

# What Is Your Story?

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[ 0 : 00 ] And I want to thank the leaders and the council at Covenant CRC for having us today. I would also like to welcome all the new members that I saw.

What you guys sang was very touching. It is true that the gospel reaches all nations and tribes. And under Jesus, we are one.

And may God continue to be with this church, be with the new members. And God bless you all. So the title today is, What is Your Story?

And I will be reading from 1 Samuel 8, 1-22 in the NIV version. And it says, When Samuel grew old, he appointed his sons as Israel's leader.

The name of his firstborn was Joel, and the name of his second was Bajah. They had served at Beersheba, but his son did not follow his ways.

[ 1 : 03 ] They turned aside after dishonest gain and accepted bribes and perverted justice. So all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Rima.

They said to him, You are old. Your sons do not follow your ways. Now appoint a king to lead us, such as all the other nations have.

But when they said, Give us a king to lead us, this displeased Samuel. So he prayed to the Lord. And the Lord told him, 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. And they have done from the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, forsaking me and serving other gods.

So they are doing to you. Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king who will reign over them will claim as his rights.

[ 2 : 04 ] Samuel told all the words of the Lord to the people who are asking him for a king. He said, This is what the king who will reign over you will claim as his rights.

He will take your sons and make them serve with the chariots and horses. And they will run in front of the chariots. Some he will assign to be commanders of thousands and commanders of fifties.

And others to plow his ground and reap his harvest. And still others to make weapons of war and equipment for his chariots. He will take your daughters to be perfumers and cooks and bakers.

He will take the best of your fields and vineyards and olive groves and give them to the attendants. He will take a tenth of your grain and from your vineyard, vintage, and give it to his officials and attendants.

Your male and female servants and the best of your cattle and the donkeys he will take for his own use. He will take a tenth of your flocks and you yourself will become his slaves.

[ 3 : 10 ] When that day comes, you will cry out from relief from the king you have chosen. But the Lord will not answer you in that day. But the people refused to listen to Samuel.

No, they said, we want a king over us. Then we will be like all the other nations with the king to lead us and go out before us and fight our battles.

When Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated before the Lord. The Lord answered, listen to them and give them a king. Then Samuel said to the Israelites, everyone go back to your own town.

This is the word of the Lord. Thanks be to God. And we will also read from Lord's Day 49. What is the third petition?

Let's pray together.

[ 4 : 29 ] Father in heaven, it is a blessing to be here today at Covenant CRC. To see how good you are working in this church with the new membership.

May you continue to be with this church. May you bless them. May you guide them. May you be with the leaders. May you be with the council. May you be with each and every single member, with

the new member.

All this is a blessing from you, Lord. We come today to worship you and give you glory. May you open our hearts today so we can hear your word.

Give us eyes to see and ears to hear about how good you are, how faithful you are, and to trust you. Give thanks and pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Amen.

Thank you for the introduction, Don. So this is part of my introduction. I didn't grow up as a Christian.

[ 5 : 30 ] I grew up as a shamanist, which is a Hmong traditional religion. And coming to the United States at a young age, there was a lot of pressure to pursue a good education and follow my family's, the Hmong religion, and cultural.

Especially being the oldest child and the oldest son. I felt like I was stuck in two worlds, living in America and growing up. I taught Hmong at home.

And when I went to school, I spoke English. When I was finally in high school, I made a commitment to myself that I will live for myself and live life to the fullest, no matter what anyone says.

I trusted myself, and I went against what my family or my religion says. But after high school, I enlisted in the U.S. Army. Because at the time, I wanted to be all that you can be, right?

I didn't go to college to pursue higher education right away like many others. Because I trusted myself, and I wanted to live a life for myself. I believed at that time that if I trusted in myself, I would have a happy life and a good life.

[ 6 : 47 ] This included going against my family, my parents, my religion. And no one is going to stop me from doing what I want because my decision was just my own.

And I'm going to live how I want. And I will write my own life story in my blank diary, right? So do you have a blank diary? What is a blank diary?

A blank diary is an open book with empty white pages that is ready to be written in like a journal. You are the author ready to write your own life story.

At the same time, live life to the fullest. You are the author who writes and experiences your good life now. It is a journal description of all your life experience, achievements, and success.

Your blank diary is ready for you to start writing your life as you live. For our text today, we see a similar issue with the Israelites.

[ 7 : 51 ] They trust in themselves and they make their own decisions. They went against God. From our text, Samuel is in his older years. Samuel is a judge, a prophet, and a priest.

He appoints his son to the next in line for the position of judges for Israel. But both of his sons, Joel and Abijah, are not like their father.

They do not walk in God's way, as the Bible tells us. They are corrupted. So the elders gather at Rema, a town in Benjamin, about eight kilometers north of present-day Jerusalem.

The elders of Israel gather because they are concerned about the future of Israel. As we read from the text, we can imagine this. One of the elders saying to the large group of elders, Samuel is getting old.

His sons are not right to be judges. Another elder saying, we want our own king. We want a king to lead us into battle. He will be great for us.

[ 8 : 57 ] For once, we will be just like other nations. So the elders of Israel goes and confronts Samuel. One of the elders yells at Samuel, you are old.

Your sons do not follow your ways. Now appoint a king to lead us like other nations. Another elder yells out, give us the king to lead us.

Samuel, with disappointment, probably thinking to himself, what is all this? You all should know God is your Lord. God is your king. They all should know this.

Samuel is filled with frustration and disappointments. He prays to God, right? And God answers him. And God says, 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. This is God speaking. As they have done from the day I have brought them out of Egypt until this day.

[ 9 : 59 ] Forsaking me and serving other gods. So they are doing to you. Now listen to them, but warn them solemnly and let them know what the king will reign over them, what claim has his rights.

Samuel followed the instructions of God. Samuel followed the instructions of God. And he goes back to not just tell the elders, but the nation of Israel, knowing their fate. Samuel says, if you want a king, your king is going to steal from you.

Your king is going to take another tenth from you. Even after you give a tenth to your God. Your king is making you all slaves. Your sons and your daughters will be slaves. Your king will take your hard-earned money.

When you are desperate in pain and distress, and when you cry out to the Lord, the Lord will not listen to you. The people of Israel, without hesitation, says, we want a king over us.

We will be like other nations. A king to lead us and fight our battles. Samuel gave them exactly what they wanted. The elders and the people of Israel trusted themselves and went against God.

[ 11 : 06 ] And the question is why? Why would the people of Israel still want a king? Don't they already have God? Isn't God their Lord? Isn't God their king? They don't trust God, or they don't trust in themselves.

Their action shows that they trust in themselves. They want to make their own decisions because they don't trust God. And when they don't trust God, it means that they don't need God. The people of Israel and the elders trusted themselves and what they can do.

The people, the elders and the people of Israel wanted to write their own life story in their blank diary. This is the same problem we have today.

Do we trust God? Isn't God our Lord? Or do we trust in ourselves apart from God? If we look at it closely, sometimes our action shows that we are.

We are just like the Israelites. We are just like the leaders, the elders here. We trust in ourselves and our decisions. Even though we go to church on Sundays when we listen to sermons, when we read the Bible, we are in control of our lives.

[ 12 : 16 ] We want to make the decision regardless of what the Bible says or regardless of what God says. Because we also want to write our life story in our very own, each and every single one of us, blank diary.

Let's just call this man Tom. Tom has been a Christian all his life. He grew up in a church growing up. Tom attended church with his parents, went to church services, went to Sunday school, and did many of the youth ministry and activities in the church.

Tom was excited about going to church growing up. But when Tom started attending college, his church attendance dropped significantly. And Tom only came to church when convenient.

During this time, Tom's mom had asked the elders of the church to continue to pray for Tom. Tom has not been listening to his mom and the importance of God in going to church.

Tom has been actively living in his life for himself. He made close friends and people outside the church that pulled him away from God.

[ 13 : 24 ] Because Tom trusted himself. Tom trusted in education. And he made his own decisions. And Tom also wrote his own story in his life in his blank diary.

Today we are similar like Tom. Do we trust in ourselves apart from God? Are we really trusting in God? Are we trusting in ourselves as Christians?

And are we writing our own blank diary? From the Hypercatechism, Lord's Day 49, it writes, We reject our own wills and obey God's will without any backtalk.

God's will alone is good. As Christians, this includes obeying God and knowing that his will is always good for us. This includes choosing God's will over our own.

So from the commentary of Zacharias Ersonus, and he's the author of the Hypercatechism, and he writes on Lord's Day 49, and he states that, A denying of ourselves consists of two parts.

[ 14 : 30 ] One, that we should hold ourselves in readiness to give up our desires and wishes, which are opposites to the law of God. And two, that we hold ourselves in readiness to take up the cross and submit ourselves willingly to God in all things.

Looking back at the text from 1 Samuel 8, 21-22, Samuel, when Samuel heard all that the people said, he repeated it before the Lord.

And the Lord answered, Listen to them and give them a king. Samuel ended up being, Saul ended up being their king, the first king of Israel.

Saul led them into battle just as the elders and the people of Israel wanted their king to do. God gave them what they wanted. God gave the people of Israel an earthly king.

And just as God says, an earthly king who would be cruel to them and not follow God. But Saul was not the king after God's own heart.

[ 15 : 36 ] In 1 Samuel 15, 10, then the Lord gave Samuel a message. He says, I am very sad I have made Saul king. He has turned away from me. He has not done what I directed him to do.

Even so, God never gave up on the people of Israel. He continued to show grace and finally gave them a real human king who is a man after God's own heart.

The real human king is King David. He is the man after God's own heart. 1 Samuel 13, 14, But now your kingdom shall not endure. The Lord has sought out for himself after a man after his own heart. And the Lord has appointed him as ruler over all people. God still loves the people of Israel and his grace is abundantly that through the line of David, there will be the Messiah, the Savior of the world, who is the Son of the living God, Jesus Christ.

God still kept him as promised despite the disobedience and failures of Israel throughout the Old Testament. God gave them the eternal King, Jesus Christ, to sit on the throne of David forever.

[16:47] And it is by grace of God, through Jesus Christ, that people are willing to do God's will and trust in him. 2 Corinthians 5, 14, 15 says, For Christ's love compels us, because we are conceived that one died for all, and therefore all died.

And he died for all, that those who live shall no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them and was raised again. The good news is that Jesus Christ died and was raised from the dead, and all those who believe in him will have eternal life, and they will not live for themselves.

But they should no longer live for themselves, but for him who died for them. They shall live and do God's will and trust in him. God is the one who is writing Christian story and shows his grace for Christians through the blank diary, through Jesus Christ.

God is the author who writes for Christians. For Christians today, even though our disobedience and failures, God's grace is for you and for me.

Today, we trust in God and have faith in him because of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ. It is because of God's grace for us that we trust in him.

[18:08] God's will for you and for me is better than our own. This is a testimony from the senior, Tori Kelly. And she says this, God, you said you have a plan for me, for my life.

So I'm just going to trust that. And even if it means I don't get famous or anything, I'm just going to surrender all of this to you. Put in your hand. And I think once I did that, that's really when the door started opening.

I didn't have to change myself. I could be, I could just be myself. Through Christ, I can just be myself and be surrounded by his love.

Continuing from the introduction from the story, by God's grace, my wife and I have been together for 25 years. And I have, by God's grace, served different positions in the church.

And God has used me to grow in his ministry. I was an elder for many years. I also went to classes. And I also was the Sunday school director.

[19:16] And I became the associate pastor among Christian folk church. And it is by God's grace. 25 years, it has never crossed my wife and I that as me, growing up shamanist, I will be in the position that I am today.

I owe all this to God. And God deserves all the glory. God writes and God is the person who is writing in my life story, in my blanket diary, according to his will for my life.

For 1 John 5, 11, and this is the testimony. God has given us eternal life. And this life is in his son. Our sins require death.

And Jesus is a sacrifice for us. Jesus paid for our sins and took our punishment. We can have confidence to put our trust in God. Even with our disobedience, our mistakes, and failures, God's grace is upon us.

And Jesus died on the cross so you and I can be saved. Our faith, our trust, our will, we do it out of gratitude because of God's grace.

[20:25] Nothing is more fulfilling than trusting in God through the finished work of Jesus Christ.

As Christians, we are an open book, like the blanket diary, where God is the author of our life story.

All of our achievements, success, as well as everything we have, all comes from God. And it is for God's glory. God is the author who does the writing in our life.

And God is the author of our life as we live for him. And the question is, who is, what is your story? Who is the author of your life story today?

Let us pray together. Father in heaven, we come before you. We thank you for your word.

May your word be with us today. Even though we fail, even though we are disobedient, Lord, show us mercy.

[ 21 : 29 ] Remind us that you, Lord, how good you are, how faithful you are. And Lord, you are the author of our life. May we live for you.

May we remember that it is you who are writing the blank diary in our life. May everything we do bring glory in your name.

We pray all this in Jesus' name. Amen. Thank you.