

SUNDAY July 27, 2025 “Spiritual and Mental Health: Job and David”

Isaiah 41:8-13 Job’s story in Job 19: 23-27 and 38:1-7

Psalms 137-146 David’s story from I Samuel 22-24

We continue our summer series “At Your Request” with our focus today on Spiritual and Mental health by sharing the stories of Job and David. We will hear about what they endured and acted upon in order to live a fuller life with God’s guidance and strength.

What is spiritual and mental health? This is one of the most misunderstood topics in the world and the church and yet we hear catch phrases like “I’ll be taking a mental health day tomorrow..” or “my mental health is causing me to ... whatever”. Yes we know people silently struggle with anxiety depression trauma and other challenges, but for some people the stigma of struggling can make them feel like they are alone or even somehow less spiritual. But we know God loves us even when we might think we are just depleted, drained or just being tired. God cares for us and wants us to enjoy being well, whole and living life to its fullest. We matter to God and we matter to those who love us so it is important that we take time to understand what mental/spiritual health is. By reflecting on others who lived before us who also had struggles in their lives we learn more and more about what it means to be strong in the Lord and to have faith that can move mountains. We can also learn that through prayer and praise of God we can do more than we ever thought possible. But we need to realize that God is and always be with us. We are not alone- ever!

Job’s story is difficult to understand from his point of view as he seems to be a pawn in the game of whether he is faithful enough to God or will he give in and give up? Job is a servant of God who lives a good life. The universe seems to line up with being and doing good and getting rewarded for it. Yet what happens if something goes wrong? If blessings are a reward for good behaviour then why do good people suffer and have misfortune. In Job 1 we learn that God and Satan had a bet whether Job would denounce when tested, tried and faced hardships and losses. He loses all of his family. Job’s first response is “The Lord has given, the Lord has taken away; blessed be the name of the Lord.” He is experiencing trauma and his world is just shattered, he is disconnected and there is a sense of order and safety taken away. so what does Job do? He denies all what has occurred and is fully grieving.

Secondly, Job’s body becomes covered with sores and these are infected to the point where they are itchy and oozing. Job’s wife even tells him to curse God and die because of his suffering. Job’s response to this is “Shall we receive the good at the hand of God and not receive the bad?” There is a certain amount of ambiguity and some doubt.

Job's friends then come to be with him and share in what is known as the ministry of presence. They sit with him in silence. They are in shock to see him as he is and they are empathetic. The friends meet Job where he is until he is ready to talk. And when Job speaks he is at his lowest- feeling alone, alienated and in pain. He wishes all connections with friends, family and God to end. He wants the darkness in this time of suffering. But he is not alone - his friends are still present and so is God.

Ironically Job speaks in rants for the next 35 chapters and takes God to task in all things. Job rebels, is lost and yet there are moments when he replies to God and says, "I know that my Redeemer lives and at the last, he will stand upon the earth." (Job 19:25). But then further dialogue continues between the three friends, Job and God and they discuss all aspects of creation and about God's justice, goodness, and majesty.

Then in Chapter 38, God's words come out of the whirlwind to speak about the wider order of the world. Out of the wind God affirms that he is in control and that he cares for Job as he cares for all creatures. God then invites Job to know Him better and to see the good of creation as something that is just as real as the pain and chaos. God asks Job to see him bigger than whom Job knew God to be before.

Change occurs but it is subtle; not everything goes back to normal. Job belongs to God and makes sacrifices for his friends' words. And God commands Job not to return to a life of incessant worrying about doing the right thing but to restore and build up relationships. This is because Job needs to belong again to community and his new family.

Job struggles with his identity as a faithful follower of God and why he was being tested. A part of the reasoning is that as a human Job cannot and will not fully understand God. Neither can we in our time and generation. But when we read Job's story we can find hope in his story of recovery and success after great difficulties. Like Hannah and Elijah too, there is a need for humility. When we think we have everything together for the best possible life, we might be tested for this. Just how humble can we be when facing challenges because it helps us remember that we do not know everything and we need to trust in something greater than ourselves. This Something - Someone is God even in the midst of suffering and questioning one's faith.

Job faced ultimate questions of whether he wanted to live or not. His faith did not depend on his circumstances. Even though God challenged Job to answer tough questions about creation God's knowledge is still greater. And in the end Job's relationship with God grew deeper and more personal through his trials. He grew spiritually and when he was having doubts and difficulty with God he had deep faith. This is why we as faithful followers of Christ

and children of God believe and trust in God. God calls us to have faith but we must be willing to learn and grow spiritually.

David is one of the most beloved biblical characters of the Old Testament because his life was filled with many ups and downs, with joy, defeat, misery and hope. He was raised as being faithful to God as the youngest of Jesse's large family. He was first and foremost a shepherd to many flocks of sheep. He knew how to calm and care for the animals, to clean and bandage wounds of those which were hurt and he was also a talented musician who played the lyre. David's story begins after Saul is anointed King of Israel by Samuel. Saul takes over leadership but turns away from God and due to this, God eventually rejects him as king. In turn, Samuel then seeks out someone who would replace him. This leads Samuel to go to the house of Jesse and eventually David is anointed. But David is just a young man and needing to prove himself. But the Spirit of God came upon him.

Meanwhile King Saul is suffering with 'evil spirits' upon him causing him to become agitated and violent. The servants want to help the King so seek a musician to calm him down. David's reputation leads him into the service of King Saul. Whenever the evil spirit came to Saul, David played the lyre and Saul would be calmed down.

But trouble was brewing with the Philistines--with their champion Goliath ready to lead his army and take over Israel. Goliath was a big man and commanded everyone's attention in order to defeat his enemy. At this time David went back and forth from King Saul's palace to tending the flocks of sheep belonging to Jesse. Yet when it came time for Goliath to meet someone in battle it was David armed with a sling and stones who went forward. This is one of the favourite stories because this young man defeats this giant and the rest of the Philistines retreat. When he is called into King Saul's presence Saul becomes angry to learn that it is the shepherd musician who has defeated the Philistines. He also is angry when he heard the women sing, "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands." So Saul eyed David from that day on and wanted him dead. Yet we must realize that Saul's son Jonathan and David have become good friends and Jonathan is willing to support David against his father.

To try to appease the situation, Saul's daughter Michal is given in marriage to David so now David is his son-in-law and subject to his rule. Saul's evil spirit wants David dead and so each time David escapes and flees, Saul continues to follow him. This shows even more his erratic behaviour and paranoia that this young man be a better warrior/ soldier than he.

I Samuel 22-24 details Saul's escalating paranoia and attempts to kill David. David receives help from a priest and gathers a group of followers in a cave. During this time Saul's chief herdsman falsely accuses the priest of conspiring against the king. Saul orders the massacre of all the priests and their families all except one who shares with David the tragedy.

David rescues the city of Keilah from an attack by the Philistines and knows that Saul is out to get him there. So he flees again. Saul pursues David into the wilderness where David is betrayed by the local people. David has another opportunity to kill Saul but instead cuts off a piece of his robe as he shows restraint and respect that he is King and the anointed king.

In Ch 24 the pursuit continues when Saul is in a cave. David refrains from harming him again but cuts off another piece of his robe. It is then that David calls out to him, shows him the piece of his robe and appeals to his conscience, reminding him that he has again spared his life. Saul finally acknowledges David's righteousness, and his own guilt and then relents that David would be king.

But what is happening with King Saul in all of this? David comes to serve him because of his episodes. From our 21st century eyes Saul might have suffered from a bipolar disorder or depressive with psychotic features. While David's writing reflect experiences of depression or sadness, grief and need for clarity in his life. He is the one in service to the king who now wants to kill him? How this affects David is immense and so he seeks supporters- including Jonathan and Michal the king's son and daughter- his friend and wife- and anyone who is willing to help him to escape and flee Saul's pursuit to kill him.

We shared Psalm 13 which reveals David's anguish, sorrow, despair as well as his plea to God for relief of his suffering. But other Psalms also reflect his faith and reliance on God for strength and guidance. This leads us also to the understanding that these songs of David suggest a path of resilience and healing.

David's experiences show the interconnectedness of spiritual and mental well-being because he believed in God, worshiped him, obeyed his laws and lived a righteous life. He was courageous and repentant and who despite many challenges, he maintained a spiritual connection with God.

Saul struggled with mental instability, possibly depression or bipolar disorder, and experienced fits of rage and paranoia. Was this because he turned away from God after becoming King? We do not know for sure, but Saul did a couple of things that did help. Saul acknowledged his problem (evil spirit) and sought help. As we consider the ideas of mental and spiritual health today this is a key first step, to know that you are not alone in whatever you face or remember or have buried for years. But Saul knew he needed help. He sought solace in

music. This is also when he first meets the one who causes him much more stress- David. But David believes in God and has a strong faith. He probably saw in Saul the changes in demeanor and mood swings. He knew that God led him to the King and it was God who guided his life.

As we reflect on Job and David today we must think also about Job's friends and King Saul and Jonathan his friend. Each of these people were affected by what happened to their friend who was just trying to live God's way. Job was tested by God and yet in the end grew to understand God on another whole new level. Was this God's intention or plan for his life?

David and King Saul had worked together to relieve the pressures put onto the King. Yet due to evil spirits Saul's changing moods and noted disorders of some kind, their friendship grew apart leading to being pursued and escaping again and again. In the end, however, David shows his calmness in spite of the challenges faced with Saul. And Saul recognizes that David would be king. Was this challenge for David to grow in his ability to lead others? Had God known the plan for David's life and these stories from I Samuel reveal his life as being filled with stories of loss, trust, hope and recovery?

How about you? God has a plan for your life but are you willing to embrace it for yourself? Jeremiah 29:11 "I know the plans I have for you, plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future." Are you willing to trust God for your life?

Or maybe in this moment you are just not sure. God knows you through and through. It is time to be still and be reminded that God is on your side and with you right now; wherever you are sitting. You are not alone. No matter what you are facing in this moment God's Spirit is moving around you and seeking to enter. But you must be willing to receive the Spirit in you and enable this Spirit to guide you.

In the words of Paul to the Philippians 4:6-7 we are also to offer our prayers of hope to God. "Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. And the peace of God which transcends all understanding will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." But we must trust in God, pray as we seek his peace.