

No Shortcuts
1 Samuel 4:1-22

The Gathering Place
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Ever tried to take a short cut and found out that it wasn't what it was supposed to be?
I learned the hard way that shortcuts are often not the quickest way home.

It was a beautiful day June in Nova Scotia. I assume it was Monday as I had gone brook trout fishing in one of the streams near Truro where we lived. I hadn't fished this particular stream before. I had on my waders lots of bait and set out up the stream catching fish as I went. It was a good day and the fish were biting. I am not sure of the reason but when I left I had assured Yvonne I would be back by 12 noon. I started up the stream at about 8 AM so I figured I could walk for two hours or so and then head back to where I had parked the car. However, the fish were really biting. So as I am prone to do, I stretched the time, and stretched the time a little more. It's 11 o'clock I have been walking three hours and I have one hour to get back to the car and drive home.

The road I parked on looked like it ran parallel to the river and the river had lots of bends in it so I figured if I climbed up the bank through the woods I would find the road at the top of the hill and could make quick time back to the car. I climbed up the hill – NO ROAD!

Well to make a long story short, I didn't make it back home by 12 noon. I don't even think I made it back by 1 PM! As you might imagine I had a rather irritated wife who wasn't impressed with the fact that I had filled my daily limit for trout.

There are no short cuts to a life of overcoming power with God.

1 Samuel 4:1-22 from The Message

Ichabod – The glory has departed from Israel! Or “Glory is exiled from Israel since the Chest of God was taken.”

Israel had suffered a terrible defeat. The first day of battle 4,000 of their men were killed. The question on the lips of every Israelite from Dan to Beersheba was, **“Why has GOD given us such a beating today by the Philistines?”** (verse 3) You might think that the next action of the people would be to have their priests go before the Lord and find out God's position on the whole thing.

Of course the problem was that there was no one but the boy Samuel that was hearing from God in those days. The two priests that should have been in touch with God were **“wicked men who had no regard for the Lord”** (2:12)

So instead of seeking God's direction they came up with their own plan. **“Let us bring the ark of the Lord's covenant from Shiloh, so that it may go with us and save us from the hand of our enemies.”**

This box called the ARK OF THE COVENANT was the place God decreed His presence would be in the community of Israel. It was in the Tabernacle (THE TENT OF MEETING). It was in the HOLY OF HOLIES, behind the curtain.

God and Israel had a covenant. Israel would obey and honour God and God's blessing would be upon them. Please notice that the people called this chest or box – the ark of THE LORD'S

covenant. A covenant is between two parties. The people of Israel were unfaithful to their side of the covenant – but they were trying to hold God to His side of the covenant.

BUT BECAUSE OF THEIR SIN AND DISREGARD FOR GOD AND HIS HOLINESS. The ark of the covenant was just an empty box!

The glory of God's presence had gone from the Tabernacle and from Israel long before the ignominy of their defeat in battle, long before the ark was captured by the Philistines!

THERE IS NO SHORT CUT TO GOD'S BLESSING AND FAVOUR!

If we are going to know the best that God has in mind for us; if we are going to know the blessing and power of God in our lives, then we must do the hard thing – JESUS SAID, TAKE UP YOUR CROSS AND FOLLOW ME.

By their actions Eli, Hophni and Phineas had taught the people that God was not a God of holiness. That you could have your cake and eat it too. You could live like the world around you, indulge in its vice and sin. You did not have to respect the Lord's commands. You could even take God's tithe and use it for yourself. 2:17 says, *they were treating the Lord's offering with contempt.*

There was no fear of God before their eyes.

What must we do today to avoid a like situation in our lives.

We must take our life with God seriously.

- We need to learn how to live life from Him.
- We need to learn to pray and how to pray
- We need to learn holiness of thought, word, and action
- We need to be committed to a long term, relationship building, interaction between ourselves and God
- We need to learn to wait for the Lord – the world we live in wants everything NOW

The worst thing we can do is look for short cuts or QUICK FIXES!

We are often like the Israelites. We get in trouble and then suddenly we are on our knees desperate for help from God to address the sudden tragedy, or loss of employment, or financial crisis, or marriage break-down.

We live our lives as though God does not exist, or if He exists He is on the periphery of our lives, far from the center of what we are doing. But then trouble come AND WE EXPECT GOD TO RESPOND TO OUR FIRST CRY, and when He doesn't then we do the blame game and God is to blame for our trouble.

And we look for QUICK FIXES – SHORT CUTS.

Hundreds of books have been written with titles like **7 Steps To Answered Prayer**, or **12 Steps to Revival**, or **10 Steps to Power with God** or

Even a great verse like 2 Chronicles 7:14 *if my people, who are called by my name, will humble themselves and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and will heal their land.* can be used as a kind of mantra that if we just do what God asks us to do God is obligated to do what we want.

It is for sure that if we walk in disobedience to God and disregard His commands we cannot expect the blessing of the Lord. However, God is always the Almighty. He is the sovereign Lord of heaven and earth and He acts according to His knowledge of what will be best for us.

We quote, *if two shall agree on earth it shall be done by our Father in heaven*. But what is it that the two are to agree on. That verse is actually about steps to reconciliation with a brother who has sinned against you. And immediately following these words of Jesus Peter asks “how many times must we forgive our brother?”

When we are looking for short cuts to getting the answers we want we very easily misinterpret the Scripture to suit our ends. We isolate Scripture from its context and give it the meaning we want it to have.

When we are looking for short cuts we often look for someone we think has real power with God to intercede for us. So we make pilgrimages to various shrines ... when I was a boy it was Oral Roberts and Kathryn Khulman. Later on it was Jimmy Swaggart, Jim Bakker and Pat Robertson. Today it is Joel Osteen or Benny Hinn, or John Hagee – all good men, but they are all just frail human beings!

You see, God wants to dwell in us. He wants to reveal His glory in and through us. Through the way we live, the way we conduct our marriages, the way we work, the way we parent, the way we worship.

Worship!!!! Our worship should not depend on choruses and hymns! Nor should it depend on the human leader. We are called to worship God for who He is! If you have been in church very long you know that there are some choruses and hymns that will always bring an emotional response. And there are immature people who believe that human emotional response is the Spirit of God moving. IT MAY BE, but often it isn't. Here is how you know that it was the Spirit of God – when WE ARE CHANGED by our worship!

Our attempts at manipulating God to do things our way in our time is actually a testimony to our lack of faith. We do not believe we can trust God to really love us, or do what is best for us so we have to figure out ways of forcing Him to respond to our call.

Folks if we have truly made Jesus Lord of our lives, than He is not ours to command, but WE ARE HIS TO COMMAND! We are like clay in His hands – He forms us according to His will.

We go where He sends us, WE FOLLOW HIM! We do what He calls us to do, We give what He asks us to give. WE LIVE TO GLORIFY HIM.

God want us to live in victory; to be MORE THAN CONQUERORS. But there are no shortcuts. Eugene Peterson says it best. The Christian life is A LONG OBEDIENCE IN THE SAME DIRECTION!