

1 Samuel 9 - It's not about the Donkeys

There was a man of Benjamin whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a Benjaminite, a man of wealth. ² And he had a son whose name was Saul, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.

³ Now the donkeys of Kish, Saul's father, were lost. So Kish said to Saul his son, "Take one of the young men with you, and arise, go and look for the donkeys." ⁴ And he passed through the hill country of Ephraim and passed through the land of Shalishah, but they did not find them. And they passed through the land of Shaalim, but they were not there. Then they passed through the land of Benjamin, but did not find them.

⁵ When they came to the land of Zuph, Saul said to his servant who was with him, "Come, let us go back, lest my father cease to care about the donkeys and become anxious about us." ⁶ But he said to him, "Behold, there is a man of God in this city, and he is a man who is held in honor; all that he says comes true. So now let us go there. Perhaps he can tell us the way we should go." ⁷ Then Saul said to his servant, "But if we go, what can we bring the man? For the bread in our sacks is gone, and there is no present to bring to the man of God. What do we have?" ⁸ The servant answered Saul again, "Here, I have with me a quarter of a shekel of silver, and I will give it to the man of God to tell us our way." ⁹ (Formerly in Israel, when a man went to inquire of God, he said, "Come, let us go to the seer," for today's "prophet" was formerly called a seer.) ¹⁰ And Saul said to his servant, "Well said; come, let us go." So they went to the city where the man of God was.

¹¹ As they went up the hill to the city, they met young women coming out to draw water and said to them, "Is the seer here?" ¹² They answered, "He is; behold, he is just ahead of you. Hurry. He has come just now to the city, because the people have a sacrifice today on the high place. ¹³ As soon as you enter the city you will find him, before he goes up to the high place to eat. For the people will not eat till he comes, since he must bless the sacrifice; afterward those who are invited will eat. Now go up, for you will meet him immediately." ¹⁴ So they went up to the city. As they were entering the city, they saw Samuel coming out toward them on his way up to the high place.

¹⁵ Now the day before Saul came, the LORD had revealed to Samuel: ¹⁶ “Tomorrow about this time I will send to you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him to be prince^[c] over my people Israel. He shall save my people from the hand of the Philistines. For I have seen^[d] my people, because their cry has come to me.” ¹⁷ When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD told him, “Here is the man of whom I spoke to you! He it is who shall restrain my people.” ¹⁸ Then Saul approached Samuel in the gate and said, “Tell me where is the house of the seer?” ¹⁹ Samuel answered Saul, “I am the seer. Go up before me to the high place, for today you shall eat with me, and in the morning I will let you go and will tell you all that is on your mind. ²⁰ As for your donkeys that were lost three days ago, do not set your mind on them, for they have been found. And for whom is all that is desirable in Israel? Is it not for you and for all your father's house?” ²¹ Saul answered, “Am I not a Benjaminite, from the least of the tribes of Israel? And is not my clan the humblest of all the clans of the tribe of Benjamin? Why then have you spoken to me in this way?”

²² Then Samuel took Saul and his young man and brought them into the hall and gave them a place at the head of those who had been invited, who were about thirty persons. ²³ And Samuel said to the cook, “Bring the portion I gave you, of which I said to you, ‘Put it aside.’” ²⁴ So the cook took up the leg and what was on it and set them before Saul. And Samuel said, “See, what was kept is set before you. Eat, because it was kept for you until the hour appointed, that you might eat with the guests.”

So Saul ate with Samuel that day. ²⁵ And when they came down from the high place into the city, a bed was spread for Saul on the roof, and he lay down to sleep. ²⁶ Then at the break of dawn Samuel called to Saul on the roof, “Up, that I may send you on your way.” So Saul arose, and both he and Samuel went out into the street.

²⁷ As they were going down to the outskirts of the city, Samuel said to Saul, “Tell the servant to pass on before us, and when he has passed on, stop here yourself for a while, that I may make known to you the word of God.”

Proverbs 20:24

²⁴ A man's steps are from the LORD;
how then can man understand his way?

Exodus 3:10-11

¹⁰ Come, I will send you to Pharaoh that you may bring my people, the children of Israel, out of Egypt.” ¹¹ But Moses said to God, “Who am I that I should go to Pharaoh and bring the children of Israel out of Egypt?”

Jeremiah 1:4-8

⁴ Now the word of the LORD came to me, saying,
⁵ “Before I formed you in the womb I knew you,
and before you were born I consecrated you;
I appointed you a prophet to the nations.”

⁶ Then I said, “Ah, Lord GOD! Behold, I do not know how to speak, for I am only a youth.” ⁷ But the LORD said to me, “Do not say, ‘I am only a youth’;
for to all to whom I send you, you shall go,
and whatever I command you, you shall speak.

⁸ Do not be afraid of them,
for I am with you to deliver you,
declares the LORD.”

Isaiah 6:5

⁵ And I said: “Woe is me! For I am lost; for I am a man of unclean lips, and I dwell in the midst of a people of unclean lips; for my eyes have seen the King, the LORD of hosts!”

1 Samuel 15:17

¹⁷ And Samuel said, “Though you are little in your own eyes, are you not the head of the tribes of Israel? The LORD anointed you king over Israel.

1 Samuel 8:19-22

¹⁹ But the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel. And they said, “No! But there shall be a king over us, ²⁰ that we also may be like all the nations, and that our king may judge us and go out before us and fight our battles.” ²¹ And when Samuel had heard all the words of the people, he repeated them in the ears of the LORD. ²² And the LORD said to Samuel, “Obey their voice and make them a king.” Samuel then said to the men of Israel, “Go every man to his city.”

1 Samuel 17: 8-11

⁸ He stood and shouted to the ranks of Israel, “Why have you come out to draw up for battle? Am I not a Philistine, and are you not servants of Saul? Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. ⁹ If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants. But if I prevail against him and kill him, then you shall be our servants and serve us.” ¹⁰ And the Philistine said, “I defy the ranks of Israel this day. Give me a man, that we may fight together.” ¹¹ When Saul and all Israel heard these words of the Philistine, they were dismayed and greatly afraid.

In 1948, in *Reader's Digest*, a story appeared about a man by the name of Marcel Sternberger.

He was in New York.

He was going to work. He was getting on the subway. He was a Hungarian, an immigrant, and as he stepped onto the subway, a man suddenly stepped up and rushed off the train — he had almost missed his station — and Marcel Sternberger took this man's seat.

He found himself sitting next to Bela Paskin, another Hungarian.

He was reading a Hungarian newspaper, and he lent over and he said to

Bela Paskin, "I hope you don't mind me reading over your shoulder."

They got into a conversation.

It turns out that Bela Paskin had come to New York

after the war. The Russians had deported him from his town, Debrecen, in Hungary.

He had been taken to Ukraine by the Russians to bury German soldiers.

When Bela Paskin came home to Debrechen in Hungary, he found his home occupied by strangers. His family had died and his wife had died. They had been taken by train to Auschwitz and presumably had been killed. He immediately fled and came to New York.

Now, Marcel Sternberger, just a few weeks before, had met a woman, a Hungarian

by the name of Marya, Marya Paskin.

He said to Bella on the train, "What was your wife's name?"

"Marya," he said. They

stopped at the next station. Marcel

Sternberger made some excuse about wanting perhaps to have some coffee with him

before going to work. But before

having coffee, he said, "I must make a telephone call."

He had apparently taken down this woman, Marya

Paskin's, phone number.
And he calls her. And he
says, "I met you just a few weeks ago."
And she says, "Yes, I remember."
"Can you tell me the street and the number in the street
that you lived
in Debrecen?"
And she told him. And he
turns to Bela and says, "What was the street you lived in
and what was the
number of the house?" And yes,
you've guessed it, it was the same house.
He hands him the phone and says, "Your wife wants to
talk to you."

Article by
Greg Morse

For years I've struggled with a sinking sense of inadequacy.

This usually plays out in a disposition of deference: Why would I speak up when others could? Why should I teach a class when others are more capable? Why would I take that position when others are more worthy of it? Whether speaking, acting, or receiving, I let others go first. The self-designated runt among the litter.

I never challenged this because I considered it a blemish of humility. If pride is the preoccupation with oneself: a life of self-insertion and mirror-gazing, then the opposite must be humility. But as I avoided different opportunities due to a sense of inferiority, the debilitating sense of my own smallness only grew.

If, like me, you've lived under a dark cloud of inadequacy; if the parasite of self-pity drains your energy to go where God calls; if anxiety over your littleness anchors you from stepping out in faith; I encourage you to join me in *repentance*.

Smallness in our own eyes is a virus mimicking humility that tempts some of us to do the same as Saul. He was a nothing, a no one, an ant. He did not consider that the Lord made him king or that the Lord sent him on a mission. He was to rise to the occasion, not because he was grand, but because the King who he served was.

Smallness in his own eyes, a sinking sense of inferiority, fueled his and the people's transgression. He shirked responsibility because he did not feel equal to it and his cowardice endangered his people and he eventually lost his kingship as a result.

Humility says, "I am small . . . but my God is big, so I will go, speak, and do." Cowardice, pride, and self-preoccupation say, "I am puny, others are more qualified, I don't want to screw things up for myself and others by accepting."

What this often means, of course, is,

God doesn't really know what he is doing to send me. I won't waste my time.

He won't stand with me upon the waves, so I will stay in the boat.

Jesus's grace isn't really sufficient after all. His power isn't actually made perfect in my weakness.

The truth is, there are always people more qualified. Someone *does* know their Bible better. Some *are* more humble, selfless, and equipped to lead. But when the all-wise Creator, who calls who he wills, beckons us to speak, serve, and act, it is our joyful lot to obey. He gives us position and something to proclaim:

But you are a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for his own possession, that you may proclaim the excellencies of him who called you out of darkness into his marvelous light. (1 Peter 2:9)

Whimper no more, though small in your own eyes, the powerful God who calls you to go forth as an ambassador, promises to go with you ([Matthew 28:18–20](#); [Hebrews 13:5](#)). The great message we carry vanquishes the stammering life of nonintrusivity. May the subtle pride that keeps us anchored in the fetal position be broken as we mimic the mighty roar of Christ. He alone strengthens timid hearts, emboldens scared disciples, and makes the weak strong as we lift our eyes from our frailty to him.

He must be great in our own eyes.