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What Does God Really Want From Me?

*“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices as in obeying the voice of the Lord?
- 1 Samuel 15:22*

The books of 1 and 2 Samuel are really great character studies. What we see in each major character of the books are people with great skills and assets, but also huge character flaws. Saul is one of those guys. He has literally everything going for him. He's got the looks, the battle skills - he's a total crowd pleaser. When the Israelites demand a King, Saul seems to be a shoe-in.

But Saul has a major character flaw - pride! When Saul starts to be successful, he increasingly starts trusting in himself more than God. With each battle he wins, he grows more and more distant from God. Eventually he starts to ignore what God asks of Him, and starts to do things that He thinks God would want. In 1 Samuel 15, God tells Saul to completely destroy the Amalekites, and to not take anything. Saul however, takes a bunch of stuff, including livestock and then makes a bunch of burnt offerings to God.

This passage can be a bit difficult to understand. See at first glance it seems like Saul is doing good stuff. After all, he makes burnt offerings to God and burnt offerings were part of what God asked of His people. It almost seems as if Saul is doing things that God wants. So why's God so angry with Saul that he's about to replace him with a new King?

Samuel gives Saul the answer in 1 Samuel 15:22! Saul is making the argument that the reason they didn't destroy everything was so they could offer it to the Lord. But Samuel reminds Saul what God is really after! Read this part again:

“Has the Lord as great delight in burnt offering and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the Lord? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to listen that of fat rams. For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He has also rejected you from being kind.”

The problem with Saul is that he was doing things he thought God would like, but doing them instead of the things God actually TOLD Saul to do. Imagine your parents asking you to clean your room. Instead you opt to empty the dishwasher and take out the trash. Those are both great things, but in the end you didn't obey your parents - you picked stuff you wanted to do for them.

If we're honest with ourselves, we spend a lot of time trying to please God on our own terms. We decide that worship attendance, amount of volunteering on mission trips, what we place in the offering plate, how many Bible studies or devotionals we take in are the ways in which we please God. It's not that those aren't things that are good - or even desirable. The problem is that while they might be part of God's desire for us - what God really wants is our obedience and our hearts. He wants to be the leader of our lives. He wants to be able to call of to something and have us listen. God wants to be able to say "I want you to go talk to that person about me", and us to respond by doing just that. God wants our attitudes, thoughts, priorities, relationships, interactions, etc. all to be guided by Him!

Saul wanted to be in charge of his own destiny and it was ultimately His downfall. God doesn't want our empty gestures - he wants our hearts. Obedience in the everyday shows we trust Him!