

*Read also 1 John 2:2-6. Check out the service at [www.fpcd.org](http://www.fpcd.org).*

Israel lived under constant tension. They had not yet settled the land God had given them. The Philistines came from the island of Crete and settled on the coast of Canaan in the foothills. A powerful nation, they pressed in on them to take more territory. They plagued Israel for years.

It was a problem; it became a crisis. Those guys were big—Goliath was a Philistine—in contrast, Israel felt very small. Israel had come into the land God was giving them, but they would conquer it little by little. God had told them at the beginning, *this will happen one step at a time, so stay with me*. Otherwise you will be overcome.

I think in the building of something, in this case the building of the people of God who were to be a blessing to the world; they needed to learn to follow.

But they would get discouraged because they couldn't see the big picture, just the obstacles; seeing the enemy in front of them who wanted to crush them. Do you ever get discouraged by your obstacles? You wonder *where is God? I could sure use His help right now*.

Do you remember that the threat of the Philistines drove the Israelites to ask Samuel for a king? Samuel was upset. Why can't they trust God? But God said, "Go with them." And God selected Saul.

Do you also remember what God said about Saul?

*"He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have seen the suffering of my people, because their outcry has come to me." (1 Sam 9:16)*

And then when Samuel first conversed with Saul this is what he said:

*"The LORD has anointed you ruler over his people Israel. You shall reign over the people of the LORD and you will save them from the hand of their enemies all around." (1 Sam 10:1)*

So the Lord had already declared His intentions for Saul, and Samuel had communicated God's call to Saul. He would save the Israelites from the Philistines. This was God's predetermined plan.

But sometimes when God encourages us—through a message in the Bible or through the words of someone else in the congregation—we have a hard time hearing it or believing it when crisis arises.

Hear the conflict that faced Saul concerning the Philistines. READ 1 Sam 13:2-5

So picture the scene. You have Israel on the one hand with 3,000 troops. Saul divides them up under his lead and his son Jonathan's lead. They do quite well! They defeat the Philistines. They are on the run—but only for a while.

It's like a bad movie. Saul's feeling pretty good; he blows the ram's horn, calls all Israel to come help with the battle; they lift their eyes to the hills; and what do they see? Not throngs of Israelites answering the call to war but swarms of the enemy, thousands of them, "troops like the sand on the seashore" pouring over the peak of the hill and bearing down on them.

Darrell read:

"<sup>6</sup> The men of Israel saw what a tight spot they were in; and because they were hard pressed by the enemy, they tried to hide in caves, thickets, rocks, holes, and cisterns. <sup>7</sup> Some of them crossed the Jordan River and escaped into the land of Gad and Gilead. Meanwhile, Saul stayed at Gilgal, and his men were trembling with fear." (1 Sam 13:6-7)

So Saul blew the rams horn and they all scattered. It was not a good day.

Have you ever had circumstances where you thought it was going well and in fact, things turned out to be quite the opposite and you panicked?

When we lived in Red Oak we had several acres and my husband traveled a lot and I decided I needed to mow. The boys were too small to put on that tractor so I thought, "I'm home; I can do it myself!" So I got a quick and easy lesson. It went great! Only, as I headed for the opening in the fence I didn't judge too well and didn't turn fast enough to make the opening and kind of hit the fence and suddenly I experienced the panic that can arise when something very powerful unexpectedly hits a stationary object. I forgot what to do to reverse the thing.

Let's just say in the morning I thought there was nothing to it, and in the afternoon, that machine seemed formidable. And even more formidable was having to explain the new shape of the tractor to my husband. So I enthusiastically began and gave up mowing that same day.

So here's what Saul did: READ 1 Samuel 13:8-14

He looked at circumstances and panicked. In the face of this crisis he took matters into his own hands. He didn't follow the commands of Scripture or trust God. He could justify it: the men were deserting. He had waited. Samuel didn't show.

All of his theology – his beliefs about help from God went right out the window. He reduced his faith to "hocus pocus," a kind of "babble" or casting of a spell—quick if you say this and make that sacrifice, you will have God's blessing, as if that's all God cares about. But that's not what God cares about at all.

But like him, you can think you believe something about God; but when a crisis arises, you panic and feel betrayed by God. Perhaps that is how Saul felt. Perhaps you feel that way at times of crisis.

A man named Peter Chin experienced that sense of betrayal. He's a pastor in Washington D.C. He gave up a medical career to plant a church in the inner city, wanting to "do great things for

God's sake."<sup>1</sup> But instead, his home was robbed, his car broken into more times than he could count, and then his church failed. In the midst of all of that his wife got an aggressive form of breast cancer. All of the things he believed suddenly went out the window as he felt that God had broken his promises.

Like Saul, he knew the right answers, but just felt so angry and betrayed. The words he preached were there; but his experience was proving to be different. He had a crisis of integrity, just as Saul.

Minutes before his wife's mastectomy, a blood test revealed that she was pregnant with their third child. Doctors recommended an abortion, but they respectfully declined, and she proceeded to have chemotherapy and a pregnancy at the same time. Nine months later she gave birth to a perfectly healthy son, protected by God from those toxic, cancer-eating drugs.

Only later did they learn that pregnancy actually increases a cancer patient's survival rate, and as Peter puts it, "my son served as a divine kind of medicine for his mother."

God, of course, already knew this. Later, doctors told them not to expect any more children due to the chemotherapy, which often puts a woman into early menopause. But again Peter said, "No one told God this news, because he saw fit to bless us with one more child, a beautiful little girl we named Lucy."

When things looked overwhelming and everything seems to be going against you, remember this story. Saul, at his time of crisis, was not supposed to rely on himself, but wait for God; having faith; letting God in His own time work it out. Instead, he failed to do that and missed the power of integrity. If he had stuck with God, he would have experienced the miracle of God defeating Israel's enemy. Instead he lost his kingdom.

How do you handle problems and crises? Do you hang onto God for all it's worth, letting your words and life match? This is the only way to be sure in God.

Peter Chin said this:

*"I had asked God for a healthy church, and he gave us two healthy children instead. I had asked for success, and he gave us salvation. I had prayed that I might witness good things in my life, and he showed me miraculous ones instead. To be honest, he did not answer a single prayer request in the way that I had asked, but instead gave me things so much deeper and richer. It was as if I had asked him for a rhinestone, and he gave me a precious diamond instead. And only a fool laments the absence of the rhinestone when a diamond lies in his hand."*

When you have a crisis and your faith wavers, wait on God's way of doing things. Then you too will experience the power of integrity, and unlike Saul, instead of a loss, you will experience maybe not exactly what you asked for but instead, unexpected, miraculous blessings.

AMEN

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<sup>1</sup>Peter Chin, *Blindsided by God ... But Never Betrayed*, <http://www.christianitytoday.com/ct/2013/july-august/>, accessed 7/11/13.