

# The Power of Fear

*Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.*

Date: 05 October 2025

Preacher: Andrew Fortuine

[ 0 : 00 ] Good morning, Covenant Church. God's blessings to you on this beautiful October day.! I think we're getting spoiled. We could almost have church outside.! But we do live in Wisconsin, and we know reality will hit eventually.

I always enjoy being at Covenant Church because the Holy Spirit always knits the service together. This past week I was in Proverbs 3, and it contains that wonderful promise in verses 5 and 6, is trust in the Lord with all your heart. What's the next part?

Lean not on your own understanding. If you picture that, if you have your understanding and you're leaning on that, how's that going to go for us? Not very well. But our song just now, Leaning on the Everlasting Arms. And I think we can all agree that is much better. Before we get to our scripture today, let's begin with a word of prayer.

Father, we gather in worship together as your people. We thank you so much for this time in your holy word. And we pray according to your promise that you will accomplish all you have purposed for it. Please give us ears to hear your word and the power, the courage, the conviction to live it out. May your name be glorified in this time, for we pray it in Christ's name. Amen.

Our scripture this morning is found in 1 Samuel chapter 13, but we'll actually start with the final two verses of chapter 12. And it tells of a sad, even life-altering chapter in the life of King Saul. But of course, we know that even in difficult scriptures, there are things that we can learn and grow from. And so beginning with 1 Samuel chapter 12, verse 24. And just the context, this is the prophet Samuel addressing the whole nation as they are about to anoint Saul as their new king.

[ 2 : 00 ] But be sure to fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. Consider what great things he has done for you. Yet if you persist in doing evil, both you and your king will perish. Saul was 30 years old when he became king, and he reigned over Israel 42 years. Saul chose 3,000 men from Israel. 2,000 were with him at Michmash and in the hill country of Bethel, and 1,000 were with Jonathan at Gibeah in Benjamin. The rest of the men he sent back to their homes. Jonathan attacked the Philistine outpost at Gibeah, and the Philistines heard about it. Then Saul had the trumpet blown throughout the land and said, let the Hebrews hear. So all Israel heard the news. Saul has attacked the Philistine outpost, and now Israel has become obnoxious to the Philistines. And the people were summoned to join Saul at Gilgal.

The Philistines assembled to fight Israel with 3,000 chariots, 6,000 charioteers, and soldiers, as numerous as the sand on the seashore. They went up and camped at Michmash east of Bethaven.

When the Israelites saw that their situation was critical and that their army was hard-pressed, they hid in caves and thickets among the rocks and in pits and cisterns. Some Hebrews even crossed the Jordan to the land of Gad and Gilead. Saul remained at Gilgal, and all the troops were with him, quaking with fear. He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel. But Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, bring me the burnt offerings and the fellowship offerings. And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. What have you done, asked Samuel. Saul replied, when I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time, and that the Philistines were assembling at Michmash, I thought, now the Philistines will come down against me at Gilgal, and I have not sought the Lord's favor.

So I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering. You have done a foolish thing, Samuel said. You have not kept the command the Lord your God gave you. If you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure. The Lord has sought out a man after his own heart, and appointed him ruler of his people, because you have not kept the Lord's command.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. We'll dive into our scripture in just a moment, but our underlying theme for this week's message is fear, and the power it can hold over us, the things it can cause us to do. Maybe not a very cheery topic, but a relatable one for most of us. Fear is something that we struggle with, we experience at every stage of life, and it starts early, doesn't it? [ 5 : 11 ] What are some things kids are afraid of? Maybe the dark, monsters under the bed, maybe the babysitter. If you've seen kids firsthand, you know how deeply they can feel things, including fear. But what about as adults? Do we ever outgrow fear and anxiety? It's more that our fears morph, they fester, they come alive, they take roots in our hearts and minds. Fears like health concerns. Whether in ourselves or in loved ones, health issues tend to raise our anxiety because they expose our own human limitations.

They remind us we're not really in control of our own destiny. Fear of the future. That comes in all shapes and sizes, doesn't it? Maybe that future is tomorrow because we have a stressful situation at work.

Or maybe we need to have a serious conversation with someone. Maybe we're anxious about AI. Or we're not sure what kind of world our kids will inherit. What kind of things keep you up at night? Financial stress, relational anxiety, worry about your family. Bottom line, fear and anxiety can get lodged into our lives.

And those things can seek to take us over. They affect our sleep. They affect our health and how we treat others. Fear can damage our faith because it eats away at our joy and our peace in the Lord because we get consumed with our circumstances rather than fixing our eyes on Jesus. Is any of this God's will that we're slaves to fear? That we're chained to our anxious thoughts and always churning inside? No. There's a reason that one of the most frequent commands in the Bible is fear not. Do not be afraid. And with that we turn to our passage today. Picking up at the end of 1 Samuel chapter 12.

The nation of Israel is gathered and the prophet Samuel is there concluding an address to the people, reminding them, warning them to remain faithful to the God who has called them and led them thus far.

[ 7 : 33 ] Only fear the Lord and serve him faithfully with all your heart. For consider what great things he has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.

So backing up just a little bit, you remember how God's people were starting to get restless and nervous for the future. There's that anxiety about the future. Samuel, the nation's prophet and priest, was getting old. And so the people come to him and they say, we want a king. And they even give their reasoning. Then we will be like all the other nations, with a king to lead us and to go out before us and to fight our battles. What do you think? Good reasoning? To be just like everyone else?

Would we tell our kids that? Yeah, just be like everyone else. Just follow the crowd. Copy whatever they're doing. Well, Samuel's not impressed. In fact, he's angry. But in one of the saddest verses in the entire Bible, God tells Samuel, listen to all the people they are saying, listen to all that the people are saying to you. It is not you they have rejected, but they have rejected me as their king. Ouch. In this request for an earthly king to be like the other nations, to have someone lead them and fight their battles, the people's hearts have drifted away from the Lord. They have rejected him as king.

How so? Because God's intent was never that his people would be like the other nations. It was that they would be holy and set apart, shining and reflecting the goodness of God to a watching world. And out of that blessed, set apart covenant relationship, God himself was the people's king, leading them, providing for them, fighting their battles. In fact, just before the people demand a king here in 1 Samuel, we see that blessed reality in action. In chapter 7, the people of Israel, with the Lord, leading the charge, rout their enemies, the Philistines. And in the afterglow of victory, Samuel sets up a stone and calls it Ebenezer. That word probably is familiar because we sing the hymn, here I raise my Ebenezer, hither by whose help? Thy help. Thy help I've come.

[ 10 : 09 ] That's exactly what Ebenezer means. Till now, the Lord has helped us. And Samuel doesn't want the people to forget it. Fix your eyes, your hearts on the living God. He is our king. He is our ruler. He is our protector and provider. But wow, faith can be so fleeting. The very next chapter, the people's memories have grown dim, and they're demanding an earthly king for themselves. Whether it's the pride of life or FOMO, fear of missing out, the people reject God as

their true king, and they demand an earthly ruler. And ironically, that same fear, that same lack of faith in the people would corrupt and infect King Saul's reign as well. So picking up at chapter 13, Saul has taken the first year to get established as king, and then he gathers an army to himself, 3,000 men. In previous days, Israel would form militias in times of national threat, but this marked the first standing army for Israel.

We're told that Saul, King Saul, takes 2,000 soldiers for himself at Michmash, while Jonathan, this is the first time Jonathan is introduced in scripture, his son, is stationed at Geba with 1,000 soldiers. But it is Jonathan, with his smaller contingent of soldiers, who meets an encroaching garrison of the Philistines. They're about six miles away from Jerusalem. Jonathan goes out to engage them and defeats them and defeats them. Saul is over here. He is not part of this battle, but he gets word of Jonathan's victory and in response blows the victory trumpet and apparently takes credit for the victory.

Well, from there, the plot thickens. The Philistines, their garrison has been routed, but that's just a small contingent of their whole army. In fact, they flip on to full battle mode. They mobilize their entire army against the Israelites, and it's a fearsome display of power. These are not two equally matched foes. The Philistines have chariots and horsemen and troops as numerous as the sand on the seashore.

Way more powerful, way more advanced than Israel, and they're all arrayed against God's people. And when the Israelites see the extent of the enemy's power, do they pray to the Lord? Not exactly. They are terrified. Their courage melts away, and they actually run and hide in caves and holes and under rocks. Some soldiers just depart. They desert. They go home across the river. Those who remain with Saul are trembling with fear. And can we begin to see the futility of people putting their trust in mortals?

[ 13 : 13 ] Let me ask you, even with an earthly king in place, did the people need God any less? Of course not. But they did need a leader who would rise to the occasion, who would demonstrate contagious faith and refocus the people's eyes and hearts on the Lord.

The inflection point comes in verse 8. Saul has been given strict instructions by Samuel to wait. Wait for my return. But now Saul is nearing panic mode. Why? Because Samuel hasn't shown up yet.

Waiting. Waiting. Samuel, where are you? Meanwhile, the war drums of the Philistines are getting louder, and Saul's army is losing morale by the hour. Hope is fading. Quick pause here. What should King Saul have done in this moment? What would you have done? Because let's own it. It's a difficult situation Saul finds himself in here. Samuel has given explicit instructions to wait for him, but he's nowhere to be found. He's past due. Meanwhile, the Philistines are gathering their forces, preparing to attack. They already vastly outnumber your army. Their technology is superior. The ragtag soldiers you do have, they're inexperienced.

Many of them are armed with farm equipment as weapons, and they're scared. What do you do here if you're Saul? Saul. This is the kind of crucible of testing where leaders are formed and shaped, and the people's hearts are bonded to a godly and faithful leader. What does the word of God say? No king is saved by the size of his army. No warrior escapes by his great strength. Let's say the rest of this together.

We wait in hope for the Lord. He is our help and our shield. Good word. Well, how about Saul? He crumbles under the weight of this pressure, and he takes matters into his own hands. He rejects the command of Samuel to wait, and he runs ahead of God. That is a very human temptation. When we are in times of waiting, and the waiting continues on, well, I'll handle it. I'll just run ahead of God.

[ 15 : 44 ] Saul says, well, Samuel's not here. I'll just be the priest myself. I'll offer up the sacrifice. What do you think? Good idea? It's a classic case of allowing circumstances and fear to dictate your actions rather than obeying and trusting the word of the Lord. Well, Saul's timing is ironic.

Even as the smoke is still rising from the sacrifice, here comes a familiar figure over the hillside. Guess who? It's Samuel. What have you done? Yes, Saul. What good answer is there except the truth? But for Saul, his mind's working overtime and starts giving excuses. Well, you didn't show up. The people were scattering. What was I supposed to do? Samuel gives Saul the bad news. You have done foolishly, and your kingdom will not continue. And still, God will raise up a man after his own heart to lead the kingdom. Most of us would call this chapter of Saul's life very sad. It's easy to pinpoint his mistakes. But is it also relatable to us in some ways? Who among us has not felt so much fear and anxiety and even panic that it's made us a little crazy? Maybe it's blocked out our

view of God or made us question his goodness or his sovereignty or his care, especially when the waiting seems to go on forever. Saul had to wait even as the pressure kept mounting. He had to wait for Samuel, yes, but even more so he had to wait on the Lord. Waiting for all of us can sometimes feel like a pressure cooker.

But with Saul and in our own lives, as frustrating as it can be, I believe that waiting and trusting are part of God's sovereign plan to teach us character and to deepen our faith, to compel us to look to the Lord's resources rather than our own. How is olive oil made in the olive press? How is godly character shaped in the crucible, in the pressure cookers of life, as we learn to trust and rely on God?

But Saul allowed fear to be his master, and he missed out on the opportunity for growth and blessing that God had intended. So a couple lessons from this story. Fear causes us to shrink back from God's will.

[ 18 : 28 ] So many stories of faith and scripture involve people being called out of their comfort zone, and it's by God's design. My righteous one shall live by faith, says the Lord. Not by sight, not by comfort, not by feelings, but faith. And it's in these times of testing and struggle that our dependence and faith on God grow stronger. But as fallible human beings, sometimes we let fear get the best of us, and we fail to step out in confidence and courage where God is leading. I think of the Israelites as they arrived at the promised land for the first time. Their memories are still fresh of slavery in Egypt and the Lord's deliverance. And you remember, they sent out 12 spies to scope out this new land God had given them, and they come back with good news. It is truly a land flowing with milk and honey. And just look at the size of these grapes we brought back. But there's more to their report. The cities are fortified with huge walls, and the land is just crawling with giants. If we go in, they're going to squash us like ants. Well, two of the 12, you remember, Joshua and Caleb, try to rally the people with reminders of God's faithfulness and his power. But fear has already taken hold. It's sweeping through the Israelites, and they shrink back from the land God has promised. And how many more years did the people have to wander in the desert? 40. God says in Hebrews 10, my righteous one will live by faith, and I take no pleasure in the one who shrinks back. Interesting, we see the same shrinking back in Saul from the very beginning, in fact. Back in chapter 10, Samuel has gathered the whole people together to introduce Saul for the first time as their king. It's this festive, joyous occasion. But where is Saul?

He's nowhere to be found. Awol, for his own coronation. They're looking everywhere for Saul. And finally, they have to ask the Lord, where is our king? Well, he had hidden himself in the back room behind the luggage, shrinking back. Fear can become a power unto itself in our lives. It's controlling us rather than God. And in Saul, this shrinking back in fear eventually becomes a way of life for him. We see it later when a giant named Goliath begins bellowing threats against God's people. And what does Saul do? He shrinks back in fear yet again. And instead, a shepherd boy full of faith, a man after God's own heart named David, answers the call. Fear of man versus fear of the Lord. Saul was burdened by people's perceptions of him. That's a very common and insidious kind of fear for many of us. From the very natural desire to please people, all the way to being controlled and even incapacitated by the opinions and the expectations of others. It's unfortunate Saul didn't learn much from his experience with the Philistines, because shortly after, God gives Saul another chance.

Go completely conquer the Amalekites. Spare nothing and no one, for they are people devoted to destruction. Clear word from the Lord. So what does Saul do? He spares the Amalekite king. He spares the best of the livestock. And then he actually has the gall to tell Samuel he's done exactly as the Lord commanded.

[ 22 : 26 ] Is it really that easy to fool Samuel? He has to rebuke Saul again. But listen carefully to Saul's confession. He says, I have sinned, for I have transgressed the commandment of the Lord and your word, so far so good, because I feared the people and obeyed their voice. Oh, the problems we bring on ourselves when we seek man's approval more than God's. When we have the fear of man influencing our decisions and our actions. When we are overly anxious for how others perceive us, we will be constantly tempted to compromise our faith in the Lord. And so in fear, we put on a mask to fit in with the crowd. We cover up our weaknesses so others won't reject us. There's even a name for this nowadays, imposter syndrome, where we live in constant fear of being seen or exposed for who we truly are, that we don't really measure up. It's a fear that can control us and dominate our lives.



[ 30 : 32 ] And who cannot obey, God is no other way to help me in Jesus, that the Savior fades. Always wonderful to be with you. If you would like prayer for any reason, I'll be available after the service.

let's conclude with a wonderful doxology from the book of Jude. Now to him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy.

To the only God our Savior be glory, majesty, power and authority through Jesus Christ our Lord before all ages now and forevermore. Amen. Go in peace.

Amen. Amen.

[ 32 : 29 ] Amen. Amen.

Amen. Amen.