

Good morning, Moon Valley!

Today we continue our sermon series titled, □ “Making a Difference in a Nation Adrift.” It is a study through the book of 1 Samuel.

Our text for today is □ 1 Samuel chapter 14:24-46. From this text, we are going to learn an important lesson. And that lesson is summarized by this big idea: □ Relying on feelings apart from God’s wisdom is dangerous. Our feelings alone are not always reliable guides for how to think or what to do. Our gut can be dead wrong.

It is not that feelings are bad. God created us to experience feelings, and they are a wonderful, valuable part of life. But ever since the fall of Adam and Eve, feelings are fallible guides. Our hearts can deceive us. □ Jeremiah 17:9 gives this sobering reality check:

ESV Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it?

Because our hearts, including our feelings and impulses are not always reliable guides, we must check them against God’s wisdom, particularly as it is revealed to us in Scripture.

This is certainly relevant today because, in some circles, feelings have been deified as the ultimate determinant for decision-making. “I’m feelin’ it.” Or “I’m not feelin’ it.” How I feel has become my truth.

As our culture becomes more feelings-oriented in its decision-making, even secular authorities warn of problems. In a recent article appearing in *Psychology Today*, psychotherapist and author Amy Morin cautions,

“your feelings can lead you astray if you’re not careful. And the more intense the emotions, the more your judgment may be clouded.”<sup>1</sup>

In the story from our text today, we are going to see how dangerous and foolish and hurtful it can be to rely on feelings apart from God’s wisdom.

You may recall from previous studies that the Israelites had been threatened by the vastly superior army of the Philistines. With many of the Israelite soldiers terrified and deserting, Saul, the king and commanding military officer of Israel disobeyed God’s Word spoken through the prophet and priest named Samuel. Saul didn’t wait for Samuel to come and give instructions. Instead, Saul impatiently and illegally offered religious sacrifices in an effort to buy God’s favor. And then, Saul shirked responsibility, rationalizing it all as something he was forced to do.

Samuel denounces Saul and tells him that, as a result of his disobedience, he will one day forfeit his kingship over Israel.

Then Samuel leaves.

Shortly thereafter, Saul’s son, Jonathan and his armor-bearer approach the Philistines without telling Saul. Jonathan seeks a sign from the Lord, then, when God gives the go-ahead, he and his armor-bearer boldly attack the Philistines by themselves.

God is with them, causing the earth to quake and the Philistines to run and turn against one another in panic.

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<sup>1</sup> Morin, Amy, “4 Ways Emotions Can Screw Up Your Decisions,” in *Psychology Today*, posted February 21, 2016 at [4 Ways Emotions Can Screw Up Your Decisions | Psychology Today](#).

Saul notices the Philistines running in panic, he realizes that Jonathan is attacking, and he mobilizes his troops to join Jonathan in fighting the Philistines.

And that is the backdrop for our text, which begins in □ 1 Samuel 14:24, where it says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:24 And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, “Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.” So none of the people had tasted food.

At issue is the relationship between the men of Israel being hard pressed and the oath laid on the men by Saul. The word □ “so,” given by the *English Standard Version* I’m using, may give the impression that Saul laid the oath because the men were hard pressed. But it is more likely the other way around. The men were hard pressed because Saul laid the oath on them. The original Hebrew word translated “so” can also be translated □ “for” or “because,” and most English translations render it that way.

It seems that, before joining the fight against the Philistines, Saul solemnly swore to God that none of his men would eat until evening in avenging the enemy.

There is nothing in Scripture or in the military customs of the day that would have required such a vow. The vow was not based on any biblical wisdom. It was a decision made in the heat of the moment.

It seems that the oath was merely a made-up form of religious bravado intended to impress God and solicit his favor. One scholar describes it

as “a grandiose gesture of self-denial.”<sup>2</sup> It was an on-the-fly attempt to manipulate God and to salvage Saul’s own reputation.

Saul acted on the impulses of his heart. And we have some evidence to suggest his impulses were, at least in part, selfishly vengeful. Notice in verse 24 he says he is joining the fight and making the oath so that □ “I am avenged on my enemies.” So, this about Saul? What about God’s reputation? What about God’s people? What about God’s justice?

Saul is likely responding to being humiliated by the Philistines. Under threat of the Philistines, Saul had been embarrassed first by being denounced by Samuel, then by the desertion of the majority of his troops, and then by the discovery that, his son went behind his back in courageously engaging the Philistines—something that Saul did not order, did not do himself, and did not even know about until God used Jonathan to put the Philistines into a panic.

So, in the moment, after being previously humiliated, Saul likely saw an opportunity to be personally vindicated, to gain back some respect, and to prove he is a good and godly man. Amped up with emotion, Saul swears his men off food, probably thinking that would be impressive.

The 600 men who were with Saul all heard the sworn ban on food for the day and probably acquiesced in silence. But remember, Jonathan and his armor-bearer were not with Saul at the time and thus did not hear the oath.

In that day, an oath like this was taken very seriously as having divine authority.<sup>3</sup> So, the Israelites honored the oath.

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<sup>2</sup> Tsumura, David Toshio. *The First Book of Samuel. The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*. Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2007, p. 370.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 372.

As the 600 Israelites engaged the Philistines, and as the day of battle wore on, the Israelites became hard-pressed because they were hungry. Some may have experienced low blood sugar brought on by vigorous exercise and lack of food.<sup>4</sup> Keep in mind that, up until God miraculously worked through the courageous initiative of Jonathan, these men were vastly outnumbered and afraid. In such circumstances, they likely did not start the day fresh and well-rested.

Verses □ 25 and 26 continue.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:25 Now when all the people came to the forest, behold, there was honey on the ground. 26 And when the people entered the forest, behold, the honey was dropping, but no one put his hand to his mouth, for the people feared the oath.

As the Israelites chase the Philistines into the forest, there are honeycombs full of honey ready to eat. But the Israelites honored the oath. All except Jonathan, who had not heard of it. Verse □ 27 explains,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:27 But Jonathan had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright.

One symptom of hypoglycemia is a darkening of the vision, much like the darkening that can occur when you stand up too quickly and feel on the verge of blacking out. Honey would have quickly raised blood sugar, restoring the brightness of normal vision.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

That Jonathan ate some honey did not go unnoticed. At least one other Israelite witnesses the unwitting violation of the oath and explains the situation to Jonathan in □ verse 28.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:28 Then one of the people said, “Your father strictly charged the people with an oath, saying, ‘Cursed be the man who eats food this day.’” And the people were faint.

Inasmuch as there are no punctuation marks in ancient Hebrew writing, the last sentence in the verse translated, □ “And the people were faint” can either be taken as the words of the author as shown here, or as the continued words of the soldier speaking to Jonathan. The *New International Version* takes the latter view, quoting the soldier as saying to Jonathan, “Your father bound the army under a strict oath, saying, ‘Cursed be anyone who eats food today!’ That is why the men are faint.”

Either way, Jonathan recognizes the connection between the weariness of the Israelites and the foolishness of his father, as evidenced by what Jonathan says in □ verses 29 and 30.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:29 Then Jonathan said, “My father has troubled the land. See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey.”

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:30 “How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoil of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great.”

Jonathan believes his father has needlessly brought trouble on his own people with his foolish vow, thus limiting their victory over the Philistines.

The scene now zooms out from Jonathan to the Israelite army. □ Verse 31 says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:31 They struck down the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon. And the people were very faint.

Aijalon is about 16 miles west of Michmash, where the Philistines had originally been concentrated before Jonathan and his armor-bearer attacked them. So, in one day, the Israelites fought and drove back the Philistines for 16 miles. That is a lot of territory to cover for 600 Israelites fighting on foot against tens of thousands of Philistines. No wonder the people were very faint, not having eaten all day.

At the end of the day, when the oath ended, the Israelites are famished. And among the spoils left behind by the Philistines are sheep and oxen and calves which supplied food for their vast army.

Verse □ 32 describes the inevitable.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:32 The people pounced on the spoil and took sheep and oxen and calves and slaughtered them on the ground. And the people ate them with the blood.

In their haste to eat, the people fail to properly drain the blood from the livestock. As such, the food they are devouring is not kosher. They are breaking the Mosaic Law. Leviticus □ 19:26 says,

ESV Leviticus 19:26 “You shall not eat any flesh with the blood in it. . .”

Saul’s reliance on his feelings that produced the foolish oath not only put his people in danger from being faint in combat, but it also drew

the people into sin. It put his people at risk both physically and spiritually. Relying on feelings apart from God's wisdom is dangerous.

News of the transgression gets back to Saul. Verse □ 33 says,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:33 Then they told Saul, "Behold, the people are sinning against the LORD by eating with the blood." And he said, "You have dealt treacherously; roll a great stone to me here."

It is interesting that Saul says to the people "You have dealt treacherously." He doesn't seem to realize much less own the fact that he himself thoughtlessly put his people in this compromising position.

Saul summons a "great stone" on which the animals may be properly slaughtered and drained of blood. And he then orders all animals to be brought to the stone. Verses □ 34 and 35 explain,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:34 And Saul said, "Disperse yourselves among the people and say to them, 'Let every man bring his ox or his sheep and slaughter them here and eat, and do not sin against the LORD by eating with the blood.'" . . .

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:34 . . . So every one of the people brought his ox with him that night and they slaughtered them there.

Saul rightly takes action to curb the transgression of dietary law. This time, his actions are consistent with the Hebrew Scriptures.

Those who rely on feelings apart from God's wisdom don't always get it wrong. Sometimes their instincts are aligned with Scripture. The point is: Feelings are unreliable. Sometimes they'll steer you right; sometimes they'll steer you wrong.



□ Verse 35 provides a curious detail.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:35 And Saul built an altar to the LORD; it was the first altar that he built to the LORD.

In Scripture, it is common for godly Israelite leaders to build altars to worship God. Samuel did it (1 Samuel 7:17). Gideon did it (Judges 6:24). David will later do it (2 Samuel 24:25).<sup>6</sup> Saul had been king of Israel for two years now and had never before built an altar.

That he had never done it before casts Saul in a less than favorable light. But at least we can give him some credit for doing it now. Saul seems to be desperately grasping for some way to please God, particularly in the aftermath of his disobedience and foolishness.

It is evening. The fighting is on pause. Saul's troops are exhausted. Nevertheless, they have now eaten, which would have been restorative to some degree.

But Saul's zeal still burns. And he is still governed by his gut. Verse □ 36 records,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:36 Then Saul said, "Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them." And they said, "Do whatever seems good to you." But the priest said, "Let us draw near to God here."

It almost seems as though Saul desperately wants to get in on some of the glory.

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<sup>6</sup> Longman, Tremper, III, and David E. Garland, eds. *The Expositor's Bible Commentary: 1 Samuel–2 Kings (Revised Edition)*. Vol. 3. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2009, p. 148.

In this context, the soldiers' response, "Do what seems good to you" seems to be the ancient equivalent of "Yeah, whatever." It is a dutiful, half-hearted assent.

But the priest wisely suggests that they seek God's guidance rather than get carried away by the emotion of the moment. Ironically, this priest is likely Ahijah, the one from the rejected line of Eli and Phinehas, the one whom Saul had appointed after Samuel's departure. Even Ahijah seems to recognize Saul's impulsive behavior, suggesting that perhaps Saul should rely on God's wisdom and not his impulses.

To his credit, Saul agrees. Verse □ 37 records,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:37 And Saul inquired of God, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?" But he did not answer him that day.

Saul interprets God's silence as a form of disapproval. So, Saul sets out to discover and deal with the sin that is keeping God from answering. In his zeal, Saul makes another reckless vow, recorded in □ verses 38 and 39.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:38 And Saul said, "Come here, all you leaders of the people, and know and see how this sin has arisen today."

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:39 "For as the LORD lives who saves Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall surely die." But there was not a man among all the people who answered him.

Saul probably thinks it's impressive to vow that he is willing to kill his own son if he is the one who has sinned. By this point, surely word has spread among the soldiers that Jonathan broke the no-food vow. But no one is saying a word.

Then Saul sets out to identify the transgressor using the Urim and Thummim, which is an ancient decision-making device which is cast to reveal a choice between two alternatives. Verses □ 40 through 42 explain how it goes.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:40 Then he said to all Israel, “You shall be on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side.” And the people said to Saul, “Do what seems good to you.” [Yeah, whatever.]

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:41 Therefore Saul said, “O LORD God of Israel, why have you not answered your servant this day? If this guilt is in me or in Jonathan my son, O LORD, God of Israel, give Urim. But if this guilt is in your people Israel, give Thummim.” . . .

□ ESV 1 Samuel 14:41 . . . And Jonathan and Saul were taken, but the people escaped. 42 Then Saul said, “Cast the lot between me and my son Jonathan.” And Jonathan was taken.

So, the Urim and the Thummim point to Jonathan as the transgressor. Saul confronts his son in □ verse 43.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:43 Then Saul said to Jonathan, “Tell me what you have done.” And Jonathan told him, “I tasted a little honey with the tip of the staff that was in my hand. Here I am; I will die.”

The last sentence from Jonathan may sound like a courageous acceptance of what must happen. □ “I will die.”

It is also possible that Jonathan is actually asking a question, “I will die?” Remember, there are no punctuation marks in ancient Hebrew. In this case, Jonathan seems to be questioning the fairness of being killed for tasting a little honey when he didn’t even know about the oath. The

*New Living Translation* renders it as a question, with Jonathan asking his father, “Does that deserve death?”

That Jonathan is asking a question seems more likely given Saul’s response in □ verse 44.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:44 And Saul said, “God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan.”

This seems to be a response to a question. Perhaps a stubbornly angry response that doubles down on his rash vow to follow through with the execution.

But the rest of the Israelites are no longer willing to put up with Saul’s foolish vows. There is a mutiny. No longer do they say, “Do what seems good to you.” Instead, they vehemently come to Jonathan’s defense. □ Verse 45 explains,

ESV 1 Samuel 14:45 Then the people said to Saul, “Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the LORD lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day.” . . .

This is no small thing for soldiers to rise up in defiance of their king.

□ Verse 45 and 46 round out the story, indicating that the Israelites are able to save Jonathan from Saul’s foolishness.

ESV 1 Samuel 14:45 . . . So the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. 46 Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place.

The word “ransomed” simply means that Jonathan was rescued or saved.

In being led around by his feelings apart from God, Saul needlessly . . .

- puts the lives of his people at risk,
- limits the success of his people in vanquishing the enemy,
- leads the people into moral compromise,
- threatens the life of his son,
- alienates his troops to the point of mutiny,
- and makes a fool of himself.

The take-away or big idea from this story is: □ Relying on feelings apart from God’s wisdom is dangerous.

How can we apply this to our lives today?

It seems to me a good place to start is to identify areas of your life where there is strong emotion. The presence of strong emotion is not inherently bad. But greater emotional intensity can signal greater opportunity to get carried away.

Take strong feelings of romantic love, for example. Not a bad thing. But such feelings can tempt us to ignore God’s wisdom relating to moral boundaries for sexual expression. Such feelings can also draw us away from God’s guidelines for divorce and remarriage. And thinking that this is not dangerous is itself a part of the danger. God’s wisdom relating to intimacy and marriage is not intended to be a wet blanket; it is intended to protect our well-being and to maximize our joy.

Or take as another example strong feelings of anger or animosity toward another person. Such feelings may be completely understandable and justified. But they can sorely tempt us to close the

book on God's wisdom that bids us to forgive, to seek peace, and to leave vengeance to God.

Being governed entirely by feelings of compassion and mercy can also be dangerous. Well-intentioned efforts to help someone can sometimes be hurtful. We need God's wisdom to sort out that which is truly redeeming from that which is merely enabling and dishonoring.

Even feelings of religious fervor can fool us. The Spirit of God can and does prompt us at times in ways that can be felt, and I do not discount that. But sometimes we can feel a certain way and rationalize it is the Spirit, when in fact, it may not be. We must evaluate our feelings in light of God's wisdom from Scripture and godly counselors.

Also, an unchecked longing to be loved and accepted can easily lead us astray. We can be drawn into groups and relationships where moral boundaries are routinely crossed. We rationalize, "At least this is where I feel loved and accepted." Our longings can blind us to the greater love and acceptance available to us with God.

In addition, feelings of toxic shame can adversely affect our decisions. When we feel that we are uniquely and irreparably broken—when we feel not only that we have made a mistake, but that we are a mistake—it can invite us to lose all hope, to abandon all virtue because what's the use? We are too far gone. But God's wisdom tells us that we are not beyond the reach of his grace. In fact, he has nailed our shame to the cross because he loves us and wants us to be near him.

Sometimes when we have experienced some kind of trauma or abuse in our lives, whether it's physical or sexual or spiritual or verbal or emotional, or medical, we can be so dominated by emotions like shame that it can be hard to see God's wisdom. If this describes you, I invite you to consider being a part of a small group called Mending the Soul.

Starting on September 28, my wife Cathy and I will be leading two separate Mending the Soul groups. I will meet with men here at the church. Cathy will concurrently meet with women at our home. There will be ten weekly sessions on Thursdays lasting from 6:30PM to 8:00PM. We will be going through a curriculum called Mending the Soul that is designed to provide perspective and healing for survivors of abuse and trauma.

It is important to know that, unlike most other small groups at Moon Valley, you can't just show up for these MTS groups; you must preregister in advance. We want to make sure that this is a good fit for you and that the groups will be safe places for everyone. So, if you are interested, you *must* talk with me or Cathy beforehand. Otherwise, if you just show up unannounced, it will be awkward because you won't be able to participate. And once these groups start, they are effectively closed. So act now.

Contact information for Cathy and me is provided in our published ministry plan for 2023-2024. There are hard copies at the Connect Counter and there is a digital version online. Mending the Soul groups are listed under life groups and also under men's and women's ministries.

Whether or not Mending the Soul is for you, the lesson from our biblical text is for everybody. Relying on feelings apart from God's wisdom is dangerous.

Let's pray.

Lord, help us to rely not on our feelings, but on your wisdom, knowing that our hearts are not always reliable, but your wisdom always is.  
Amen.