



# The Trinity Pulpit



## Life's Great Scavenger Hunt

I Samuel 16:1-13

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Have you ever participated in a scavenger hunt? A well planned scavenger hunt can be a creative and exciting activity for a Sunday school class. It has always been a favorite of youth groups, including ours. One of the easiest scavenger hunts is to go around the neighborhood to find items that are on a list to bring back as proof. With today's technology, a digital photo scavenger hunt can create great memories when you begin with a list of things to find. You may go all over the neighborhood or even the entire city to find just the right photo op. It could even be a video scavenger hunt where a group is assigned some crazy activities that can only be done at certain places around the neighborhood to accomplish the task, all the while capturing it on video for proof. Undoubtedly, scavenger hunts are filled with laughter and lots of keepsakes for the future.

Samuel was called to participate in what could be referred to as a scavenger hunt. Samuel had just returned home to Ramah after confronting King Saul of his disobedience to the Lord. In chapter 15, we read about how Saul lost his rights to the throne before the Lord. The Lord had given specific instructions to Saul through his prophet Samuel. "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 everything that belongs to them. Do not spare them; put to death men and women, children and infants, cattle and sheep, camels and donkeys." (I Samuel 15: 2-3) So Saul went ahead and did what the Lord commanded. However, he didn't completely follow the directions. He and his men spared the Amalekite King, Agag, and some of the best sheep and cattle. When confronted by

Samuel of his deeds, Saul quickly tried to play off his disobedience as an act of worship by pretending the spared sheep and cattle were for a sacrifice to the Lord.

Samuel's reply is poignant. "Does the Lord delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the voice of 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." (v. 22-23) Samuel goes on to say, "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." (v. 28)

Scripture tells us that Samuel was in mourning for Saul at his home in Ramah. Samuel had opposed the entire idea of kingship in Israel, but had followed the Lord's instructions to give the people what it had wanted. Saul was reluctantly chosen, but Samuel had great hopes for the young king. Saul had great potential to follow the Lord and lead the people of Israel to higher heights. However, Saul had let him down by not following the Lord's commands. It was a disappointment of great proportions.

However, instead of allowing Samuel to sit around depressed about the situation at hand, the Lord called Samuel to go on a scavenger hunt for the next king. Today's text that was read earlier, picks up the story from there.

Samuel reluctantly followed God's command to search for a new king to replace Saul. Samuel followed the Lord's leadership and went to Bethlehem in search of the new

king. He ended up at the house of Jesse and eventually anointed David as the next king of Israel. It wasn't easy for Samuel but he did it anyway.

So, what does this mean for us today? I want each of us to seek God's leadership and courageously follow his plan for our lives. When we are armed with the Lord's directions, we should follow him without reservation. God's plan for our lives can be a great search. Let's go on Life's Great Scavenger Hunt armed with our Lord by our side!

### **I. Life's Great Scavenger Hunt begins with an open and vibrant relationship with God. (v. 1-3)**

Samuel always had his ears open to hearing God. Remember back to when Samuel was called by God. In the third chapter of I Samuel, Samuel heard someone call his name while sleeping. He awoke, ran to Eli and sought to serve him. After Eli told Samuel to go back to bed, he once again heard the voice and Samuel ran to Eli. After the third time, Eli told Samuel to answer the voice by saying, "Speak Lord, for your servant is listening." From early in his childhood, Samuel was in tune with the Lord's voice.

Even while he was in mourning for Saul and lamenting over the disappointment, Samuel heard God when the Lord charged him with finding the next king. Without always being attentive to hearing God's message, it would've been easy for Samuel to miss God's speaking. Yet, Samuel heard and Samuel followed. Due to his relationship with the Lord, he didn't miss the chance to go and anoint the next king of Israel.

Our life's scavenger hunt begins when we give our lives over to God. Matthew 10:39 states, "Whoever finds his life will lose it, and whoever loses his life for my sake will find it." Christ told us to give control over our lives to God. When we are able to give up the control, it is then and only then, that God can begin to show us his plan for our lives. When we grow in our relationship with the Lord, we begin to notice the open doors for us to walk through to find God's will waiting there for us. Without the relationship, the doors are not even noticed.

Hudson Taylor had definite convictions about how God's work should be done. "We can make our best plans and try to carry them out in our own strength. Or we can make careful plans and ask God to bless them. Yet another way of working is to begin with God; to ask His plans, and to offer ourselves to Him to carry out His purposes."



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This has been especially real in my life over the past few weeks. As many of you already know, I am a planner with Type A personality. This has been a strength, as we try to manage the size of our student ministry these days. However, I sometimes cross the line and become a control freak. It has to be a certain way and at a certain time. I want people and plans to be in the right place, at the right time, doing the right things. I am learning more

and more of what it means to begin with God and ask for his plans. I want our student ministry, and in turn our church family, to seek after God's plans and then give ourselves in carrying out those plans. God has been teaching me to rely on his purpose and his plans...not my own. He continues to teach me that he knows better than I.

Without an open and vibrant relationship with God, our life's Great Scavenger Hunt is just a futile attempt to find joy and happiness. We find our joy and happiness in Christ.

### **II. Life's Great Scavenger Hunt requires courage. (v. 4-6)**

Even when we have an open and vibrant relationship with our Savior, it doesn't guarantee life will be easy. Life's Great Scavenger Hunt requires us to have courage in order to keep going.

Samuel found himself in that very situation. In responding to the Lord's call to find and anoint the next king, Samuel quickly came back with a concern. "How can I go? Saul will hear about it and kill me." Samuel realized he would be in danger from Saul and his men. He had a reasonable concern.

In his commentary on this passage, Dr. Tony Cartledge wrote, "Yahweh dismissed Samuel's objections by suggesting a reasonable solution bound up in a small artifice. Samuel was to take with him a heifer and tell any potential informant that he

had need to offer a sacrifice in Bethlehem. As Israel's leading priest, the guise of sacrifice could mask his real motives effectively. Suppressing his fears, Samuel obeyed, only to find that the elders of Bethlehem were no more happy about his appearance than he was."

It took a great deal of courage for Samuel to follow the Lord's plan. It could've possibly cost him his life, yet Samuel did just as the Lord instructed. Our life's Great Scavenger Hunt will not be without moments where we'll have to follow the Lord's plan with courage. We may never be faced with a time when our life will be in jeopardy, but undoubtedly, we will find ourselves having to make difficult choices. Our hunt may lead us to move to a place where we have no family and friends. It may lead us to make a difficult financial decision that could have consequences for years to come. It may even lead us to make a change in our career, following a new path God has prepared. Following God's plan for our lives will be filled with difficult decisions that will test our faith in the Lord.

Even during these difficult times, we must choose to follow God's plan for our lives with courage and conviction. Jeremiah 29:11 says, "For I know the plans I have for you declares the Lord, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." God has our best interest in mind!

### III. Life's Great Scavenger Hunt ends with success! (v. 7-13)

When we follow God's plan for our lives with courage, it always ends successfully. For Samuel, his search ended with the anointing of David. Jesse's oldest son, Eliab, was the first to stand before Samuel. Samuel believed that he was the chosen one because of his outer appearance. After being warned by God to not look at just the outer appearance, Samuel passed him over. Abinadab, Shammah and four more sons of Jesse were passed over. When asked if he had any more sons, Jesse mentioned that his youngest was still in the field tending to his sheep. Samuel had David brought before him. When Samuel saw David, the Lord spoke to Samuel and said, "Rise and anoint him; he is the one." Samuel not only saw the handsome features and fine appearance, but he also saw a young man who would seek after

God's own heart. Samuel's great hunt ended with the successful anointing of David as the next king of Israel.

With Jeremiah 29:11 in mind, we can be assured that if we follow God's plan for our lives, he will bless us with hope and a future. The world's definition of success is the very antithesis of God's definition of success. Someone once said, "A sound body, a brilliant mind, a cultural background, a huge amount of money, a wonderful education -- none of these guarantee success."

The world measures success by counting how many digits our paychecks have. It measures success by the size of our homes, the cars in the garage and the clothes in the closet. It looks at the position we hold at work and the power we seemingly have over others.

However, the hope and the future promised in Jeremiah have nothing to do with the success defined by the world. It promises love and joy, two gifts we find in the relationships we have with family and friends. It promises a life full of hope, hope for what God is doing to reconcile the world unto himself. It promises that we have a hand in bringing about this hope and future to those without them. When we follow God's plan, success in these areas will follow!

Bud Wilkinson's football teams at the University of Oklahoma were undoubtedly the strongest in the nation in the late 50s and early 60s. Consistently, his undefeated teams steamrolled the opposition. After his retirement to the broadcast booth, Coach

Wilkinson was asked the secret of his success. How could he consistently mold young athletes into powerful teams, year after year?

This was Bud's answer—

"When a football player goes into a game, he can play to a variety of audiences. He may play for the crowd in the stands, for example, working hard for their cheers and avoiding their boos. Or he might play for a special person in the stands—a girlfriend, maybe.

"A player may allow the other team to dictate his play. In other words, if the man across the line



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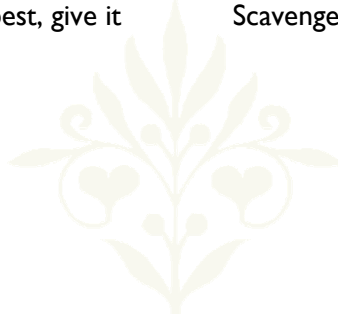
isn't very good, then he doesn't play well either. If the opponent cheats and plays dirty, so does he.

"Some football players allow their teammates to determine the quality of their play. Some focus on the game officials, the referees. And of course, some play merely for themselves—they work hard to be the stars.

"Many audiences vie for the attention of the players. My men know, however, that there's only one person watching the game that matters—only one person whom they have to please...me. Regardless of the cheers or boos, the strength of the opposition, the fairness of the officials, or the play of their teammates, I am the only audience that counts. When everyone knows that and plays that way, they pull together, do their best, give it their all, and win."

Who are we trying to please? Are we trying to please ourselves? Are we trying to please others? Are we trying to please the world? As Christians, we should have only one audience, God.

Our life's journey starts with an open and vibrant relationship with Jesus; continued by following God's plan with courage and finding success defined by God along the way. We have only God to please! Samuel followed the Lord's plan and found success by finding David as the next king. It wasn't without trials and difficult times, but ultimately, Samuel followed with courage. May we also seek God's leadership in the next year and courageously follow his plan for our lives. May we continually strengthen our relationship with our Savior and keep seeking for the next clue in our Life's Great Scavenger Hunt!



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