

1 Samuel – Week 9 – Apparently Chasing Donkeys – Bible Study Helps

Title: Apparently Chasing Donkeys

Sermon Summary: Drawing from 1 Samuel 9, this sermon explores how God works through seemingly mundane and inconvenient circumstances to accomplish His sovereign purposes. Using the story of Saul's search for his father's lost donkeys as the central narrative, the sermon demonstrates that God's providence operates quietly behind the scenes of everyday life, orchestrating people, timing, and events to fulfill His plans. Saul had no idea that chasing donkeys for three days would lead him to Samuel, the man of God, and ultimately to his anointing as Israel's first king. The sermon calls believers to trust God even when His purposes are not immediately visible, to remain faithful in ordinary responsibilities, and to recognize that God is always working -- even when life feels repetitive, frustrating, or without apparent direction.

Key Points:

- God's providence operates through ordinary, everyday circumstances that often appear random or insignificant
- Inconveniences and mundane responsibilities are frequently the very instruments God uses to lead people into His greater purposes
- Believers do not need to understand every detail of God's plan in order to be faithful to Him
- God schedules divine appointments in advance, often without the knowledge of those involved
- Proverbs 16:9 captures the central tension of the sermon: a person plans his way, but God directs his steps
- The donkeys Saul was chasing were never the most important part of the journey -- the meeting with Samuel was
- God resolves the very concerns that consume us while simultaneously working something far greater in our lives
- Being brought into God's purpose does not eliminate personal responsibility to obey God
- The local church and the Word of God serve as the well where believers receive direction and divine appointments
- Saul's story is a warning as well as an encouragement -- receiving God's purpose is only the beginning; faithfulness must follow

Scripture Reference:

- 1 Samuel 9 (primary passage -- the story of Saul's journey to Samuel while searching for lost donkeys)

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- Proverbs 16:9 (a man plans his way, but God directs his steps)
- Genesis 50:20 (Joseph's declaration that what his brothers intended for evil, God intended for good)
- Acts 8 (Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch -- a divine appointment in the desert)

Stories:

- Saul and the lost donkeys (1 Samuel 9): Saul spends three days searching for his father's donkeys, unknowingly traveling to the very city where Samuel lives, walking into a divinely orchestrated meeting that leads to his anointing as king
- Moses and the burning bush (Exodus 3): While performing the ordinary task of tending his father-in-law's flock on the backside of a mountain, Moses encountered God and received his calling as Israel's deliverer
- Ruth gleaning in the field (Ruth 2): Ruth, a widowed foreigner in desperate need of food, happens to enter the field belonging to Boaz, the very kinsman-redeemer God had appointed for her restoration -- she later becomes the great-grandmother of King David
- Abraham's servant and Rebekah (Genesis 24): An unnamed servant prays specifically for a sign at a well and receives an immediate, detailed answer, leading to the marriage of Isaac and Rebekah
- Jacob and Rachel at the well (Genesis 29): Jacob, while fleeing, arrives at a well and encounters Rachel, the woman he would marry, in what appears to be a chance meeting
- Philip and the Ethiopian eunuch (Acts 8): The Holy Spirit directs Philip into the desert where he meets a searching man on a chariot, leads him to faith in Christ, and baptizes him on the spot
- Naaman and the young captive girl (2 Kings 5): A trafficked Jewish servant girl speaks a simple word of faith that ultimately leads a Syrian commander to seek healing from the prophet of God
- A church member's car breaking down: A contemporary story shared from the pulpit in which a broken-down car and a tow truck ride became an opportunity to share the gospel, illustrating that God works through modern inconveniences just as He did in biblical times

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Discipleship Questions

In what ways have you experienced what the sermon describes as 'apparently chasing donkeys' — ordinary, frustrating circumstances that God later revealed were part of a larger plan for your life?

The servant in the story plays a crucial role in redirecting Saul when Saul was ready to quit — who in your life has served as that kind of voice, pointing you toward God when you were tempted to give up, and how can you be that person for someone else?

Saul was described as physically impressive and outwardly everything Israel wanted in a king, yet he was spiritually clueless about God's plan — how does this tension challenge the way you evaluate leadership and success in your own life?

Proverbs 16:9 describes a man planning his way while God directs his steps — where in your life do you struggle most to release control and trust that God is directing your path even when you cannot see where it leads?

The sermon points out that God told Samuel a day in advance that Saul was coming, while Saul himself had no idea — what does this reveal about the difference between God's perspective on your life and your own limited view of your circumstances?

Ruth's story shows that tremendous loss and hardship can be the very path God uses to position someone for a role in His redemptive plan — how does this challenge the way you interpret seasons of suffering or loss in your own life?

The sermon emphasizes that God will never lead you to violate His Word to accomplish His will — how does this principle help you discern between a genuine leading of the Holy Spirit and a desire or impulse that simply feels right in the moment?

Samuel's words to Saul, 'set not thy mind on them, for they are found,' reveal that what consumed Saul's attention had already been resolved by God — what worries or preoccupations are consuming your attention right now that you need to surrender to God's care?

The sermon draws a parallel between Saul being brought into a room with a reserved seat and the best portion set aside for him, and believers being welcomed into God's redemptive story — how does recognizing that God has prepared a place and purpose for you personally change the way you view your daily life and responsibilities?

Saul had every opportunity to be faithful to the calling God placed before him, yet he ultimately failed — what habits, disciplines, or relationships are you cultivating now that will help you remain faithful to God's purpose for your life rather than drifting as Saul did?

Small Group Guide

"Apparently Chasing Donkeys" | 1 Samuel 9

Before You Meet

Encourage group members to read 1 Samuel 9 on their own before gathering. Ask them to come prepared to share one moment from their week that felt ordinary or even frustrating.

Opening Question

Think of a time in your life when something that seemed like an inconvenience or a dead end turned out to be significant. What happened, and how did you recognize it later?

Key Takeaways

Use these summary points to ground the group in the sermon's main ideas before moving into discussion.

- 1. God's providence works through ordinary circumstances.** Saul was not on a spiritual quest. He was doing a chore. Yet God was orchestrating every detail of that three-day search to bring Saul to exactly the right place at exactly the right time. God is always working, even when we cannot see it.
- 2. God schedules divine appointments we know nothing about.** The day before Saul arrived, God had already told Samuel a man was coming. Saul had no idea. The meeting that would change his life was already planned before he took a single step toward it.
- 3. Faithfulness to God does not require understanding His full plan.** Saul simply obeyed his father, kept searching, and listened to the counsel of his servant. He did not need to understand what God was doing in order for God to accomplish it. Obedience in the ordinary moments is enough.
- 4. God is good, and His plans exceed what we could plan for ourselves.** The reserved portion at the table, the donkeys already found, the seat of honor among thirty guests -- none of it was something Saul arranged. God had prepared all of it. His goodness is not dependent on our awareness of it.

Discussion Questions

Understanding the Text

1. Read 1 Samuel 9:1-6 together. What details stand out to you about how the story is told? Why do you think Samuel takes time to describe each place Saul searched and came up empty?
2. In verse 15, God tells Samuel a day in advance that Saul is coming. What does this tell us about how God works behind the scenes of what appears to be an ordinary series of events?
3. Saul was ready to quit and go home in verse 5. What role did the unnamed servant play in the story? What does that suggest about the people God places in our lives?
4. When Samuel reveals to Saul that the donkeys have already been found (verse 20), what do you think that moment felt like for Saul? What does it reveal about God's character?

Going Deeper

5. The sermon referenced Ruth 2:3, where the text says Ruth "happened" to glean in the field belonging to Boaz. It also referenced Moses at the burning bush while keeping sheep. What do these stories have in common with Saul's story? What pattern do you see in how God works?
6. Proverbs 16:9 says that a man plans his way, but God directs his steps. How do you personally hold together the reality of making your own decisions with the belief that God is directing your path? Where does that feel easy, and where does it feel difficult?
7. The sermon made the point that God will never lead you to disobey His Word in order to accomplish His will. Why is that an important boundary to understand when we are trying to discern God's direction in our lives?
8. The sermon said, "You must be faithful to God before understanding all the details of His plan." Do you agree? What makes that kind of trust difficult in practice?

Personal Reflection

9. What are the donkeys you are currently chasing? In other words, what are the ordinary, frustrating, or seemingly meaningless responsibilities in your life right now that you might be tempted to dismiss as insignificant?
 10. Is there an area of your life where you have been ready to quit, like Saul in verse 5, because the purpose is not obvious to you? What would it look like to keep moving forward in faithfulness?
 11. When you look back on your life, can you identify a moment where what seemed like an inconvenience or a detour turned out to be exactly where God needed you to be? How does that memory affect the way you see your current circumstances?
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Practical Applications

Choose one or two of the following to discuss as a group or to take home as individual commitments.

Practice Awareness This week, pay attention to the interruptions, inconveniences, and unexpected detours in your daily life. At the end of each day, spend a few minutes asking God whether He is at work in any of those moments. Write down what you notice.

Identify Your Donkeys Write down two or three responsibilities or circumstances in your life that feel mundane, frustrating, or pointless right now. Pray over each one and ask God to help you see them as potential places of His activity rather than obstacles to your plans.

Seek the Man of God The servant's advice to Saul was to go find the man of God and hear what he has to say. Are you consistently in the Word of God and in fellowship with other believers? If not, identify one specific step you can take this week to move toward that.

Share Your Story The sermon noted that young people need to hear the stories of how God has worked in the lives of those who have walked with Him longer. Identify someone in your life, whether younger in age or younger in faith, and make a plan to share a specific story of God's providence in your own life.

Surrender Your Grip If there is an area of your life where you are straining to understand what God is doing rather than trusting Him, take time this week to pray specifically over that area. Confess the anxiety or frustration, and ask God to replace it with the kind of trust that obeys before it understands.

Closing Thought

Saul walked into a meeting that God had scheduled the day before. He sat in a seat of honor that had been prepared for him. He learned that the very problem consuming his mind had already been resolved. And he had no idea any of it was coming.

That is the God we serve. He is not distant or indifferent to the details of your life. He is working in the ordinary, the inconvenient, and the confusing. The question is not whether He is at work. The question is whether we will trust Him enough to keep moving forward until we can see it.

Closing Prayer

Close your time together by inviting group members to share one specific thing they want to trust God with this week. Pray over each one together, asking God to make His providence visible to each person in the days ahead.

5-Day Bible Reading and Devotional Guide

Based on "Apparently Chasing Donkeys" — 1 Samuel 9

Theme Overview: God is always at work behind the scenes of ordinary life. Through His providence, He orchestrates the seemingly random, mundane, and even frustrating circumstances of our days to accomplish purposes far greater than we can see. This reading plan explores God's faithfulness, His sovereign direction, and His goodness revealed through everyday moments.

Day 1: God Is Working Even When You Cannot See It

Reading: 1 Samuel 9:1-6

Devotional:

Saul was not on a spiritual quest. He was not seeking God's calling or preparing for greatness. He was chasing lost donkeys at his father's request. Three days of searching, nothing to show for it, and he was ready to quit. Yet God was working every single detail of those three days into a plan Saul could not have imagined. This is the nature of God's providence. He does not require your awareness to accomplish His purposes. He does not need your cooperation to set the table. He simply asks for your faithfulness in the ordinary. The donkeys were not a distraction from God's plan. They were the vehicle for it. Today, consider the ordinary responsibilities weighing on you. The work that feels beneath your calling. The chore that seems disconnected from any greater purpose. God may be using the very thing you want to walk away from to walk you directly into His will. Do not despise small beginnings. Do not abandon the mundane. Be faithful where you are, and trust that God is directing what you cannot see.

Personal Reflection: What ordinary responsibility or inconvenience in your life right now might God be using to lead you somewhere you have not yet imagined?

Practical Application: Choose one task today that feels routine or frustrating and approach it as an act of worship, asking God to reveal His purpose in it.

Day 2: Divine Appointments Are Already Scheduled

Reading: 1 Samuel 9:15-17; Proverbs 16:9

Devotional:

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The day before Saul arrived, God had already spoken to Samuel. He told him in specific detail that a man from Benjamin was coming, that this man would be the one, and that He Himself was sending him. Saul thought he was wandering. God said he was being sent. This is the staggering truth of divine providence. While Saul was making decisions about which road to take and whether to turn back, God was narrating the journey from a completely different vantage point. Proverbs 16:9 captures this beautifully, affirming that a man plans his way but God directs his steps. This does not mean your choices are meaningless. It means God is sovereign over them. He weaves your free decisions into His eternal purposes without violating your will. You are not wandering. If you belong to God, you are being sent. There are meetings God has already scheduled for you. There are conversations, encounters, and moments of impact that exist on His calendar before they appear on yours. Your role is not to figure out the whole map. Your role is to take the next faithful step and trust that the Lord who told Samuel a man was coming is the same Lord directing your feet today.

Personal Reflection: Have you ever looked back on a seemingly random encounter or unexpected turn and recognized God's hand in it? What did that reveal to you about His character?

Practical Application: Spend time in prayer today specifically asking God to make you aware of the divine appointments He has placed in your ordinary day, and go through your day watching for them.

Day 3: Faithfulness Before Understanding

Reading: Ruth 2:1-3; Genesis 50:19-20

Devotional:

Ruth did not know whose field she was walking into. She only knew that she and Naomi needed food and that gleaning was the provision available to her. She was faithful to the task in front of her without any knowledge of the extraordinary future God was building through her obedience. The text notes that it just so happened she landed in the field of Boaz, the very kinsman-redeemer who would restore her life and place her in the lineage of David himself. Joseph looked back at betrayal, slavery, false accusation, and imprisonment and declared that what his brothers intended for evil, God intended for good. Neither Ruth nor Joseph understood the full picture while they were living it. They were simply faithful. This is the call on your life today. You do not need to understand everything God is doing before you obey Him. Confusion about the plan is not a reason to stop walking. God is not waiting for your comprehension before He acts. He is waiting for your trust. Be faithful to Him in the place He has you right now, even if the purpose is not obvious, even if the pain is real, and even if the field you are walking into looks like just another ordinary field.

Personal Reflection: Is there an area of your life where you have been waiting to understand God's plan before you take a step of obedience? What would faithfulness look like right now?

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Practical Application: Identify one area where confusion or uncertainty has caused you to pause in your walk with God. Take one concrete step of obedience in that area today, trusting that understanding will follow faithfulness.

Day 4: God Resolves What Consumes You

Reading: 1 Samuel 9:20; Matthew 6:25-33

Devotional:

When Samuel looked at Saul and said the donkeys had already been found, the entire weight of three days of anxious searching was lifted in a single sentence. The thing that had consumed Saul's mind, dominated his energy, and nearly caused him to quit had already been resolved by the time he arrived at his divine appointment. God had not forgotten the donkeys. He had simply prioritized the meeting. This is a picture of how God works in the lives of His people. The things that consume our thoughts and drain our strength are not too small for God to notice and not too complicated for Him to resolve. But often what we are most anxious about is not the most important thing happening in our lives. God is orchestrating something far greater while we are fixated on the lost donkeys. Matthew 6 calls us to seek first His kingdom and His righteousness, with the promise that all the other things will be added. This is not a dismissal of your real needs. It is an invitation to reorder your priorities. God sees the donkeys. He can find the donkeys. What He most wants you to do is come close to Him, hear His word, and receive what He has prepared for you. Let Him carry what has been consuming you.

Personal Reflection: What is the "donkey" in your life right now, the thing you cannot stop thinking about, the problem that feels all-consuming? Have you brought it fully to God and left it with Him?

Practical Application: Write down the burden or anxiety that has been consuming the most mental and emotional energy in your life. Pray specifically over it, surrendering it to God, and then deliberately redirect your focus toward seeking Him through His word today.

Day 5: The Seat Was Prepared for You

Reading: 1 Samuel 9:22-24; Revelation 19:6-9

Devotional:

Before Saul ever arrived, the cook had been instructed to set aside the best portion. The seat of honor was waiting. Thirty people had gathered, and the place of greatest privilege was reserved for a young man who had spent three days chasing donkeys and was ready to give up. He did not earn it. He did not even know it existed. But God had prepared it for him. This is a picture of the

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grace of God extended to every believer. You did not earn your place at the table of God's redemption. You did not stumble into it through superior wisdom or spiritual achievement. God, in His sovereign grace, set aside a portion for you before you arrived. He prepared the seat. He issued the invitation. He made the provision. And one day, the marriage supper of the Lamb will gather every blood-bought believer from every generation of church history, and the table will be full. The question that Saul's life forces us to answer is not whether God has been good. He has been extraordinarily good. The question is what we will do with the privilege we have been given. Saul squandered his. We do not have to. Receive what God has prepared for you with humility and gratitude, and spend the one life you have being faithful to the God who set your seat before you ever knew to look for it.

Personal Reflection: When you consider all that God has done for you through the death, burial, and resurrection of Jesus Christ, what is your honest response? Does your daily life reflect the weight of that privilege?

Practical Application: Take time today to write out a prayer of gratitude to God, specifically naming the ways He has been working in your life that you may have previously overlooked or taken for granted. Share one of those moments with another believer this week as an act of testimony and encouragement.