more than enough to give us the strength to press on.

That's how God moves His story forward.

He uses *our* story...
Our perseverance in the trials...
And *our* trust in Him...

To show people who He really is.

And so, like Samuel and David,
may we be willing to obey the Lord when He calls.

And like Paul,
may we be a people who boast about the ways Jesus impacts our lives.

Because it's through the stories of God working in us that people see the love of Jesus.

So I wanted to leave you with this encouragement:

[SLIDE 15] When the Lord prompts you to tell someone about how He's working in your life — don't hesitate.

Because that's the moment Jesus wants to move His story forward...

Through you.

Let's Pray