

1 Samuel 27

Living in a Gray Area

I want to begin by describing a work situation to see if any of you can identify. Sherry works for an average sized publicly traded company in an average sized city. She likes her work and feels that what she does provides a service in her community and sometimes for people around the country that is needed and makes this a better place.

The company itself does not make any mention of faith. Their stated values are integrity, doing right by the customer, and excellence in everything they do, but it is obvious to everybody who works there that the only value that matters at the end of the day is profit number to make the managers and stockholders more money.

If you were to ask Sharon how she feels about making her bosses wealthy, she is OK with that. As the company has done well, she has also done well financially. Sharon's job has allowed her to provide for her family's needs, most of their wants, build a decent retirement, and support her church and things in the community she cares about. While she wishes she had more time with her family, she can't say that her job has become an idol that crowds out everything else she is called to do in her life. Even though it is still a job, Sharon feels blessed by God every day that she is able to go to this job.

All of the people who work with Sharon on a daily basis know that she is a Christian. She talks about her church, she will sometimes share things that God has done in her life, and she has even been able to invite a few interested people to church with her. But she has NEVER EVER preached a sermon at work. Most people describe her as someone who just walks the walk. Even people who don't particularly like organized religion like Sharon because she is genuine and loving in her faith.

The angst that Sharon feels about her comes in two different areas. Sometimes, she feels pressure to only offer clients the more expensive option or sell things that they neither want, need, nor will likely notice when the bill comes. Her boss never tells her to do these things, but he always makes it clear that the company loves to see these numbers go up because these charges are great for the company, even though everyone can admit behind the scenes they do nothing for the customer. What her boss is encouraging everybody to do is not illegal and has never resulted in anybody being fired for it in her company. Although everyone else in the company does things this way, Sharon knows that if she were a customer and found out about these charges, she would not feel like the company has behaved ethically. She doesn't think in the long run that this kind of behavior is good for business, and she is not comfortable engaging in it as a Christian. Sharon is genuinely torn as to whether she should do things the right way, according to the company's stated values, or the way that everyone else is doing them.

The other thing has come recently in a push that the company has embraced. They are really wanting company employees to show up and Saturday for the local Pride parade. They feel like a good showing from their company will let everyone know that their community is a more loving and inclusive place.

Sharon is a Christian she is completely non political, she hates the culture wars, and as a Christian does not feel like it's her job to judge nonbelievers for not living by a Christian ethic. On the other hand, Sharon knows that as a Christian that it is the opposite of love to encourage people to live in a way that the Bible says is wrong. She would not go out of her way to TELL somebody they are wrong, but she won't give her approval either.

Sharon is feeling pressured in her work that if she does not in some way offer her personal endorsement of Pride Month by wearing a pin, volunteering at the Pride parade, or signing a poster as an "ally" then people in her work, people who she genuinely loves, will interpret that as hatred. She doesn't think her job is in danger, but it could potentially change the way that people view her in the workplace. She doesn't want to be viewed as a hateful person. She wants get along with everyone and work for the common good of people at work and in the community, whether they share the same views on life or not. Sharon is genuinely struggling with what she should do. Should she take a stand by not doing anything and wait to see what the fallout might be? Should she offer an excuse for why she can't come to the pride parade but tell everybody she would like to come and support it in spirit? Should she quietly start looking for another job because the values of the company and her co-workers do not align with all of her personal values? Should she make a protest with the company and essentially challenge them to discriminate against her because of her faith?

These are real life questions that I know that many of you have to deal with. As a pastor, I could give you some Scirptural principles that should help guide you, but at the end of the day, you are the person who has to make decisions about your life. Honestly, there are multiple possible choices you could make that remain true to your faith and attempt to honor God. But you also don't know what the potential pitfalls might be that lead you to have to make harder decisions that sever relationships and affect your livelihood down the road.

This gray area of meeting the mundane challenges of surviving and making a living in the world are where David finds himself in 1 Samuel 27.

To remind you of where we are at in the story, David has been anointed as the next king of Israel, but he is not king yet, Saul is still king. David has faithfully served God and served God's anointed king, Saul. Saul has repaid David's loyalty by trying to hunt him down and kill him. At first when David was on the run from Saul, he made some terrible choices out of fear and panic that nearly cost him his own life and cost many innocent people in the priesthood their lives at the hands of evil Saul.

But David returned to a right standing with God, he did not repay Saul evil for evil, and he has begun to take on greater and greater responsibilities as a warrior and a leader, even though he is not a king yet.

In 1 Samuel 27, David is creating a tangled web by making choices without much concern for whether God declares those choices to be right or wrong

Let's begin reading.

1 Samuel 27:1-4

Then David said in his heart, "Now I shall perish one day by the hand of Saul. There is nothing better for me than that I should escape to the land of the Philistines. Then Saul will despair of seeking me any longer within the borders of Israel, and I shall escape out of his hand." ²So David arose and went over, he and the six hundred men who were with him, to Achish the son of Maach, king of Gath. ³And David lived with Achish at Gath, he and his men, every man with his household, and David with his two wives, Ahinoam of Jezreel, and Abigail of Carmel, Nabal's widow. ⁴And when it was told Saul that David had fled to Gath, he no longer sought him.

The first gray area choice that David makes is to leave Israel to once again live in the land of Philistines.

David is officially responsible for two wives, their kids his parents, brothers and sisters, 600 high maintenance societal outcast dudes and ALL of their families. We could conservatively estimate that even though David is not King yet, he is responsible for the well being of OVER 2,000 people. This is a very different situation than when he was on the run from Saul by himself many months ago. David can't just think about his own survival, but he has to make sure that all of these 2,000 people can defend themselves as well as find something to do that feed their families. And, oh by the way, David is still technically at outlaw in Israel.

If you are a man, I hope that in some way that you can relate to the weight of responsibility that David feels. Part of a godly definition of manhood that our culture seems to forget is that a real man is somebody to assumes God-given roles of responsibility to care for people who need his provision and protection.

I don't know about you, but whether it be for my wife, for my kids, for people at church, there is a weight of burden that comes with "I have responsibility for the well-being of other people besides just myself." I hope that you feel that on at least some level. And while it can be tiresome to know you have to get up every day and go to work to provide for other

people, it's actually a way that you are following God and living his plan for your life, so it's tiresome, but it also the way to deep satisfaction in life.

David has fully embraced this, but his conundrum is "how can all these men find jobs and farm when we are not allowed to possess land in Israel. Saul might declare us to be safe for the moment, but tomorrow he may decide to raise an army and come after us. He knows where we are. Do we simply trust in the mood of an unstable narcissistic egotistical maniac, or do we try to go somewhere else that is more stable?"

In this light, it's completely understandable why David "goes over" to the son of the King of Gath. He's not going to go to war with Saul and he can't trust that Saul won't decide one day to kill him AND the thousands of people for whom he is responsible. David isn't doing this out of panic or fear, but he seems to be rationally examining his options and realizes that going somewhere else is a smarter option than staying where he is at.

David knows that he can't trust Saul, but if he shows up in Gath this time he has a little bit of leverage this time. We already know that David is an elite warrior. Remember from last week that David's men, even though they are high-maintenance outcasts, they are offering protection to the people in the land of Judah from wild animals, but also from Philistine raiders. These high maintenance men are actually being trained by David to become valuable and skilled warriors like he is.

David is correct in his assessment that he cannot place his faith in Saul. And when you look around at the kingdoms around Israel, they are each either enemies of Israel or allies of Saul. The options are not good. But notice what is missing in these verses. Even though David knows he can't place his faith in mankind, he never takes any action that would indicate that he is actively placing his faith in God. He never asks "where does God think I should go?" This is going to begin to needlessly complicate David's life, even though you can't firmly declare David is yet

Now when you show up in a city with 600 possible warriors, one of two things is going to happen. The leaders of that city are going to take up arms to kill you or force you to leave, or they are going to sit down to talk to you to how you might be able to help them. David rightly figures that if he goes over to Gath, even though they have been enemies in the past, that they will be able to form a partnership that is mutually beneficially to both of them and that is exactly what happens.

The second gray choice that David makes is to form an alliance with Achish

⁵Then David said to Achish, "If I have found favor in your eyes, let a place be given me in one of the country towns, that I may dwell there. For why should your servant dwell in the royal city with you?" ⁶So that day Achish gave him Ziklag. Therefore Ziklag has belonged to the kings of Judah to this day. ⁷And the number of the days that David lived in the country of the Philistines was a year and four months.

Notice the phrase that David uses in verse 5 “if I have found favor in your eyes.” Have you ever heard the phrase “it’s easier to catch flies with honey than vinegar.” David is using the standard language of diplomacy in seeking something of value from Achish. If David needs a place for he and his men to live and make a living, is he more likely to accomplish this by being adversarial to Achish or by being a friend? Part of the reason many don’t like Christians is because Christians like to be more known by our enemies than by being good friends. In general I want you to know that is simply a foolish way to live. And David is no fool.

And what does David ask for? David is wise enough to know that if he stays in the capital city of Gath with his 2,000 people, that even though they might have been welcomed at the beginning, their welcome will surely run out sooner or later and there will be conflict. And that conflict will not end well. So David wisely asks to be given a small town twenty-five miles away from Gath where he and his men can go make a living and have enough distance to maintain peace with the King of Gath.

Now, if you know your Old Testament, there is another narrative at work here that is not even mentioned in 1 Samuel 27. When Moses and Joshua led the Israelites into the land of Canaan and God declared how the land would be divided up amongst the tribes, Ziklag is very clearly within the boundaries of the land that God intended for the tribe of Judah to possess. Israel had been intended to possess ALL of the land to the sea on which the Philistines were inhabiting. The Philistines were squatting on land that God had already given to Judah and Benjamin and Simeon, but which the Israelites refused to trust God and possess.

Of course Achish has likely never read the book of Joshua and he has no idea that he is giving land to the most powerful person of the leading tribe of Israel that God has declared for hundreds of years belongs to that tribe.

What is Achish getting out of the deal? If you are familiar with military and political history, you know that one of the keys to having any security for a nation or a state is to pay attention to your border regions.

Where Gaston County sits right now used to be called the back country of North Carolina. If your family has been here since the 1700s there is a very strong likelihood that your last name isn’t technically English, but is Welsh, German, or Scots-Irish. You see in the 1700s the English colonies knew that they had a border problem with all of the Indian tribes that lived to the west. The Indians had been pushed out of their lands on the east and they sometimes would raid and attack English settlements. So the English government figured this- we can give land to people who aren’t English, but who also aren’t our enemies so that they will settle the land and provide a buffer between the parts of the colonies we care about and the Indians. And that’s the basic story of how you end up with Lincoln and Mecklenburg County. Now of course, that strategy blew up on the English pretty quickly and

all these crazy Germans and Scots irish decided that they wanted to start their own country.

But this is the same thinking that Achish is using in welcoming David and giving him a city. He is getting a buffer of protection from some of his enemies to the south. David asks for this once again without consulting God or even having a concern other than trying to provide for his people. But behind the scenes, God is clearly working doing what he said he would do...that is deliver the land that David is given to the tribe of Judah.

Seems like a win-win situation right? Well, maybe. But there is some indication that perhaps David isn't just using diplomatic language with Achish, but that he really and truly deep down is desiring that Achish will find favor with him....perhaps even more favor that he finds with God. After all, we still have no mention that David is asking God what he should do or even asking God for provision and protection for his people. David is depending on Achish, which puts David in a precarious situation that leads him to weave and tangled web of deceit unnecessarily.

The third gray area choice that David makes in 1 Samuel 27 is to deceive Achish about what he and his men are actually doing.

⁸ Now David and his men went up and made raids against the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites, for these were the inhabitants of the land from of old, as far as Shur, to the land of Egypt. ⁹ And David would strike the land and would leave neither man nor woman alive, but would take away the sheep, the oxen, the donkeys, the camels, and the garments, and come back to Achish. ¹⁰ When Achish asked, "Where have you made a raid today?" David would say, "Against the Negeb of Judah," or, "Against the Negeb of the Jerahmeelites," or, "Against the Negeb of the Kenites." ¹¹ And David would leave neither man nor woman alive to bring news to Gath, thinking, "lest they should tell about us and say, 'So David has done.'" Such was his custom all the while he lived in the country of the Philistines. ¹² And Achish trusted David, thinking, "He has made himself an utter stench to his people Israel; therefore he shall always be my servant."

Now before you go sideways about the violence of David and his men here. These men are not farmers, or construction workers or craftsmen. They are not even herdsman at this point. They are mercenaries. They make a living by killing people and taking their stuff. Achish knew this, and he invited a band of mercenaries to come live on his border. If David had gone to Achish and been like "hey I want you to know me and the boys have gone raiding these people who live on your border who you might like to take their land from at some point. Here's some of their stuff for you to enjoy." It's not a foregone conclusion that Achish would have been upset about that. After all, David has formed an alliance meant to be mutually beneficial. And besides, Achish knows that David at his core is not a Philistine. David wouldn't be expected to go attack his own family members.

But David, completely without consulting God, really causes a problem for himself. Rather than be honest with Achish about what he's doing and take the chance that Achish might not approve, David just lies and says that he has become a full throated enemy not just of King Saul *but of his own tribe*, and is killing and plundering the tribe of Judah. There is no other reason for David to do this other than to receive the adulation and praise of this pagan Philistine prince.

David surely wants Achish to believe that he can trust David, because in David's mind, his peace and prosperity are coming from Achish. But here's the thing about deceit.

When we practice deceit, we might step into deceit for what we believe is a noble purpose. We just want other people to like us, other people to feel good about us, other people to assume that we are on their side. But the problem about deceit is that who is easiest person for you and I to deceive?

Remember David when he felt truly alone and on the run, but he remembered that his salvation was found in God?

Psalm 142

**142 With my voice I cry out to the Lord;
with my voice I plead for mercy to the Lord.**

**² I pour out my complaint before him;
I tell my trouble before him.**

**³ When my spirit faints within me,
you know my way!**

**In the path where I walk
they have hidden a trap for me.**

**⁴ Look to the right and see:
there is none who takes notice of me;
no refuge remains to me;
no one cares for my soul.**

**⁵ I cry to you, O Lord;
I say, "You are my refuge,
my portion in the land of the living."**

**⁶ Attend to my cry,
for I am brought very low!
Deliver me from my persecutors,
for they are too strong for me!**

**⁷ Bring me out of prison,
that I may give thanks to your name!
The righteous will surround me,
for you will deal bountifully with me.**

Nowhere here do we see the David who is in trouble and totally dependent on God. He is dependent on himself, his own cunning, his own strategy, his own ability to make people love him. **But when you seek the approval of men instead of God, you very quickly become to men somebody that you are not. And when you present yourself to others to be somebody who you are not, you forget that it is God who gives you your protection, your prosperity, and your identity.**

Next week we will see that David has created a total mess not just for himself, but for the entire town of people for whom he is responsible. It will take a wild and crazy series of events for him to get back to the place where he remembers the God is his strength and his deliverance.

Challenge

So how do we make choices in those gray zones of life where there isn't a book, chapter and verse telling us exactly what we should do? How can we be honest with other people, honest with ourselves, and maintain our faith in a world that in many ways is subtly conspiring against our absolute trust in being a child of God?

- 1) Don't find your sense of place and security on the systems of this world that have no place for God.

Is it wrong to work in a job where nobody acknowledges God or seeks first what God wants out of their business? Absolutely not.

One of my favorite quotes is from a Dutch theologian who was also the prime minister.

There is not a square inch in the whole domain of our human existence over which Christ, who is sovereign over all, does not cry: 'Mine!'- Abraham Kuyper

As a Christian this gives us the freedom to go anywhere in the world, to any workplace, or any situation and not believe that we can do God's work there. God has a plan, and his plan is not limited merely to people who acknowledge him yet. You don't have to leave the world for the cocoon of space space where everybody believes like you do. You can make meaningful contributions to the world in secular spaces AS A CHRISTIAN because you understand that God is ultimately in control of every places that you go and that he desires you to serve him THERE.

- 2) Don't believe that you can practice deceit and not become a victim of the lies you tell yourself.

The easiest thing to do as we go into a world that doesn't trust in God is to believe that we are also part of the world that doesn't trust in God. We begin to measure success by the world's measure of success, we crave the approval and adulation of people more than we

crave the fellowship and protection of God. The only way we can live as children of God in the world is to live as children of God, and not as children of the world. David faced this temptation, and God has to rescue David from himself as much as he has to rescue him from his enemies.

Remember whose you are and remember what God is saving you from.