

# Withstanding the Pressure of Intimidation

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“Saul and Jonathan were beloved and pleasant in their lives, and in their death they were not divided; they were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.” So King David eulogized “Jehovah’s anointed” in “the song of the bow” as recorded in “the Book of the Upright” (2 Sam 1:18-27). David’s words were not the platitudes of a diplomat. They were the heartfelt words of one who was grieving over the loss of a man who had been like a father to him but whose end was so pathetic and inferior to the potential with which his reign began. King Saul is not found in Hebrews 11 because ultimately he did not obtain a good testimony through faith (Heb 11:2, 39).

“There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish.... And he had a son whose name was Saul, a choice and handsome young man. There was not a more handsome person than he among the children of Israel. From his shoulder upward he was taller than any of the people” (1 Sam 9:1,2). He had the advantage of looking like a king (10:23,24). However, more impressive was his apparent humility in his hesitancy to be revealed to the people (V. 22), his holding his peace regarding rebels who initially despised him (V. 27), and his return home to Gibeah to tend to the family herds (11:5). There was no evidence of self-serving political ambition in him. Instead there was a meekness about him accompanied by the Spirit of God (10:10-12) as he surrounded himself with valiant men “whose hearts God had touched” (10:26).

Saul’s first military campaign was motivated by a righteous indignation over the cruel threats of the Ammonites against the people of Jabesh-Gilead. Saul exhibited great passion and leadership in mustering the children of Israel to come to the rescue of their brethren. Yet, even in the heady glow of a mighty victory, Saul refused to exact any revenge upon those who had despised his kingship despite being encouraged to do so by some. Instead, Saul gave Jehovah credit for the salvation of Israel (11:12-13).

What happened? With such an impressive beginning to a reign, we are made to wonder how it could all end with Saul falling on his own sword in bitter disgrace (31:4). What happened to Saul between his successes at Jabesh-Gilead and his demise at Mt. Gilboa was an apostasy that all who are called to leadership should soberly consider and beware.

Beware of presumption! It is common for men to think more highly of themselves than they ought, especially when they have been successful and have had those successes praised. In proceeding with the offering of sacrifices that he had no authority to perform (1 Sam 13:5-14), Saul rationalized that his usurpation was justified for three reasons: Samuel had not come when Saul expected, Saul wanted to rally the people, and Saul intended to make supplication to God in preparation for battle. Samuel told Saul that he had acted foolishly and had not kept God’s commandment. Saul’s presumption reflected a lack of faith. Saul took matters into his own hands rather than being patient and trusting in God.

Beware of popularity! It seems that those who find themselves in positions of influence and leadership become more consumed with maintaining those positions rather than with truly leading. In short, leadership becomes followership in an effort to remain the “leader.”

When Saul feared the people and obeyed their voice (1 Sam 15:24), he quit being a leader and became a follower. A leader, while not deaf to the will of the people, is not intimidated into compromising the will of God to remain popular and keep his position. Leaders need to remember that when they reject the word of the Lord, then God will reject them as leaders (15:23). Better to be rejected by the people than by God (Acts :29).

These sins of Saul were bad enough, but Saul compounded them by his subsequent jealousy and bitterness. His paranoia and obsession about holding on to power led him to extreme fits of rage and violence as he irrationally attempted to solve his problems in ungodly ways. Today we see this pattern not only with politicians, business executives, and the religious leaders of denominations, but with elders, preachers and others of influence among brethren. Men of great potential, early victories, and meteoric influence have often fallen prey to presumption and popularity and, when rebuked, do not humbly repent but become defensive, jealous, paranoid, and bitter.

Unfortunately, the end of some brethren has been as pathetic as the end of Saul. Our goal is not to obtain a good testimony among men; it is to obtain a good testimony of faith. Therefore, we must resist the pressure of men to conform (Rom 12:1-2) to their expectations and instead conform ourselves to the image of Jesus Christ (Rom 8:29).