

Breaking Free From Impulsivity

1 Samuel 14:24-46

Faithfulness Under Pressure

By Dave Urbanski

This past week we celebrated a pair of truly American holidays: Thanksgiving ... and then 24 hours later ... Black Friday.

If you look up the definition of “Black Friday” in a dictionary, you might find a two-word descriptor that Pastor Scott shared with us last Sunday: “Impulse buying.”

Yes, on Nov. 29, 2024, starting just after midnight, the Internet likely was flooded with Americans typing their credit card and banking data in order to take advantage of deals — and some of them would expire by breakfast! Same for the brave (and maybe a little crazy) folks who gathered on sidewalks in front of stores hours before they opened Friday morning. And then once those doors swung wide, motivated shoppers surely galloped inside (if they were able to get past the glut and clog of humanity). The perhaps they got walloped and knocked to the floor by fellow bargain seekers — yet they still rushed with every ounce of energy left in them to the cash registers before the deadlines went away.

Yes, America — our unique land of plenty — celebrates the pinnacle of capitalism on Black Friday. And woe to you if you missed out on any deals! How many of us got a peek at computer screens displaying sales pages with countdown clocks at the top: “Get ‘em while they’re hot — and 75% off! This deal will expire soon! Don’t delay!”

Our passage from this past Sunday — 1 Samuel 14:24-46 — gets into another one of King Saul’s character flaws that speaks to the Black Friday phenomenon: His impulsivity and rash decision-making.

Verse 24 tells us that “the men of Israel had been hard pressed” on the day of their battle with the Philistines, and Pastor Scott told us that this is the reason why Saul does what he does. There are many, many pressures on Saul, and he responds not by turning to the Lord but by trying to control things around him. By jumping in and acting immediately without much thought. In fact, by rejecting God’s wisdom and opting to do things his own way.

With that, Saul “laid an oath on the people” and declared, “Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies.”

Pastor Scott told us that perhaps this order from Saul came from a positive place, and he wanted his people to do more in battle. And what’s more, fasting can be a good thing — for health reasons and for spiritual reasons.

But just because an action such as fasting can be positive, that doesn't mean it's a good idea in every situation — and Pastor Scott told us that fasting in this case likely wasn't the best order to issue to exhausted warriors.

And because those under Saul feared breaking their oath, no one touched honey visible on the forest floor. (vv. 24-26) All except Saul's son Jonathan. Verse 27 says Jonathan "had not heard his father charge the people with the oath, so he put out the tip of the staff that was in his hand and dipped it in the honeycomb and put his hand to his mouth, and his eyes became bright."

What does Psalm 19 say? "The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eyes" (v. 8), and it — among other things from the Lord — is "sweeter also than honey and the drippings of the honeycomb." (v. 10)

If only Saul had read those words — which, ironically, were composed through the power of the Holy Spirit by the man who would soon be anointed King of Israel in Saul's place ... and who Saul despised: David.

Verse 28 says the people were "faint," and Pastor Scott indicated that this proves to be a negative consequence of Saul's demand that the battle-weary people not consume food. Again, there's nothing wrong with fasting in and of itself — it's a good thing, in fact, in the correct context — but as Pastor Scott told us, the *timing* of the fast is crucial. This was NOT the time.

"My father has troubled the land," Jonathan tells the people in verse 29. "See how my eyes have become bright because I tasted a little of this honey. How much better if the people had eaten freely today of the spoils of their enemies that they found. For now the defeat among the Philistines has not been great."

Pastor Scott pointed out that Jonathan's aforementioned declaration is a key statement. More could have been accomplished in the battle. In our own lives, how much more successfully will we work through our challenges if we do so exercising wisdom? Instead, as verse 31 says, even though the Israelites defeated the Philistines, "the people were very faint." And as Pastor Scott said, the challenges for the people are now greater.

Saul's misstep leads to the people slaughtering animals and eating them with their blood, which was not permitted according to the law of Moses. After which, Saul directs them to eat the animals properly, without consuming their blood, and then he built an altar to the Lord for the first time in his life — and Pastor Scott told us those are examples of Saul doing the right thing as a leader.

After another sound decision from Saul ("Let us go down after the Philistines by night and plunder them until the morning light; let us not leave a man of them") and the

people's encouraging response ("Do whatever seems good to you"), the priest says, "Let us draw near to God here." (v. 36)

This also is the right thing to do, Pastor Scott told us. Even when we have *no doubt* that our decision is the best one, as believers we never should go into important decisions without asking God if it's a good idea. "God, do you want me to do this?"

So, Saul does just that, asking the Lord, "Shall I go down after the Philistines? Will you give them into the hand of Israel?"

But then another crossroads: The Lord "did not answer him that day." (v. 37)

Now what? How many times has God not given us an answer exactly when we wanted it? Then what often happens? Yup. *We forge ahead anyway!* That's just what Saul does.

Pastor Scott reminded us that there are many reasons why we may be left waiting for God's answer — and a crucial one we need investigate carefully is that there may be sin in our lives. We can't expect God to give us much direction if we're not obeying him to begin with, can we?

With that, Saul along with a priest determined by lot that it was his son Jonathan who had "sinned" by eating the honey — although Jonathan never heard Saul order the Israelites to avoid food in the first place!

Nevertheless, Jonathan obediently tells Saul, "Here I am; I will die." And Saul's head-scratching response? "God do so to me and more also; you shall surely die, Jonathan."

How rash and extreme! Pastor Scott noted that Saul already was jealous of his son — and now because of his poor values and lack of wisdom, he's ready to throw everything away.

But the people of Israel aren't having it, and they read Saul the riot act: "Shall Jonathan die, who has worked this great salvation in Israel? Far from it! As the Lord lives, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground, for he has worked with God this day." (v. 45)

With that, "the people ransomed Jonathan, so that he did not die. Then Saul went up from pursuing the Philistines, and the Philistines went to their own place."

Let us be mindful of any tendencies within us to make impulsive and rash decisions.

Let us check in with the Lord. Let us ask him what we should do. If he doesn't answer right away, let us search our hearts to make sure we're not sinning or straying from him in any way.

And not just on Black Friday ... but every day.