

Letting God steer your life

Disclaimer: this is an automatically generated machine transcription - there may be small errors or mistranscriptions. Please refer to the original audio if you are in any doubt.

Date: 12 July 2026

Preacher: Robin Silson

[0:00] So we're going to turn in God's Word again. This is kind of the past few weeks we've been looking at the book of 1 Samuel.

This is the final one, the final one in kind of like the series, if you will. So we're in chapter 7, so page 277, chapter 7, and we're reading from verse 3, which is slightly confusing actually, the way the Bible that we have has kind of portioned it off, because it starts where that chapter heading is.

Verse 3 actually starts just like a sentence under that. You'll see the little three. So we're going to read from there. So I'll read it and then I'll pray and then we'll think about this passage together.

This is God's Word. So Samuel said to all the Israelites, If you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only, and he will deliver you out of the hand of the Philistines.

So the Israelites put away their Baals and Ashtoreths and served the Lord only. Then Samuel said, Assemble all Israel at Mizpah, and I will intercede with the Lord for you.

[1:29] When they had assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. On that day they fasted, and there they confessed, We have sinned against the Lord.

Now Samuel was serving as leader of Israel at Mizpah. When the Philistines heard that Israel had assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them.

When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid because of the Philistines. They said to Samuel, Do not stop crying out to the Lord our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.

Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord on Israel's behalf, and the Lord answered him, While Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, the Philistines drew near to engage Israel in battle.

But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The men of Israel rushed out of Mizpah and pursued the Philistines, slaughtering them along the way to a point below Beth-kar.

[2:43] Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen. He named it Ebenezer, saying, Thus far the Lord has helped us. So the Philistines were subdued and they stopped invading Israel's territory.

Throughout Samuel's lifetime, the hand of the Lord was against the Philistines. The towns from Ekron to Gath that the Philistines had captured from Israel were restored to Israel, and Israel delivered the neighbouring territory from the hands of the Philistines.

And there was peace between Israel and the Amorites. Samuel continued as Israel's leader all the days of his life. From year to year, he went on a circuit from Bethel to Githgal to Mizpah, judging Israel in all those places.

But he always went back to Ramah, where his home was. And there he also held court for Israel, and he built an altar there to the Lord. This is God's word.

Amen. Let me pray. Almighty God, as we come to your word, the Bible, we thank you that this is the way, the way that you've ordained and planned to speak to us.

[3:47] And so we pray for our hearts now as we come to it. We pray that you'd engage our hearts. We pray that you'd help us to listen, to focus. We pray that you'd apply it to us.

We pray that where we need to be taught, where we'd be taught and rebuked, corrected and trained in righteousness, that we, your servants, may be equipped for every good work. We ask for this in the name of Jesus.

Amen. Amen. Question to start with. How do you know that God will come through for you?

How do you know that God will come through for you? In this chapter, 1 Samuel 7, the bit that we're looking at, we meet a people here who are tested with that same idea.

We see they've, what we see is a people that turn to the Lord. Israel, after many years, have been away, 20 years. If you look in the previous few verses, they've been away from the Lord for 20 years and they turn back, return to the Lord their God.

[4:53] They give up their false, fake gods that they'd put their trust in. But what we see is, giving something up brings vulnerability. Until you've seen the Lord's faithfulness, there is, there's kind of a hole where it feels uncomfortable for them.

I don't know if you remember, some of you, maybe quite a while back now since you learnt to drive. I remember the time my dad first handed me the keys to his Renault 5.

Tells you a little bit how long I am because they've only just restarted making those cars. And I remember the obvious panic as he sat in the passenger seat with the, now not having the ability to steer or brake.

And I remember the fear in his eyes and the colour of his knuckles as he gripped the handle, you know, the little handle on the door. When I tried to pull out of a junction in third gear, stalling and stopping in the middle of the road.

Now, it's still a bit of a way off for me, but I can imagine, you know, it's quite a few years since then, but giving up that kind of control is terrifying.

[6:14] I've got the, for those of us young kids, that we've got all of that to come. Now, that's kind of a humorous example, but I can remember, my dad actually was terrified.

He was, I don't, I don't know if he got in the car learning many times after that. Why is, why, why was that? Because he was vulnerable and he wasn't in control. He couldn't steer or brake.

And so, he was left to, under, you know, my ability to drive. When we come to speaking spiritually, we see these things about idols and fake gods.

An idol is when we, we give the idol the steering wheel. And, it's the, the steering wheel, not of a car, but the steering wheel of our lives.

And, it's the illusion of control is, that we, when we hand it over, we, we think that they can control our lives and steer it in the direction that we should go.

[7:21] It's the illusion of control that, to grip onto that steering wheel most tightly that we give it because we, we think that it makes us safe.

What happens here, when God asks us and asks them to get rid of their idols, it is hard. And when he, and when, and when we give up that old way of life, we can feel a bit lost when our hands, you know, are not on the, the wheel anymore.

we panic because, um, we're not as, we're now dependent on someone else to navigate us. That is where the opportunity comes this morning as we hear the word of God because, the power of the gospel, the power of the good news of Jesus is that we get to completely let God sit in the driver's seat of our life and take hold of the steering wheel.

But the reality is this, he's actually the only one who's able to handle it. Because handing over the keys is really just another way of saying that we're going to give our whole selves, we're going to give our whole hearts to the Lord, we're going to trust every ounce of who we are to his supreme control.

the opportunity is to think about what that might look like for us today. The principle really that we're going to sort of think through is actually that it is God alone that can, only him can place a demand for every part of us.

[9:05] It's only him that can actually demand that we give him our whole hearts. I've mentioned it's after 20 years, you look back with me, verse 2, the passage that we're in, verse 2, it says, the ark remained at Kirith-Jerim a long time, 20 years in all.

So it's after 20 years that Israel is ready to turn to the Lord their God to return to him. They've sat under Samuel's preaching and teaching. Samuel, the man God has, God raised him up to be his mouthpiece.

And over the last few weeks, if you've been following with us, he's kind of been out of the picture up until now. But now when he preaches, after 20 years, they listen to him.

Verse 3, if you are returning to the Lord with all your hearts, then this is what you must do, Israel, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths, and commit yourselves to the Lord and serve him only.

Then, you will be delivered out of the hand of the Philistines. notice Samuel doesn't say, you know, guys, it might be a little bit more helpful in your life if you kind of just focused a little bit more on the Lord than you currently are doing.

[10 : 21] He doesn't say that. He says, there is no compromise with what they must do. It is a demand. They must give all of themselves, nothing left on the table, exclusive devotion.

They must be committed whole heartedly to him. I just want to pause here a minute because we might be asking, okay, well, what does wholehearted devotion actually mean?

It's a fair enough question. Well, the first thing we have to say is this, that the heart of a person in the Bible is more than just what someone thinks and feels. Today, that kind of language when we talk about our whole heart, we, you know, people say, you know, I love you with my whole heart. It kind of means kind of gushing, affectionate language, doesn't it? But in the ancient world, the heart was much more than just the centre of romantic affection. It was the centre of someone's whole being.

Not just what they felt, but what they thought about and how they acted. It all came from the heart. It was the whole of their life to give their heart to someone. And so when Samuel says, direct your heart, he isn't asking them to have warm, fuzzy feelings about God.

[11 : 33] He's saying they must give their entire selves to him. Don't get me wrong, that does include their feelings and affections. It's not less than that, it's more. It demands their loyalty, their worship, all their actions.

Every moment of daily life is to be directed and committed towards their God. when the keys of a car are handed towards a teenager, the fear is understandable because they aren't capable of handling it.

God demands your whole heart, but there is a difference. He alone is able to navigate your life without crashing. The response from Israel is emphatic.

What did they do? They do it. Verse 4, So the Israelites put away their bals and ashtoreths and served the Lord. Only they turn away from their sinful ways and verse 5, put their trust in the Lord and then they demonstrate it.

They gather, Ketamuel calls them, let's all get together at Mizpah. You see? And what did they do? When they assembled at Mizpah, they drew water and poured it out before the Lord. This is a symbolic act of something that's going on in their hearts.

[12 : 43] They pour out water as a physical picture that their hearts are being poured out before the Lord. That's what it symbolises. It is an outward symbol of an internal change, reality.

Emptying themselves of all the sin and mess before him. But more than that, it's also pointing to this, that as they pour the water in the ground, what happens to water in a hot country as you pour it?

It soaks into the ground and it dries up. And there it reminds them of just how fragile and helpless their hearts really are. That without God, they will dry up.

And so what do they do? They fast, they confess their sins, they've handed the keys to the only one who can sit in the driver's seat. This visual picture of pouring out water, it is a beautiful picture of trust.

Christ. And 3,000 years later from this event, here we are. And just as the Israelites follow the Lord their God, following Jesus is actually no different.

[13 : 59] God demands their whole heart and Jesus demands wholehearted devotion to him. In fact, he says something, he says this in Mark 8, he says this, he says, whoever, whoever wants to be my disciple must deny themselves and take up their cross and follow me.

Deny their whole selves, what that means is giving up your whole heart to Jesus. Many of us in this room have done that.

But there is this illusion when people turn to Jesus become Christians. There is an illusion that people think that once you start following Jesus, life is going to be all hunky-dory.

You know, you've turned to him, you're following the king who made you, the one who reigns, that from now on it's all going to go swimmingly, you'll just be able to say no to sin, get rid of all your mess, you'll be walking the park.

what we see here in the Israelites is that it is anything but that. No sooner have they pledged their devotion to God and that devotion is tested.

[15 : 19] It is tested. Which is where we kind of come to the second point if you're a note taker. It's kind of the problem that we see in the middle of it. This is kind of the problem.

devotion to God is tempted because the memory of our idols plays on our minds. The way that we used to live. Putting idols to death, getting rid of them is hard.

The idols, what did they do? They helped us feel in control. Getting rid of them feels like loss. It can't be done overnight. It takes time. In those days, putting away the physical statues, fake gods that they would bow down to.

It was the first step. But underneath the water line of their hearts when trouble hits, there is a reality that is tested. The devotion is tested.

And the questions would come, well, we don't worship these gods, we've got rid of these gods, we've put our trust in the Lord, what do we do now? Our devotion says, who are we now? Who do we turn to in this moment?

[16 : 28] The Philistines are attacking us. We used to turn to Baal, we used to turn to these fake gods, what now? And remember the last time Israel went into battle, they lost 34,000 men.

Is God going to come through for us? Is he truly for us? Or is he still harbouring ill will against us? verse 7?

Verse 7, you wonder if maybe they're not so sure, what do we read? Verse 7, when the Philistines heard that Israel assembled at Mizpah, the rulers of the Philistines came up to attack them.

When the Israelites heard of it, they were afraid. Verse 8, they say to Samuel, don't stop crying out to the Lord, our God for us, that he may rescue us from the hand of the Philistines.

Giving their whole heart makes them vulnerable. There is a gap where they used to trust their idols. Can they now put their faith in God when that devotion is tested? That experience is very relatable.

[17 : 40] And sometimes we have to ask, you know, we don't live in the ancient world, we don't bow down to big statues, statues, so we must ask a different question.

What are the modern Baals and Ashtaroths in our life? Here's a little bit of historical knowledge.

Baal was the storm god, the one who brought the right weather, that enabled crops to grow.

Baal put food on the table and enabled the economy to flourish when crops could be traded.

Ashtaroth was the god of fertility and war, enabled herds to produce, families to grow and be healthy.

So why did the Israelites worship these gods? Because there was the promise of provision, money, family, health and future security.

When you see it like that, we're not that dissimilar. We don't bow down to statues for those things, no, instead we try and control them for ourselves. It is easy to see why they struggle to let go because when they did, there was a void.

[18 : 48] Without the bars, the asterisk to turn to, without the illusion of control, they felt out of control. In 21st century Western society, in world history, we are in the top 1% of people in terms of comfort and money.

And yet, the desire for more still pulls our hearts. We want more because we think more will give us what we need. If we want to climb the social ladder, money will help us wear the right clothes, shop in the right supermarkets, drive the right car, to be accepted by those already up the ladder we want to climb up.

Money we think will buy us comfort, stuff we believe will bring us happiness, and it does for a short while until we get bored of it and need to buy more stuff. money.

What about the financial future of our children? Earn more, put away more, give them a leg up in life. Money has a pull, and when it pulls we make decisions on how to use it based on the outcome, the goal that matters to us the most, where we want to get to or who we want to be.

the Israelites temptation comes from that fear, the fear that we get tempted with too. What are our modern fears?

[20 : 21] What if I lose my job? What then? If I can't afford whatever it is, how can I be happy? If I can't climb the social ladder, what will happen to my reputation locally?

If I can't provide for the future of my children, what will happen to them? And the temptation is to go back to live in a way where we feel in control.

Where the idol, where we let money sit in the driver's seat of our hearts. And so when we give it up, it can feel like there is a gap.

That there is a gap and the natural reaction is fear. When the Philistines show up, if they go back to Baal, they will fail again.

And they know it. the truth is, as we come into what we need to know is at this point, we need to know the good news of Jesus.

[21 : 35] We need to know that in our hearts because the control, losing it, there is an illusion that it's a loss. But actually losing control and giving it to God, that is, it's not a loss, it's a rescue.

Because life actually, when God is in control, life no longer rests on the unpredictable unknowns, it rests securely in the sovereign hands of the living God.

The Israelites realise in this moment they have zero control, but instead of turning back to the false gods of old, they come to Samuel, God's man. They are fearful, but they turn to him.

This is the way of the gospel, turning to God's man instead of themselves. Look, they don't even pray for themselves. They don't even pray for themselves. They turn to Samuel and say, don't stop crying out to the Lord, our God for us.

Continue crying out to God for us that we may be rescued from the Philistines. And notice what Samuel does. What Samuel does, a miracle takes place.

[22 : 40] Okay, verse 9, what does he do? Then Samuel took a suckling lamb and sacrificed it as a whole burnt offering to the Lord. He cried out to the Lord in Israel's behalf and the Lord answered him.

Verse 10, while Samuel was sacrificing the burnt offering, you can picture the chronological events, how it's panning out. As he's sacrificing the burnt lamb, the Philistines are drawing near to engage Israel in battle.

But that day the Lord thundered with loud thunder against the Philistines and threw them into such a panic that they were routed before the Israelites. The timing of it is perfection.

Samuel, he's sacrificing the lamb, the enemy's closing in, and what part did the Israelites play in the victory? How long did they fight for? Is it blood, sweat and tears?

You know, this would ruin a war movie. This ruins a war movie. You know, you've seen the historical war movies, you get two enemies across a valley, they're facing up to each other, you've got, you know the kind of movies that I'm, they're rousing one another up, ready to charge across and meet in the middle, and you know if you've seen those, it's going to be brutal, bloody and violent.

[23 : 53] as Samuel makes the sacrifice, the charge, the clash, the clink of sword on sword, never happens. The battle scene is over before the cameras have started rolling.

A blast of thunder. The living God sends confusion, panic, and in verse 11, the victory is finished off with ease. God alone is responsible, and God acts at the moment a substitute is offered.

The point is, you know, the point is this, that victory happens because of substitution. Because a substitute, a lamb is offered, that is why victory happens.

And just like the Israelites play no part in the victory, neither do we spiritually. What they experience in hand-to-hand combat, we experience spiritually.

We don't need to, we don't play a part. At the moment that our sin, that temptation and the world come to us, the substitution that happens at the cross of Christ gives us victory.

[25 : 05] When our enemies come at us, when temptation draws in, when we fear, Jesus has already won. Jesus has already won, the victory is already secure, and we play no part.

Jesus allowed himself, this is where it comes in, Jesus allowed himself to be made vulnerable. He allowed his life, in one sense, to be controlled by others.

You know, Jesus in the moment, he's kind of, he doesn't, in one sense he's in control, in another sense, he slides over into the passenger seat, and allows himself a head-on collision.

Our sin means that his whole person, his whole heart, collides with the anger and the wrath of God, and Jesus is left as the wreckage with no one to rescue him.

He takes the fatal, crashing consequences of our sins so that we can walk away without a scratch. He trades in his whole undivided heart for our distorted, divided ones.

[26 : 20] He dies so that we have the victory. But the victory for the Israel actually is so much bigger than this battle because not only do they defeat the Philistines, it's more than that.

Here we, what we get is a picture of where this nation are at before their God. We see where they're now at. It's not just the victory, the physical battle, it's a spiritual victory too because now they're won with the Lord.

And we see that in how they respond. God has come through for them and so they want to live in light of it. To continue with wholehearted devotion, we move to our final point which is looking at the response of them.

Verse 13, look with me. halfway through, Samuel takes a stone and he sets it, verse 12, sorry, then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen.

He named it Ebenezer saying, thus far the Lord has helped us. They set up a reminder to them of what God has done, a pointer to God's victory, so that whenever they pass the stone they would be reminded that God alone is responsible.

[27 : 37] and we need visual reminders of the journeys that God has taken us on. But, however, there is a different reality this side of the cross.

They have a physical stone, they pass it all the time there to look at, oh yeah, do you remember when God did this great thing for us? They have that physical stone.

For us, the cross is our ultimate Ebenezer. And we never advance from it. You know, we never graduate from the cross of Christ.

It is the anchor of our salvation, but that's not even the end of it either. Because Ebenezer, you know, we read that, it says, he's called Ebenezer because why?

Because it means thus far the Lord has helped us. It is the stone of help. But Jesus gives us actually more than a stone. You know, this side of the cross, because we're united to Jesus, when Jesus ascends 40 days afterwards at Pentecost, he sends the Holy Spirit, which is called the helper.

[28 : 47] He sends us his own spirit, more than a stone, to be our personal helper, our guide, that lives in us, not as something to look at as a reminder, but the spirit who gives us a new heart.

when we started looking at, you know, thinking this whole-hearted devotion, giving everything, you might have thought, my days, that sounds impossible.

The reality is giving your whole heart to the Lord is actually impossible to do on your own. You can't do it on your own. but it's made possible by Jesus.

It's made possible and here's why, because you receive a new heart from Jesus when the spirit comes and changes you inside out. Jesus takes your mucky heart, your divided and disordered one, and in exchange he gives you his pure, undivided heart that is loyal to God.

You are given what you need to live a life of complete, committed devotion with a heart directed to the Lord. You have a clean, pure heart given to you. And so now, as followers, we get to live our lives aligned to who we actually already are.

[30 : 10] You see that? We have the pure heart, we have to live in line with who God has made us to be. So when we give our whole hearts to God, we're just living out who we've become. We're equipped now to keep on putting down the idols.

And so instead of trying to control, we get to toss the keys to the one who is capable of sitting in the driver's seat of our hearts.

The fears about tomorrow, the same fears the Israelites had, the fears about money in control, or whatever it is that maybe you have allowed to drive, by giving our whole hearts to God, all those fears are in his hands, and we get to rest.

Do you know that's actually what faith is? Faith is each and every day letting the living God sit in the driving seat of your life. life. And we can do that because he's given us a new hat.

As we come in for landing, I wonder if, I kind of hinted at it, that if I ever have to hand over the keys to my own children, not too far away, no doubt I will be terrified as I sit in the passenger seat, and actually with good reason.

[31 : 46] But when we hand over the keys of our lives, when we give our whole selves to the Lord, putting down our old ways, we're handing the wheel to the only one who knows how to direct us, the only one who can actually bear the full weight of our hearts, he's the only one who can steer it perfectly.

And so today, you can sit in the passenger seat. You don't need to white-knuckle your way through. It's been paid for by the blood of the Lamb, secured through sacrifice.

And so, can I encourage you to let the living God take hold of your life? Can I encourage you to love him with your whole heart, not just part of you, but all of it?

Because when you do, you are aligning your life with who you actually are, who you've become.

And if you've never done that, why not consider it?

Why not consider it? What that might mean, what that might look like for you? Being out of control, because he is in control, is the safest place there is.

[33 : 05] Let me pray. Almighty God, you know so well, and you know so often we're tempted.

We want to control our lives, and we don't like handing it over, and it feels vulnerable and scary to do that, when we don't know what tomorrow will bring.

I thank you that you are sovereign over all things, and I thank you that you are able. I thank you that you've given us a new heart. I thank you that, Jesus, you've made yourself vulnerable on the cross, so that because of you, when we're connected to you, we're actually no longer vulnerable really, in that kind of a way, because we know that you're the supreme one who we let in the driver's seat. And so I just pray that you'd equip us and help us to live in this way every day. Forgive us where we've made mistakes, and I thank you that as we turn to you, that we want to today return to you with all our hearts.

And so I pray for your blessing on each one of us, in Jesus' name. Amen.