

The Call of Saul
 1 Samuel 9-10
 Bellevue Baptist Church
 October 25, 2026

Please open your Bible to 1 Samuel 9.

Last Sunday, we stepped into 1 Samuel, which explains how the first king of Israel came to be. Samuel was the last faithful judge, his two sons were in line to follow him, but the people saw them as poor choices. They were ready for something new. So they said to old Samuel: "It's time we became like all the other nations. Let's build a throne and name a king."

And though God warned them that a human king would ultimately fail them, the elders insisted. This begins the story of Saul. 1 Samuel 9:1.

There was a prominent man of Benjamin named Kish son of Abiel (A-B-L), son of Zeror (Z-roar), son of Becorath (be-coe-rath), son of Aphiah (a-fye-ya), son of a Benjaminite. 2 He had a son named Saul, an impressive young man. There was no one more impressive among the Israelites than he. He stood a head taller than anyone else.

So there you have it. Saul is a lady's man. In my mind, I see a Marvel character, don't you? Maybe Thor or Captain America. He's huge. When this guy walks into a room, people notice. And he's clearly a guy who comes from money. All those hard to pronounce names I just read: son of, son of, son of—that's the ancient way of indicating noble stock. So this is our introduction to Saul: he has solid pedigree and solid pectorals. Two things I didn't get. For these reasons, I don't like him, already.

Because the Bible says that pride goes before a fall, we can't help but wonder if this young man is going to be hopelessly arrogant? The foreshadowing feels thick and the question naturally arises: Will his character grow alongside his popularity?

Those of us that have read through the Bible have our radar up because this is different than what God normally does when choosing a leader. Scripture says that Jesus had nothing physically that drew people to him. Isaiah 53:2: "He had no form or majesty that we should look at him, and no beauty that we should desire him." The Bible says that David was the runt of Jesse's litter, a shepherd boy unlikely to win vs Goliath. The apostles are described as ordinary, unschooled men who turned their world upside down.

It is God's usual way, to choose ordinary people for leadership—because it maximizes his glory, and proves his power to be the deepest need of man.

Even still, Saul is about to have his burning bush moment. Look with me at v. 3...

One day the donkeys of Saul's father Kish wandered off. Kish said to his son Saul, "Take one of the servants with you and go look for the donkeys. (9:3)

This is not a glamorous assignment—donkey chasing for dad. If Instagram were around, Saul wouldn't see this as a chance to post this moment, causing others to be envious. It's safe to say, that when Saul set out that day to find those wayward mules, he was not thinking, "This is going to be the greatest day of my life."

He doesn't have a clue what God is about to do, which leads me to the first of three Calling Principles. #1...

Calling Principle #1:

You likely have no idea where God is going to take you.

Forrest Gump said: "Life is like a box of chocolates, you never know what you're gonna get." Have you ever thought about what an interesting metaphor that is. If you've ever had a box of chocolates, you know that it brings pleasant surprises and crushing disappointments. Gump was giving us a good illustration. Sometimes in life, we think we are biting into caramel, and it turns out to be a bad-tasting something else. And other times, it's the opposite: we expect life to bring disgust and it turns out to be fantastic.

Saul started out that day, likely soured by the assignment, but God was about to give him the opportunity of a lifetime. Anyone with age in this room can testify: in this life, we should expect the unexpected.

If you want to picture the church I grew up in, just drive out to deep country and find a typical white one-room schoolhouse looking building—something like off Little House on the Prairie. I grew up in a farm town in the Midwest. The kind of church that had a sign with weekly attendance and giving totals. If you know, you know.

church ran 100 on a high attendance day. This is where I learned the basics of the Bible and taught my first Sunday school class. And now, look around: this is the church I pastor today.

I never dreamed I would be called to lead Bellevue Baptist Church.

There have been so many surprises along my way. When Lynley and I were church planters in Denver, we moved there with every intention to spend our lives in the mountains doing ministry. As soon as the church launched and it began to grow, the laypeople started asking if we intended to stay put or if we intended to move on and plant more churches. Unthinkingly, I said: We are putting roots down right here, And as a joke, I said, "I'm going to be buried right here in the Rocky Mountains. I'm going to be buried by Buffalo Bill!" Buffalo Bill was a famous cowboy entertainer who was laid to rest outside Denver.

Looking back, I never should have said that. I can't promise what God will call me to do tomorrow. Neither do you.

And sure enough, years later the Lord called us to Nashville TN and I had to eat crow. When I arrived back in the South, someone gave me a copy of the old newspaper that dated back to the day of Buffalo Bill's death, as a reminder to never say for certain what God is going to do.

My job is not to map out the rest of my life. My job is to follow the Lord one step at a time, wherever He leads.

And the same goes for you. You have no idea what God has planned for you five years from now. You may change careers. You may move across the country. You may come into contact with someone who changes the direction of your life. You may face a trial you never saw coming, or receive an opportunity you never imagined. So hold your plans with open hands.

Saul was the son of a wealthy farmer and probably thought he'd inherit the family farm, live high on the hog, settle down and make a good living, but when they struck out finding those donkeys, Saul goes to find Samuel, because his servant has a bright idea:

"Look," the servant said, "there's a man of God in this city who is highly respected; everything he says is sure to come true. Let's go there now. Maybe he'll tell us which way we should go."

I know what you're thinking--this is weird. Saul's servant says, "Before we abandon our mission and call those donkeys dead and gone, why don't we see if the local man of God has any clues? Maybe he knows where our animals are?"

What's even more weird is that Saul agrees to the plan. "OK. Yeah...let's give that a whirl." And he has no clue that Samuel has already been instructed by God to crown a visiting son of Kish, as the first king of Israel. God had plans Saul knew nothing about.

Any planners in the room? Anybody here have a spreadsheet kinds of folks present? You know who you are: you've got an Excel Document for everything. I don't mean to discount sound planning. Jesus poked fun at a foolish man who set out to build a tower but didn't know if he had the funds to complete the project. He was a fool for not thinking ahead.

Planning is a strategic thing, but what will you do when God throws your plan out the window? Like we're about to see here. V.15...

Now the day before Saul's arrival, the Lord had informed Samuel, "At this time tomorrow I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin. Anoint him ruler over my people Israel. He will save them from the Philistines..."

Samuel does that. He informs Saul that he will sit on the first throne, but notice in v. 21...

Saul responded, “Am I not a Benjaminite from the smallest of Israel’s tribes and isn’t my clan the least important of all the clans of the Benjaminite tribe? So why have you said something like this to me?”

Who am I? That you would ask me to be the first king. This leads me to calling principle #2.

Calling Principle #2:

You will likely feel ill-equipped for your calling.

Over and over in Scripture, when God calls people, the individual often feels overwhelmed.

Think of it this way. There is the size of the task. And there is the size of my talent. The giant gap between my ability and my assignment—this is where faith is given room to grow.

God wants to show through situations that seem insurmountable, that He is able where we are unable. If you feel under qualified for your situation, don’t be surprised. 1 Cor. 1, Paul says:

Brothers and sisters, consider your calling: Not many were wise from a human perspective, not many powerful, not many of noble birth. Instead, God has chosen what is foolish in the world to shame the wise, and God has chosen what is weak in the world to shame the strong. 1 Cor 1: 26-27

God likes to use people with gaps. Because those gaps represent the space where spiritual growth spikes, and where God gets the most glory. Often in your life, when you receive a fresh assignment, you will feel like this person.

For the sake of time, let me skip ahead to the moment just after Samuel anoints Saul, because there’s one more principle here we shouldn’t miss. As Saul gets up to go home, his head still spinning, look what happens in his heart. Jumping ahead to 1 Samuel 10:9...

When Saul turned around to leave Samuel, God changed his heart, and all the signs came about that day. 1 Samuel 10:9

That this the CSB translation. The ESV says, “When he turned his back to leave Samuel, God gave him another heart.”

It does not say that God gave him a pat on the back to encourage him. It does not say that God gave him a great idea for his government. It simply says: God gave Saul an upgrade in his heart. Many scholars suggest that this was likely an OT way of describing the filling of the Holy Spirit, which powers a person’s ministry.

Calling Principle #3:

You will surely experience a filling of the Holy Spirit.

This reminds me of a moment way back in the life of Moses, just after he was placed in charge of Israel. As Moses was gaining popularity and trust with the people, it became obvious that the Holy Spirit was falling upon other leaders down in the ranks also. His loyal friends came and said, “Moses, these two other guys just spoke authoritatively to the people—in the Spirit—you’ve got to stop this. Moses replied, in Numbers 11:29:

“Are you jealous on my account? If only all the Lord’s people were prophets and the Lord would place his Spirit on them!” Numbers 11:29

Moses wanted to see a much greater outpouring of the Holy Spirit. Which takes us to the prophecy of Joel. Through him, God says:

After this I will pour out my Spirit on all humanity; and your young people will see visions. Joel 2:28

Even then, God saw a coming era when the Holy Spirit would fill many more people. Fast forward again...Jesus shows up on Christmas day remains quiet for 30 years or so-, but when God calls him to the wilderness for 40 days of testing, Luke writes:

Then Jesus returned to Galilee in the power of the Spirit, and news about him spread throughout the entire vicinity. Luke 4:14

From there, Jesus fulfills his calling, dies on a cross, rises from the grave, and reappears to his disciples.

“And look, I am sending you what my Father promised. As for you, stay in the city until you are empowered from on high.” Luke 24:49

Of course, that day would come 50 days later. Pentecost marked the birth of the church, when Joel’s prophecy was realized. 120 were gathered in a room to get a fresh encounter with the Spirit and empowered for ministry.

Over and over we see that when God calls His people, He promises to supply the power to get it done. He surely supplied that support to Saul, when it says that God charged up his heart, preparing for His days at King.

Sadly, with time he would quench that Spirit, and disqualify himself for leadership. He would be a disappointment, and David would take his place, but now I’m getting ahead of myself.

Now with my time remaining, let me raise a couple of questions that people rightly ask around calling.

Calling Question #1:

How do I know if I’m being called to something?

Jeff Iorg has done a wonderful job, in his little book *Is God Calling Me?* in answering questions like this. How do I know if I'm being called?

Jeff says:

A call is a profound impression from God. It happens rarely and has significant, life-altering ramifications. A call is an inner impression boring into the core of your soul, changing you forever. –Jeff Iorg

Often, one of the evidences of a calling is that you can't seem to get away from it. It's like one of those horse flies, when you're swimming in a pool, and it lands on your head, so you go under the water. When you come back up, it just lands on your head again. You can't get the thing to fly away, no matter how much you try.

That's the language we hear when a person in the Bible is being called to something. They can't shake it. Jeremiah described his call to preach as "a fire, a fire shut up in my bones. I am weary of holding it in; indeed, I cannot" (Jeremiah 20:9). In the New Testament, we hear Paul declaring, "Woe to me if I do not preach the gospel!" (1 Corinthians 9:16).

Paul wasn't simply saying, "I enjoy preaching." He was saying, "I have to preach! God has laid this assignment upon my life, and I am accountable to Him for carrying it out."

When God calls you to something, you don't do it for the applause of people. You don't do it for a paycheck. It is now an obedience issue, and you'll keep getting bit until you abide. If you don't believe me, just ask Jonah. You cannot run from God.

A call is a profound impression from God, with life-altering ramifications.

Question #2:

What method does God use to call people?

Throughout Scripture, there are three main ways that God makes His calling known and clear. Some people receive a:

- **Sudden, dramatic experiences (crisis)**

Take Isaiah, for example. He was worshiping in the temple when he suddenly saw a vision of the Lord seated on His throne, high and exalted. Angels were crying out, "Holy, holy, holy!" The building was shaking. Smoke was filling the room. Isaiah was terrified! But in that moment, God called him to be His messenger, and Isaiah responded, "Here am I. Send me!"

Now, I personally have never experienced anything like that. I've never heard an audible voice from heaven. I've never seen an angel standing at the foot of my bed. And I've certainly never seen a burning bush!

Some do, like those shepherds in the Christmas passages. They were out in the fields, minding their own business, when suddenly the sky lit up with angels announcing the birth of Christ! Talk about a dramatic experience! Now, contrast that with the Magi. They didn't get a sky full of angels. Just one measly star. No angelic choir. No booming voice from heaven. Just a night light that prompted them to begin a journey.

The shepherds received a sudden dramatic experience.

Even outside the Bible, we find accounts of dramatic experiences. In the fourth century, a Roman emperor named Constantine had an experience that changed the course of Christian history. In AD 312, as he prepared for battle, he claimed to see a brilliant cross in the sky with words meaning, "In this sign, conquer." He believed it was a message from the Christian God, and after winning the battle, he began embracing Christianity.

The following year, Constantine helped legalize Christianity, bringing an end to official persecution in his territories. He began supporting churches and giving Christianity a prominent place in Roman society. Think about that. A man claimed to see a cross in the sky, and the course of Christian history was forever changed.

Sometimes God gives fireworks.

That's crisis. Other times, though, its through contemplation.

- **Reasoned decision-making (contemplation)**

In the book of Acts, a controversy takes place between the Jewish and the Gentile believers. The apostles were not sure, at first, how to handle it. They decided to call a meeting in Antioch to settle the issue. They would send delegates. Acts 15:22:

It seemed good to the apostles and the elders, with the whole church, to choose men from among them and send them to Antioch. Acts 15:22 (ESV)

How did they come to that decision—to send delegates and to handle it this way? They mulled it over, prayed about it, and felt that this was the best course to take. Often, God works through a long process of thinking, questioning, and wrestling with the truth.

Take Nicodemus, for example. Nicodemus was a highly educated religious leader, a member of the Jewish ruling council. And when we first meet him in John 3, he's coming to Jesus at night. He's curious, but cautious. He's heard about the miracles of Jesus, and he has questions. Jesus tells him that he must be born again, but Nicodemus can't seem to wrap his mind around it. He keeps asking questions, trying to make sense of what Jesus is saying.

Then, several chapters later, in John 7, we see Nicodemus again. This time, he's sitting in a meeting with his fellow religious leaders, and they're speaking harshly about Jesus. Nicodemus speaks up! He asks whether their law allows them to condemn a man without first giving him a

hearing. He's not quite ready to declare himself a follower, but something is clearly happening in his heart. He's beginning to defend the very man he once questioned.

Then, finally, in John 19, we see Nicodemus one more time. Jesus has been crucified, and Nicodemus shows up with about 75 pounds of spices to help Joseph of Arimathea prepare His body for burial. Think about that! The man who once approached Jesus under the cover of darkness is now publicly associating himself with a crucified Savior.

In John 3, he's asking questions. In John 7, he's defending Jesus. In John 19, he's honoring Jesus.

We aren't told exactly when Nicodemus came to genuine faith. But John gives us these three snapshots of a man whose relationship with Jesus appears to be changing over time.

No burning bush. No blinding light on the Damascus Road. Just a man wrestling with the truth, gradually finding the courage to act on what he was coming to believe. Not every work of God happens in a moment. Sometimes, it unfolds over a season of careful thought.

And finally, sometimes God reveals our calling through the...

- **Prompting of others (community)**

Crisis, contemplation, now community.

3. Prompting of others (community)

Crisis, contemplation, and finally, community.

One of the ways God reveals His calling to us is through other people. There is an internal element of calling, and then there's this—the external.

The internal call is what I talked about earlier—what Jeremiah said was the fire in his bones. In 1 Timothy 3:1, we read: "If anyone aspires to the office of overseer, he desires a noble task." That word *aspires* means to reach toward something, to long for it. God has put this dream inside of you. That's the internal piece, but then there's the external, as others testify to the benefits they receive when you exercise that gift.

In preaching, it means people say things like: "That message really spoke to me." Or, "You have no idea how much that illustration helped me." Or, "Something you said really struck a chord with me." Every preacher needs to hear those things, because it's evidence that the Spirit is indeed moving through the exercise of the gift.

And 1 Corinthians 12:7, "Now to each one the manifestation of the Spirit is given for the common good." Our gifts have been given for the common good. What does that mean? They are not merely for your fulfillment, but for the fruit they bear in others. And when others are blessed, they will affirm you in the work.

God used Samuel to affirm Saul, and to help him see his destiny. God will use other people to do the same for you.

But I'd be a bad pastor if I didn't state the obvious: you may never find your calling if you isolate yourself from the body of Christ. God uses others to help you find the path. So, I want to challenge you to make yourself known today.