

CONFORM TO GOD'S AGENDA

1 Samuel 24:1-22

Objective: To identify characteristics of conforming to God's agenda and then determining how we can conform to that agenda in the challenging circumstances we face.

\$ What is another name for "God's agenda?" God's will.

\$ Where do we find God's will? In God's word.

\$ What is another name for "conforming to God's agenda?" Obedience.

The word "conform" gives us a picture of something being molded or shaped in to a certain configuration. Paul told the early Christians in Rome to avoid being conformed to the way of the world. The point is that we **will** be fashioned in our outlook on life and subsequent actions in our daily lives by the various influences around us. So it is important that first of all that we recognize the presence of those influences and then that we make the **right choices** of which of these influence we will allow to shape who we are.

We can think of "shape" (as a noun) as the outcome of the molding process. The various influences will produce predictable outcomes in this shaping process. How do you choose which influences you want to allow to affect you? In order to answer that question, we have to know what we want the final product to look like. This would imply that we need to have a "vision" of what we want to become in the final analysis. Many times we don't think about such things in a deliberate conscious manner. However, for everyone there is an underlying (subconscious) target that provides a drive (stimulus) that causes us to make various choices. The more amorphous the vision the more undefined and erratic will be the molding process. For some, the image of the vision they have for themselves is ever changing and could be influenced by the latest book or some guru on television. Picture what would happen if you were given a block of wood and a set of carving tools and were told to shape that piece of wood into a duck. After 15 minutes of carving, the rules are changed and you are told to carve a dog instead. A little later the target becomes a giraffe. It doesn't take a lot of imagination to figure out that the outcome would be a total mess! Therefore, making a deliberate correct choice and not being swayed by every wind of change is very important and these provide the stability in life that produces good results.

If we are going to conform to God's agenda, then we need to discover His vision of what we are to become and then do the things that lead to that vision being accomplished. What is God's vision for us? We are to be conformed to the image of His Son, Jesus. When we deliberately agree with this agenda and make it our own agenda, then we can face challenging circumstances with a calm certainty that God is working for our good. That sounds a lot like Romans 8:28-29.

[Aside on Romans 8:28. For we know that all things work together for good, to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose." The construction of this verse would seem to indicate that "those who love God" and those who are "the called according to His purpose" are one and the same. The phrase "the called ..." is simply a description of "those who love God." We can compare this to John 14:23 - "...If a man love me, he will keep my words." We understand "keep my words" to simply mean obedience. So, we can logically conclude that "the called according to His purpose" means those who respond to the invitation to put their trust in God by following his will (purpose) and have confirmation (evidence) of that response by obedience in their daily walk." Or in the theme of this study, we could say that "all things work together for good for those who conform to God's agenda."]

So, what does all this have to do with David and what was going on in his life from the time he was anointed by Samuel to be king and the time that he actually ascended to the throne? Sometimes in these accounts we lose track of the lapsed time involved. David was thought to be about 15 years old when Samuel anointed him to be king of Israel. (Josephus argued that he was closer to 10 years old.) David was 30 years old when he ascended to the throne following the death of Saul. The point is there was an extended period of time between the anointing and the fulfillment of the call. Many things happened during this time that either shaped David or revealed the inner character of who he was. We can see from the example of David that God's will involves not only **what** is to be done, but it also involves **how** and **when** it is to happen.

The other side of this coin is that many things happened during this time that either shaped Saul or revealed the inner character of who he was. What we have is side-by-side picture of doing things God's way or doing things our own way. You know the outcome: doing things by God's agenda resulted in success (David) and doing things man's way led to destruction (Saul).

In Chapter 24 of 1st Samuel we find examples that contrast the two different agendas of these two men. This account is the first of two occasions when David could have easily killed Saul but did not do so. Throughout this account we see David demonstrating the godly characteristics of mercy and respect for authority.

A. **The resumption (24:1–2):**

¹ Now when Saul returned from pursuing the Philistines, he was told, saying, "Behold, David is in the wilderness of Engedi." ² Then Saul took three thousand chosen men from all Israel and went to seek David and his men in front of the Rocks of the Wild Goats.

After routing the Philistines, Saul once again continued his relentless hunt for David. We can see evidence of what drives people by observing what consumes them. Saul was consumed with his agenda of protecting his position as king of Israel. He saw David as a threat to that position and he was determined to eliminate that threat. Saul's priority in life was driven by his own personal agenda. That agenda was interrupted by having to lead the army to fight the Philistines. As soon as that was over, he immediately returned to the driving force in his life.

How does this apply to us in our "everyday" and ordinary lives? What is it that is the main driving force in our individual lives? Examples may be our job or a hobby. It might be doing work at the civic club or at the church. There will be interruptions that will come along to take us away from the pursuit that we have, but we will get back on track toward whatever the target is as soon as we can. If the driving force is our job, the interruption may be a family problem that requires attention. If the driving force is our hobby, the interruption may be our job. What is it that drives us? What should be the driving force in our lives? (Be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ.)

As you can see from these verses, not everyone supported David. Some were supporters of Saul. These who did not support David reported where he was. In this instance, David was hiding out in the wilderness of Engedi - literally, the fount of the goats. This was rough country that was full of caves that was fit only for wild goats. David had about 600 men with him and Saul had them outnumbered 5 to 1.

B. **The realization (24:3–4):**

³ He came to the sheepfolds on the way, where there *was* a cave; and Saul went in to relieve himself. Now David and his men were sitting in the inner recesses of the cave. ⁴ The men of David said to him, "Behold, *this is* the day of which the LORD said to you, 'Behold; I am about to give your enemy into your hand, and you shall do to him as it seems good to you.'" Then David arose and cut off the edge of Saul's robe secretly.

David's men, hiding in the cave, realize that there was an opportunity to kill Saul, who has entered the cave to relieve himself. The question this raises is: "When we are searching to find God's will, does finding an "open door" mean that this "open door" is what God wants us to do?" There **was** an "open door" in this case. However, the men following David misinterpreted what it was. They saw an "opportunity" to kill Saul. The open door was actually an opportunity to show mercy. We could make the argument that every "open door" comes with a decision to do good or to do evil. Fortunately, David had a better grasp of the situation. David's agenda was to become the person "God wanted him to be" to successfully govern Israel. The threat to his life did not cause him to abandon that objective by taking a short cut to get to the point where God was taking him. He would eventually ascend to the throne. The temptation was to make it happen right then by killing Saul. However, David realized that such action was not in keeping with the character of God. This shows the difference in following God's agenda versus following the way of the world, the flesh or the devil.

It is interesting that David's men quoted a promise to David that God had given him with regard to his life. Perhaps this was the fulfillment of God's promise in that Saul was delivered into David's hand and David **did** do what seemed "good" to him – he showed mercy.

(There is a similarity in this to what Jesus experienced in the wilderness temptation. The devil promised Jesus all the kingdoms of this world if Jesus would bow down and worship him. Jesus knew that the kingdoms would eventually all belong to Him and refused to take a short cut.)

Do we have situations in which we have promises and know what the will of God is for our lives and we find ourselves in circumstances where we are tempted to take a short cut rather than wait on the Lord and His timing and His way?

C. The repentance (24:5–7):

⁵ It came about afterward that David's conscience bothered him because he had cut off the edge of Saul's robe. ⁶ So he said to his men, "Far be it from me because of the LORD that I should do this thing to my lord, the LORD'S anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, since he is the LORD'S anointed." ⁷ David persuaded his men with *these* words and did not allow them to rise up against Saul. And Saul arose, left the cave, and went on *his* way.

David thought that what he had done was rash and did not show proper respect to the king. This regret shows a lot about the character of David. He had genuine respect for authority and realized that he was to show respect for those in authority until the time God would remove that person. The attitude that David demonstrated served to calm the men who were with him who wanted to kill Saul immediately.

There is some strong symbolism in what David did. First, it showed how vulnerable Saul was when he did not have God's protection. Saul's life was literally in David's hands. The second was this: When he cut the edge of Saul's robe he cut off the tassel. The tassels were on the corners of their garments to remind them to obey the commands of the Lord. Cutting off the tassel symbolized that Saul was not in compliance with God's commands.

D. The rebuke (24:8–15):

⁸ Now afterward David arose and went out of the cave and called after Saul, saying, "My lord the king!" And when Saul looked behind him, David bowed with his face to the ground and prostrated himself. ⁹ David said to Saul, "Why do you listen to the words of men, saying, 'Behold, David seeks to harm you'?" ¹⁰ "Behold, this day your eyes have seen that the LORD had given you today into my hand in the cave, and some said to kill you, but *my eye* had pity on you; and I said, 'I will not stretch out my hand against my lord, for he is the LORD'S anointed.' ¹¹ "Now, my father, see! Indeed, see the edge of your robe in my hand! For in that I cut off the edge of your robe and did not kill you, know and perceive that there is no evil or rebellion in my hands, and I have not sinned against you, though you are lying in wait for my life to take it. ¹² "May the LORD judge between you and me, and may the LORD avenge me on you; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹³ "As the proverb of the ancients says, 'Out of the wicked comes forth wickedness'; but my hand shall not be against you. ¹⁴ "After whom has the king of Israel come out? Whom are you pursuing? A dead dog, a single flea? ¹⁵ "The LORD therefore be judge and decide between you and me; and may He see and plead my cause and deliver me from your hand."

After Saul left the cave, David called out to him and bowed low before him, showing him the piece of robe he cut off. David used this to prove that he was not seeking Saul's harm, because he could have killed him if he had wanted to. David asked Saul why he continued to chase him.

Some interesting points to note:

- \$ David showed respect to Saul by bowing low (action reflect the heart)
- \$ David told Saul that he was believing lies about him (replace lies with truth)
- \$ David reminded Saul that he could have killed him
- \$ David referred to Saul as "father" - this could have been in reference to father-in-law
- \$ David admitted to cutting off a piece of Saul's robe - just in case Saul had not noticed
- \$ David contrasted his behavior to that of Saul's
- \$ David left judgment up to God
- \$ David observed that the old proverb is truth - you can know people by their fruits
- \$ David acknowledge his inability to really hurt Saul
- \$ David left the matter in God's hands.

E. **The remorse (24:16–19):**

¹⁶ When David had finished speaking these words to Saul, Saul said, “Is this your voice, my son David?” Then Saul lifted up his voice and wept. ¹⁷ He said to David, “You are more righteous than I; for you have dealt well with me, while I have dealt wickedly with you. ¹⁸ “You have declared today that you have done good to me, that the LORD delivered me into your hand and *yet* you did not kill me. ¹⁹ “For if a man finds his enemy, will he let him go away safely? May the LORD therefore reward you with good in return for what you have done to me this day.

Saul became ashamed and acknowledged that David was a better man than he. Saul was under strong conviction and he displayed remorsefulness. He wept and he confessed that David was more righteous than he. He acknowledged that David did not count him as his enemy - otherwise, he would have killed him when he had the chance. He even asked that the Lord bless David for doing good. However, there was one thing lacking. We’ll look at that after the next two verses.

F. **The realization (24:20–22):**

²⁰ “Now, behold, I know that you will surely be king, and that the kingdom of Israel will be established in your hand. ²¹ “So now swear to me by the LORD that you will not cut off my descendants after me and that you will not destroy my name from my father’s household.” ²² David swore to Saul. And Saul went to his home, but David and his men went up to the stronghold.

Saul also acknowledged that God has indeed chosen David to be king over Israel! He even made a plea to the future king that his family be treated well when David did become king.

What was the one thing that Saul failed to do? Saul did not repent. He could and should have stepped down as king of Israel if he really believed all that he confessed. He could not do that since he was not willing to humble himself and demonstrate by his action what he realize was the truth of the matter. All the right feelings and all the tears - all the understanding and all the correct doctrine - none will amount to anything without the right action. We must hear and **do** if we want to be successful in the eyes of God.

Is there a lesson here for us? Do we know more that we act upon in our lives? Are we like the farmer whose son went to the university to study agriculture? The boy was sharing with his dad that he was learning so much and wonder how much more successful his father could have been if he had gone to college. The boy’s dad told him, “Son, I don’t DO half of what I know I ought to do already.” We may be like that dad when it comes to living life in the everyday things that come our way: We know to do a lot more than we actually do.

What Can We Take Away from This Study?

How does all this apply to our lives? We have been called out by God and anointed to sit on the throne with Jesus. Just as the actual experience of this for David did not happen instantaneously, it does not happen for us all at once. There is a waiting period in which we have a chance to grow up into the likeness of the One who called us. There will be many tests and trials along the way that will help us discover how well we are being conformed to the target (the image of Jesus). Just as David came under attacks, we will find ourselves being persecuted by those who are dedicated to the world system or who have their own personal agendas. Sometimes we find ourselves behaving in accordance with God’s agenda and at other times we find ourselves behaving like Saul and acting out of an agenda that is selfishly motivated. So, how do we make the right choice?

When David was anointed, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him mightily from that day forward. When you were saved and when you surrendered to God’s call on your life, then that same Spirit became available to you. The secret of “getting it right” is to simply follow the leading the Spirit of God. As you can see from the examples from the life of David, you will have opportunities in which you will have to choose to follow or not to follow. The thing that made a difference in David’s life was that he had and he cultivated awareness of the presence of God in his life. It was priority with him. Go thou and do likewise.