

BEYOND YOUR BACKYARD

BEYOND YOUR BACKYARD

STEPPING OUT TO SERVE OTHERS



T O M E L L S W O R T H

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Bringing The Word to Life

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For my parents, Tom and Midge Ellsworth,
and
my wife's parents, Floyd and Alma Barrow.
Thank you for giving us, your children,
wonderful homes and great backyards
in which to grow.
More importantly, thank you for showing us
how to get beyond our backyards
to love and serve God!



I never cease to be amazed at God's grace. He not only provides for our needs as promised, but sometimes he gives us our dreams on a silver platter. As I worked on this book, I realized he had made another of my dreams a reality. But isn't that just like God? He is a Father who loves to give good gifts to his children—and he has given me more than my fair share:

My wife, Elsie. For over thirty years she has been the best gift of my life. That she chose to share her life's journey with me still makes me feel like I'm living a dream. I am deeply grateful for her encouragement, wisdom, and love. Without her help and patience, I never could have undertaken such a project.

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And you! Thank you for taking time to read this book. I hope and pray that it will encourage you to get out of your own backyard and change the world for Jesus Christ!

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INTRODUCTION

The highest form of worship is the worship of unselfish Christian service. The greatest form of praise is the sound of consecrated feet seeking out the lost and helpless.

BILLY GRAHAM

I learned it years ago, and I suspect you did too:

Here's the church,
(fold hands with fingers hidden inside)

here's the steeple;
(point both index fingers up, forming a spire)

open the doors
(open thumbs)

and see all the people.
(turn hands over and wiggle fingers)

It was an entertaining exercise for me as a small child. Unfortunately, it was all too descriptive of the local church in many places. I'm not sure why it happens, but at times the church becomes content with being willfully sequestered inside the walls of its buildings. In those cases, to learn about the church, you have to go where the church meets. To see the church in action, you have to attend a church service. To discover the truth about Jesus Christ, you have to seek out the answers from inside the church building.

Jesus talks about Christians being salt and light in the *world* (Matthew 5:13-16). Where did we get the idea that the salt needs to be locked up

behind doors? When did we decide that the light needs to be filtered through stained glass? One of my college professors observed that there were only two buildings where a person could not see what was going on inside: a tavern and a church. One usually had darkened windows and the other, stained glass. It was a bit of an exaggeration at the time, but not much. From the outside of the church it was impossible to know what was happening inside. One had to “open the doors and see all the people.”

Long before Las Vegas began its newest advertising blitz, some congregations and some individual Christians were practicing a similar philosophy: “What happens in the church stays in the church.” It hasn’t always been like that, you know. In the first century, the church was not defined by its four walls. It was not confined to a worship service or to a predictable weekly pattern.

Don’t get me wrong. I love the church! I am thankful for the church building and property that enhances kingdom ministry. Several years ago we experienced a church fire and spent two years in a high school auditorium. I know how valuable a good building can be! I’m also thankful for the excitement and inspiration that result from worshiping with others who share a common faith and worldview. Some of the most life-changing moments I’ve ever experienced have come during worship with other Christians. And let’s face it, the first-century church wasn’t perfect or problem free—I’m not sure I would have wanted to minister in Corinth!

Here’s the problem: it is all too easy to become inward focused instead of outward focused, if we aren’t careful. Our first-century counterparts may have struggled with that issue as much as we do. Oh sure, we are still passionate for the truth, we still desire to exalt Jesus Christ, and we still long for the moment of his return. But in some ways we’ve lost the urgency of the *go!* It is so easy to become satisfied to offer the invitation to *come*. Anyone who makes it past the front doors is welcome.

In the future, I don't believe *come* will have much of an impact. Tomorrow's generations of unbelievers will not be drawn to the church behind four walls, but to the church that is found serving in local food pantries, homeless shelters, and hospices. We cannot do less than *go!* Christians of all generations are called to demonstrate their love, share their faith, and serve humanity . . . all for the privilege of introducing others to Jesus.

For the last several years, my good friend Steve Connor has served with Sports Outreach International.¹ In his global work, Steve holds to this philosophy: "If they play in your backyard, and if they play in your front yard, then maybe someday they'll come play in your house." I like that. It's a concept worth embracing. But before we can expect others to come and play in our yard, we must meet them on their turf. Many people may not be interested in coming to a building . . . for a variety of reasons:

- *a bad experience with a church in the past*
- *a negative perception of what happens in a church building*
- *the counterproductive influence of hypocrites*
- *the fear of entering a place where they will be the outsiders*

Seekers who might resist coming to a building would still love to meet Jesus. So let's take a step out of our comfort zones and meet them where they are.

I know. It can be a bit unnerving to move beyond the safety of the church doors. But in the ancient church, Christians permeated the world around them; they became salt and light. Our predecessors left behind a great legacy for us to follow. Study the mini biographies of first-generation

disciples like Tabitha, Barnabas, Lydia, Titus, Epaphroditus, and Aquila and Priscilla. They changed their world because they went into the world to reach others. We too can add our light and flavor to the world. As a matter of fact, many Christians are doing exactly that. You'll read about a few of them in this book.

I still believe the two-fisted children's poem has value. But as we look to the future, I would suggest we teach a slightly modified poem to our kids:

Here's the church,

here's the steeple;

open the doors

and *send out* the people!

Now is the time to break out of our four walls. Knock down the doors and send out the people. There is no limit to the number of practical ways in which you can serve others in the name of Jesus—and make an eternal difference. The adventure is yours for the taking. Go! Get beyond your backyard!

STUCK IN THE MUD

1 SAMUEL 13:13, 14

1

When one door closes, another opens; but we often look so long and so regretfully upon the closed door that we do not see the one which has opened for us.

ALEXANDER GRAHAM BELL

Does the name Elisha Gray ring a bell? It would if Alexander Graham Bell hadn't won the race to the U.S. Patent Office.

On February 14, 1876, both men applied for a patent for what would later become the telephone.¹ On Gray's application he described his apparatus "for transmitting vocal sounds telegraphically." Unfortunately, Elisha Gray was two hours too slow. After years of litigation, Bell was legally named the inventor of the telephone.

What makes the story more painful is the fact that Gray had a better invention. It was later discovered that the apparatus described in Gray's application would have worked, while that in Bell's patent would not have. Think about it—Gray missed the opportunity of a lifetime by only two hours.

Elisha Gray isn't the only member of the Missed Opportunity Club. Consider these other regretful decisions:

- *Texas businessman Ross Perot had the opportunity to buy Microsoft in 1979 and turned it down. He didn't think it was worth the price.²*
- *In 1938 Joe Schuster and Jerry Siegel, the two teenagers who conceived the idea of the Man of Steel, sold Superman to DC Comics for less than two hundred dollars.³*

- *In the 1984 NBA draft, the Houston Rockets and the Portland Trail Blazers both passed over a very qualified, young jump shooter, making Michael Jordan the third draft pick of that season.*⁴
- *Today it costs around \$705,000 for a thirty-second commercial on American Idol,⁵ the number one show in the U.S. But back in 2002 when the show's creators were looking for a market here in America, none of the major networks were interested. Only Fox network expressed an interest—and since then they've been laughing all the way to the bank.*

You might expect God's Word to contain only success stories. Indeed there are plenty of biographical narratives of successful Bible characters, men and women who saw an opportunity and made a true difference in the lives of others:

- *We are emboldened when reading about how Moses—who stood face-to-face against Pharaoh, the most powerful ruler of his day—rescued the enslaved Hebrew nation (Exodus 7–12).*
- *We are inspired when reading about a widow who put everything she had in the offering, trusting God to supply all her future financial needs (Mark 12:41–44).*
- *We are challenged when reading about a young boy who willingly gave up his lunch, which Jesus took and used to feed five thousand hungry men, plus women and children (Matthew 14:13–21).*

But not every narrative ends so triumphantly. Some Bible biographies recount the lives of those who let opportunity slip through their fingers. Instead of seizing the moment, they got stuck in the mud. Immobilized. Powerless. Helpless. Incapable. They never lived up to their God-given potential. Just think of the squandered lives we read about in Scripture.

The Bible mentions several of the charter members of the Missed Opportunity Club:

- *Samson was physically strong but morally weak. He could have been an inspirational leader, but his character got stuck in the mud of immorality. Instead of leaving behind a great legacy, he let his God-given gifts languish in a dusty, Philistine gristmill (Judges 13–16).*
- *Nicodemus was an influential member of the Jewish Sanhedrin and a respected leader among his peers. He could have stood up as a powerful advocate for Jesus, but his faith got stuck in the mud of his fears. Instead of serving Christ boldly, he hovered around in the dark shadows of wannabe discipleship (John 3).*
- *Ananias and Sapphira were semi-affluent members of the Jerusalem church, who were momentarily celebrated for their generous giving. Their contribution should have been a wonderful example to the early church, but they got stuck in the mud of their greed. They gave only part of the sale price of their land to the church—and there was nothing wrong with that—but they insisted that it was the total price. Such bold-faced deceit cost them much more than they ever intended to pay. Instead of dropping a gift into the offering plate, they dropped dead at the feet of the ushers! (Acts 5).*
- *Eli was a faithful high priest but a lousy father. Eli's two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were an embarrassment to God—and should have been to Eli. They had the opportunity to follow in their father's footsteps, but they got stuck in the mud of their pride and hypocrisy. They went into battle arrogantly leading the ark of the covenant; but they did not survive, and the ark did not come home. Eli, instead of enjoying his golden years, collapsed at the news and died of a broken neck—and more importantly, a broken heart (1 Samuel 2–4).*

- o *Demas was an associate of the apostle Paul, but he was known as a quitter. Demas had the opportunity to assist the imprisoned Paul with the greatest mission in the world, but he got stuck in the mud of envy. Instead of loving God with all his heart, he chose to love the world with all his desire (2 Timothy 4:10).*

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS

Can you relate to any of those people? Have you ever missed an opportunity to make a difference? Do you ever find your faith stuck in the mud?

We could learn from the lives of many different characters, but we'll focus on just one in this chapter. He had great potential for God and tremendous opportunities to make a difference; but he got mired down in the mud of his own self-importance, and he never came clean. (Had Saul lived up to his potential, it is possible we never would have heard of a shepherd boy named David.) We meet this mediocre monarch in the book of 1 Samuel.

Saul's story begins with stubborn people and missing donkeys—which, by the way, are very similar! In the days of the judges, the Israelites reached the conclusion that they wanted to be like every other country. After all, they were the only nation without a king. In truth, they *had* a king. The Israelites had long lived in a theocratic system of government—God was their ruler and sovereign. But since he wasn't present in flesh and blood, the Israelites felt slighted. Obviously, they sacrificed all common sense when they made this appeal for a king. What were they thinking? *We want to trade the impartial, benevolent, providential grace of God for a fickle, subjective, self-exalted ruler who will draft our young men into military service and will tax our wages to provide for his extravagant palace and lavish lifestyle.* It was a lousy trade, but then . . . peer pressure is hard to resist.

When we think about dealing with peer pressure, teenagers usually come to mind. But adults are certainly not immune. When an individual believes he is missing something valuable or enjoyable because everyone else has it or is doing it, that's peer pressure. Such pressure is a powerful force unless strong convictions prevail.

My preferences are easily manipulated by peer pressure. I might prefer to eat at a particular restaurant, but if the other three people in the car want to eat elsewhere, I will concede. A *conviction*, however, is not subject to peer pressure; it is a core belief that will not be compromised at any cost. For example, a conviction regarding the truth of Christ's resurrection is what led to the martyrdom of the apostles. A conviction that the world needed to know the gospel compelled Paul to endure every possible pain and discomfort to fulfill that mission.

A conviction is not just something that you hold; it is something that holds *you*. A conviction will control your ways, your words, and your wealth. It is vital to determine whether faith is a preference or a conviction. The crowd is easy to follow but, all too often, painfully wrong.

A few years ago a snowstorm hit Bloomington less than forty-eight hours before the weekly trash pickup day. I anticipated that the pickup would be delayed due to the harsh weather, but I couldn't confirm that hunch. I checked in the newspaper and online. The Department of Sanitation was no help since it was closed. My only recourse was to watch the neighbors. Without exception, everyone on our street set out their trash that night for the early morning pickup, so I decided to follow suit. I reasoned that the whole street couldn't possibly be wrong. But we *were*. Pickup was delayed until later in the week.

I realize, of course, that being confused about our weekly garbage is a trivial matter. Still, it was a cold reminder that when I decided to

follow the crowd, I was left holding the bag—the trash bag. Don't get stuck in the mud of peer pressure, or you too will end up with nothing but garbage.

Peer pressure notwithstanding, the Almighty decided to give the obstinate Israelites what they kept insisting they wanted: a king. Now remember, there is more to the story than stubborn people—there is also a herd of missing donkeys. An influential Benjamite named Kish had a son named Saul, who is described as impressive, without equal among the Israelites, and a head taller than any others (1 Samuel 9:1, 2). He definitely would have been the number one NBA draft choice! One day Kish's herd of donkeys went AWOL, so Saul and a servant were given the task of locating the wayward animals.

Saul was completely unaware that God had chosen him to be king, but the Lord revealed it to Samuel, the last of the spiritual judges to lead Israel. Look closely at this story, and you will see the providential work of God at every turn. It seemed to Saul that the donkeys had vanished without a trace. For three days Saul and the servant carefully searched the area, but neither of them could find a clue as to the herd's whereabouts. The servant suggested they seek an answer from a “man of God; he is highly respected, and everything he says comes true” (v. 6). Isn't it interesting that Saul didn't think of that first? It would seem that the spiritual element wasn't a priority with him.

As they entered the town, the man of God, Samuel, met them on his way to the place of sacrifice. Perfect timing. However, Saul didn't even know Samuel. He approached Samuel and asked for the location of the prophet's home. Amazing! Had he never attended a sacrifice presided over by Samuel? Had he never heard the prophet speak on behalf of God? How does one grow up just down the road from the greatest spiritual leader of his time and not know him?

Before Saul could pose the question of the day, Samuel explained, “The donkeys you lost three days ago . . . have been found” (v. 20). He then informed Saul that he was to be the guest of honor at the feast. He got the best cut of meat, sat at the head of the table, and spent the night in the prophet’s home. The next morning as he prepared to return home, Saul got the shock of a lifetime. Samuel took a jar of oil and poured it on Saul’s head, stating that the Lord was anointing him as the new king (10:1). Then Samuel told Saul that on his way home he would meet two men who would tell him about the donkeys, then three men would offer him two loaves of bread, and finally he would join a band of prophets and prophesy with them (vv. 2-6).

Disappearing donkeys, being the guest of honor at the feast (and the only one with *filet mignon*), meeting total strangers who offered him free bread, and singing baritone with the Prophets of Praise ensemble were not coincidental experiences. God was very much at work.

News-breaking miracles are not a daily occurrence, but the providential work of God *is*. Every day God works in our lives to accomplish his will. God is at work in your life whether you can see it or not. Even when you feel like your life is stuck in the mud, God may be doing his greatest work in you! Do not lose heart.

A HUMBLE BEGINNING

When the day came for Saul to be officially anointed as king over Israel, he was so afraid and humble that he hid. He did not come out from hiding until he was found and forced to appear. It was an exciting day—the people were ecstatic. They had their king, and he was impressive! But in the midst of all of the wonderful celebration came this footnote to the day: “Some troublemakers said, ‘How can this fellow save us?’ They despised him and brought him no gifts” (10:27).

No celebration is without its naysayers, pessimists, and whiners. Some people are never satisfied. Earlier, they didn't like it because they had no king; then they didn't like the king God had chosen. I can hear them whispering behind their hands: *Just because he's tall, dark, and handsome he gets to be king. If he thinks I'm going to give him a new toaster for his palace-warming, he can think again.* But Saul kept silent.

Saul had so much going for him. He was handpicked, blessed, and transformed by God. At thirty years of age, he had the presence of a celebrity and the look of royalty, but he was a man of humility. When he could have retaliated at such rude and brazen behavior, he just kept silent and went about his business. I like that. And his next move was even more endearing. He didn't start building his palace, creating a tax structure, or assembling an army; he humbly went back home to the farm.

His first big test challenged his military leadership. An Ammonite king was terrorizing the Jewish city of Jabesh. The rogue offered a treaty that would have called for every person in the city to lose his right eye. Not much of a treaty, is it? When word reached Saul, the Spirit of the Lord came upon him; and he took action. Saul rallied the troops and attacked the Ammonite army at night in their own camp, destroying them (11:1-11). That day he gained the confidence and loyalty of the people. Everything was looking great. Saul demonstrated noble qualities that are worth emulating: a humble attitude, a simple manner, a magnanimous heart, and a courageous spirit.

HUMBLE PIE

No wonder God chose Saul. He had such potential . . . until he got caught up in himself. Saul appears to be a man driven by the external. Perhaps he started believing his own press—what others said about him—or simply concluded that he could do anything since he was king.

Regardless, he lost his humility and made a grave error in judgment on the eve of a later battle.

When he saw his army beginning to scatter because of fear of the Philistines, he no longer waited for Samuel to come and offer the sacrifice before God. Saul offered the sacrifice himself. This was no act of worship; it was merely a perfunctory ritual before battle. It was not carried out in faith, but in fear. This offering was not about God; it was about a good-luck charm. It was not in Saul's job description to offer the sacrifice of worship. And the spirit in which he made the sacrifice was unacceptable. Just because he was God's chosen man for the throne didn't give him the right to ignore God's command.

Saul was still wiping the blood off his hands when Samuel appeared and gave him this tragic indictment: "You acted foolishly," Samuel said. "You have not kept the command the LORD your God gave you; if you had, he would have established your kingdom over Israel for all time. But now your kingdom will not endure; the LORD has sought out a man after his own heart and appointed him leader of his people, because you have not kept the LORD's command" (13:13, 14).

It would be some time before David entered the picture, but God began at that point to move in a new direction. Saul became indecisive, melancholy, defensive, and inactive. He no longer knew which way to turn. Should he fight or retreat? Should he lead or retire? He just wallowed in the mud of uncertainty. And so it seems that Saul began to respond only to outward circumstances rather than being driven by the inward leading of God's Spirit.

First Samuel 15 records the next assignment Saul received from God. He was to destroy the Amalekites who waylaid and attacked the Israelites as they came up from Egypt. God instructed him to destroy everything

and everyone—not even the livestock were to be spared. Once again Saul stepped in the mud of disobedience. He spared Agag the king, and Saul’s men saved the best of the herds for themselves. Following the battle Saul erected a monument in his own honor, and he went to Carmel to prepare a celebration feast where he planned to parade the captured king as his trophy of battle. God, in his anger, sent Samuel with tragic news on a day of triumph. When Samuel arrived, Saul blurted out, “I have carried out the LORD’s instructions” (15:13).

That was a whopper. So Samuel asked, “Why then do I hear sheep and cows?”

“Because the men saved back the best to sacrifice to God,” Saul responded. Another whopper. They had done nothing of the sort; they fully intended to keep the best of the flocks and herds for themselves. When we get caught with a hand in the cookie jar, we often try to put a spiritual spin on our unspiritual deeds.

Samuel then spoke words worth remembering: “What is more pleasing to the LORD: your burnt offerings and sacrifices or your obedience to his voice? Obedience is far better than sacrifice” (v. 22, *NLT*). Finally Saul admitted, “I was afraid of the people and so I gave in to them” (v. 24). From that day forward God rejected Saul as king and was sorry he had ever placed Saul in that royal role. Saul continued on until the time for David to take the throne, reigning for forty-two years—but most of those years were without God’s blessing.

Saul was a hero among his people even though he had been rejected by God. He had achieved great military victories, established Israel as a powerful nation, and made the land prosperous. The average citizen of Israel sang his praises, but praises of the people are not the praises that matter. With the passing of time, Saul became a bitter, angry, vengeful

man. On numerous occasions, even though he knew God had rejected him and his sons as the royal line, Saul tried to kill David to prevent him from becoming the next king. In the end Saul became so desperate and stooped so low that he consulted a witch for spiritual answers. And she rebuked him for it! (1 Samuel 28). His finish is one of the saddest in Scripture. He had so much to offer but offered so little. His life is a testimony on how *not* to be a servant.

One of the convincing evidences for the inspiration of Scripture is the fact that it includes these human failures as well as the successes—and there *are* more tragedies than triumphs. We can learn relevant lessons from the examples (sometimes poor ones) of people who lived during Bible times. Consider the following imperatives from Saul's life.

HUMBLE YOURSELF

Humble yourself before the Lord, or you will get stuck in the mud of self-absorption. Saul began his reign humbly but soon let his pride push humility into the shadow of his character. Humility remains one of the most endearing traits of true leadership. Jim Collins, writing in *Good to Great*, explored the characteristics of leaders who turned good companies into great companies. He identified the best as level-five leaders. One would expect such leaders to be arrogant in their own success. Just the opposite was true—humility was a characteristic they all had in common.⁶

We are never more like Jesus than when we live unassuming lives. Of all God's creation, only human beings are capable of willful arrogance. Yet what do we have to be arrogant about? Regardless of who you are, what you do, or how much you know, no one has any bragging rights. Each of us has sinned; that's the common denominator of the human race. And each of us is dependent upon God's grace; that's our common hope. If the

Creator himself was known as the humblest of men when he lived in this world, who are we to aim for anything less?

Saul could have been the best of kings, but his reign ended tragically because somewhere along the way he strayed from the path of humility and stepped into the mud of his own selfish agenda.

OBEY THE LORD

Only God's opinion matters, and he considers obedience more important than any sacrifice of worship. Peter Bulkeley wrote, "If God be God over us we must yield him universal obedience in all things. He must not be over us in one thing, and under us in another, but he must be over us in every thing."⁷

God's instructions are not to be considered as suggestions. Live long enough in this world, and you will learn that God's principles are for your benefit. Therefore, obey God. Follow him, even if the world celebrates you as a hero. Follow him, even if you like your direction better. Follow him, even if everything in you rebels against his lead. Obey him, and you will guard against becoming self-deceived.

HONOR THE LORD

When Saul should have been giving credit to God, he was building monuments to himself. Isn't it interesting that we don't have any record of Saul praying? He had prophesied at times, but for divine guidance he relied upon other prophets, dreams, or the high priest's Urim and Thummim (see 1 Samuel 28:6; Exodus 28:30).

At times he showed remorse, but only God knows whether or not he was truly repentant. There seems to be little, if any, personal relationship with

the Lord. This much is true: Saul's royal reign did not honor God. Ironic, isn't it? The one who elevated Saul from being a plowboy to king got lost in the shuffle of power. Does that ever happen in your life? The one who supplied you with talents and abilities gets overlooked while you get the praise as you exercise those talents and abilities. How easily we forget God's benefits. The Lord alone deserves the honor and the credit for any good we may do.

Saul got stuck in the mud of this world and never got out of its muck and mire. A life that was so full of potential ended tragically empty.

There is a clue at the beginning of the story that explains why Saul did not finish well: he didn't know the man of God just down the road. I can't help but wonder whether God had ever truly been an active part of Saul's life. No throne, golden crown, or princely title can compensate for not knowing the King of kings and what he's doing.

Take a peek over the fence. God is working in the lives of people, but we may not notice if we are stuck in the mud of our own backyards. To finish well in this life, spend time serving others in the Lord's name. Don't miss the opportunities God sends your way.

I love to hear the service stories of Christ-followers. Like so many other churches, our congregation is making a concerted effort to impact our community with sincere acts of service. Our missions ministry hosts an annual autumn CareFest. With this event church families blanket the area by trying to meet the needs of various community groups or organizations. They have worked with the local school corporation, Boys Club/Girls Club, humanitarian groups, the city's parks and recreation department, and more. In a day's time, a thousand volunteers can make a big dent in the mound of unmet needs. In most cases the church furnishes both the labor and the supplies for the work. It is a great way

to bridge gaps and share the compassion of Christ. I've watched families have a great time serving together. From the oldest to the youngest, they work with a sense of satisfaction seldom seen in other chores. As people work together they also talk, laugh, and grow together.

It is amazing how serving Christ improves one's whole outlook on life. And the best part is, *any* congregation can reach this goal! Size or location is immaterial. Look for the unmet needs of your community, offer to help out, and then *go*—clean, rake, paint, build, plant . . . Your congregation can do it; *you* can do it!

King Saul could have made an incredible difference as Israel's first monarch, but he let divine opportunities slip through his fingers and fall into the mud of the palace backyard. The same thing can happen to each of us if we aren't careful.

You are gifted by God. Don't hide from God's leading like Saul did. Don't allow yourself to get wrapped up in your own self-promotion like Saul did. Don't get stuck in the mud of this world like Saul did. Stay focused on the Lord, and follow him wherever he leads!

STEPPING OUT TO SERVE

1 Some Bible biographies recount the lives of those who let opportunity slip through their fingers. Instead of seizing the moment, they got stuck in the mud. Immobilized. Powerless. Helpless. Incapable.

Have you ever felt that way? What opportunities do you wish you had back? What can you do to guarantee that future opportunities won't slip away?

2 Saul demonstrated noble qualities that are worth emulating: a humble attitude, a simple manner, a magnanimous heart, and a courageous spirit.

Why do those character traits transcend time and culture? Take an honest inventory of your life. Are those traits obvious in your daily living? If not, what do you need to do in order to ensure that they will become a part of your character?

3 When Saul should have been giving credit to God, he was building monuments to himself.

Why are we so reluctant to give God the credit for the positive things that happen in our lives? Are we afraid that if we honor God it will somehow take away from our accomplishments? What can you do to change your attitude about giving credit where credit is due?

4 [Saul's] finish is one of the saddest in Scripture. He had so much to offer but offered so little.

What other Bible leaders fell short of their potential? What caused their downfall? If you desire to finish well, what specific action steps will you need to take to accomplish that goal?