

What Rule? 1 Samuel 8:4-9

I. INTRODUCTION

A. Read 1 Samuel 8:1-9

B. Walking

1. Ever used a treadmill?
 - a. They have some really nice, industrial grade ones at the gym.
 - b. With variable speeds from a snail's pace to a sprint.
 - c. They go from flat to a steep incline.
 - d. You can program them for however long you want, on a multitude of courses that vary the pace & pitch.
2. I've seen people spend over an hour on a treadmill!
 - a. And though they're drenched in sweat when they're done,
 - b. They're in the same place as when they started.
 - c. All their walking got them—no where.
3. I much prefer those automated walkways in the airport.
 - a. They're like a conveyor belt for people.
 - b. They look a little like an escalator, only they don't go up; they're level – so we could call it a 'levelator.'
 - c. You find them in long corridors of terminals to help those who are travel weary.
4. I see them as a way to get where I'm going *even faster!*
 - a. I hop on, but keep walking. In fact, I walk even faster than normal.
 - b. Every step covers probably 10 ft.
 - c. It's so exhilarating to feel yourself covering so much ground with so little effort.
 - d. I like looking at the poor suckers who are walking on the *regular* floor of the corridor.
 - e. I'm just strolling along, but *screaming* by them. Ha! I'm going to get there before them.
5. What really irks me is the people who get on the walkway but *stop walking*. Don't they realize that they're going to get to the end *at the same time* as those who're walking on the regular floor?
6. Seems like *poor stewardship* to me.
7. Move aside, & let those of us who're wiser in the ways of travel take advantage of this golden opportunity to get farther, faster.

C. The Walk

1. The treadmill & the automated walkway provide us an illustration of the different ways believers go about their walk with Christ.
2. And it's something we find in these verses this morning.

II. TEXT

A. Set the Scene

1. This marks the end of the time of the Judges & the beginning of the Kingdom of Israel.

2. Samuel was the last judge; a great man of God who was well known as a prophet & leader.
 - a. He led the nation in both spiritual renewal & military victory,
 - b. Then traveled throughout the land giving counsel & guidance.
3. Ever he reminded the people of their covenant with God; how they were called to walk in His ways.
4. But v. 1 says that as Samuel got older, he realized he couldn't keep up the extensive travel of his early years, so he appointed his 2 sons to assist him.
 - a. The problem was, they weren't cut from the same spiritual cloth as he.
 - b. They *used* their position as judges to enrich themselves by taking bribes.
5. The leaders of the 12 tribes of Israel knew Samuel's days were numbered & that his sons could *not* step into his Birkenstocks, so they met & decided to approach Sam at his home in Ramah with a special request.

B. V. 4-5

⁴Then all the elders of Israel gathered together and came to Samuel at Ramah, ⁵and said to him, "Look, you are old, and your sons do not walk in your ways. Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations."

1. It's not hard to imagine how they settled on this solution.
2. As *leaders*, they were always thinking about how best to prepare for the future.
 - a. The writing was on the wall – Samuel would soon be gone, & the lone voice that had united the tribes would be silenced.
 - b. His sons could no way replace him.
 - c. So, first things, first—let's call a meeting & have a sit-down to devise a plan.
 - d. The plan they settled on was obtained by asking what *other nations did*.
 - 1) There's no record of them praying or seeking God.
 - 2) They just ask, "*What's everybody else doing?*"
 - e. Theirs is a pragmatic solution – "Give us a king."
 - f. When faced with a need, instead of *looking up* to God for an answer, they *looked around* to see what others were doing.

C. Vs. 6-9

⁶But the thing displeased Samuel when they said, "Give us a king to judge us." So Samuel prayed to the LORD. ⁷And the LORD said to Samuel, "Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them. ⁸According to all the works which they have done since the day that I brought them up out of Egypt, even to this day—with which they have forsaken Me and served other gods—so they are doing to you also.

1. Samuel was bummed with their request because he knew it revealed their *heart*.
 - a. Though he'd spent his life traveling throughout the land reminding them of the unique relationship they had with God,

- b. This request proves they didn't *really* get it.
- 2. The covenant God made with them at Mt. Sinai wasn't a *business deal*.
 - a. It wasn't just some two-party arrangement with God on one side & them as a *huge group* on the other.
 - b. It was an invitation to *personal friendship* with Him.
- 3. The covenant was for *each & every one* of them *individually*.
- 4. It was an invitation to an *intimate relationship* with Him – a walk of faith, the *form* of which was spelled out by the Law.
- 5. And it was something God wanted every man, woman, boy & girl to enjoy.
- 6. But as God said in v. 8, for over 400 years, since the Exodus, Israel had failed to enter into the fullness of this relationship with God.
 - a. There were short periods when they did well, but it never lasted.
 - b. And of course, there were always a *few* who understood & walked in faith, enjoying the blessings of God.
 - c. But by & large Israel *as a whole* failed to abide in the covenant.
- 5. As the elders now come to Samuel with this request for a king, really what they're saying is that the covenant was *too hard*.
 - a. While God had proven Himself *more than capable* of leading them,
 - b. They'd grown weary of following Him in the way He wanted them to,
 - c. Which was to *daily* look to Him for guidance.
 - d. God had *always* raised up leaders for the people when they needed new direction.
 - e. But the daily kind of dependence on God the covenant required was too much for them.
- 6. So they came up with a new plan; A *human* king, just like all the other nations.
 - a. They thought it would be *easier*, better, more effective, if they had a regular ruler.
 - b. Someone they could see & hear who would tell them what to do.
- 7. Samuel was distressed at their request because he knew how easily power corrupts even *good* men & women.
- 8. When he took their request to God, God told him to do what they asked.
- 9. If Samuel didn't appoint a king, they'd do it themselves,
 - a. Because they'd already rejected *God's* guidance, their choice would be a disaster.
 - b. With Samuel doing the selecting, they'd at least have a shot at getting someone decent.

9 Now therefore, heed their voice. However, you shall solemnly forewarn them, and show them the behavior of the king who will reign over them.

- 10. Before Samuel selected a king, he must tell them the scenario that would follow the granting of their wish.
 - a. That's what he does in vs. 10-18
 - 1) Sam tells them having a king won't be all peaches & cream. There's a major downside.
 - 2) A king needs an *army*, so he'll install a military draft & take the best of their sons.

- 3) The army needs *weapons*, so he'll confiscate resources.
 - 4) It needs to be *fed*, so he'll take of their fields & flocks.
 - 5) A king needs a *court* to handle the business of a nation, so he'll establish a bureaucracy that will make a whole bunch of new rules.
 - 6) A *bureaucracy* needs funding, so he'll tax them.
 - 7) He'll need a palace & grounds & will want them at the best place, so he'll take their choicest land.
 - 8) On & on it goes.
11. After warning them what having a king will cost—they said; vs. 19-20 –
- 19 Nevertheless the people refused to obey the voice of Samuel; and they said, “No, but we will have 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.”**
- a. They thought life would be *easier* with a king.
 - b. They said: He would judge them & fight their battles for them.
 - 1) He'll *judge* them all right, with a whole new set of his own *rules*.
 - 2) As far as *battle*; the king won't be doing the fighting. He'll have the army comprised of *their sons* do that for him.
 - c. This reminds us of people today who look to government to take care of them.
 - d. Where do they think the government is going to get the resources for that – from the people *themselves*.
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D. Walking in the Spirit

1. There's an important lesson for us in this story.
 2. The Apostle Paul told the Corinthians that Israel's history parallels our experience of the life of faith.
 3. Israel was now living in the Land of Promise, which is a picture of the Spirit-filled life of the believer.
 4. But the Jews were having a hard time taking possession of all God had promised.
 - a. Their failure was due to the fact they weren't *walking in faith*.
 - b. There were a handful of people like Caleb & Joshua who were sold-out to God & had entered in to lay hold of *all* He wanted for them.
 - c. But such were few & far-between.
 4. Now the leaders of the tribes come to Samuel at Ramah & say that living by faith is *too tough*.
 - a. They don't want to go through the hassle of looking to God in everything.
 - b. They just want someone to tell them what to do!
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5. The lesson for us is that just like Israel, *we're* called into a personal, intimate, daily relationship with God.
 - a. What's even *better* about the offer God extends *to us* is that we can enjoy a level of intimacy with Him Israel couldn't.
 - b. Because of Christ, the Holy Spirit *indwells* us.
 6. The picture the NT paints for us of the *normal* Christian life is one of walking moment by moment in faith, empowered & guided by the Spirit.

- a. Remember what Jesus said to the disciples that last night?
 - b. That they were to abide in Him,
 - c. And as they did, another *just like Him* would come to live inside them, so they could *continue* to enjoy close communion with Jesus.
 - d. He was speaking of the Holy Spirit, our resident Expert on everything Who guides us in the multitude of decisions we face each day, *if* we will but listen to Him.
7. Walking in the Spirit, living by faith, whatever you want to call it, simply means to live . . .
- a. in the awareness of God's presence,
 - b. depending on Him,
 - c. and desiring His glory.
8. I've found that when I'm walking in the Spirit, just turning my heart & mind over to God, I'm much more concerned about holiness.
- a. Here's why – I'm more aware of God's presence & concern for my wholeness.
 - b. Let me explain it this way – Ever look in the rearview mirror to see a patrol car behind you?
 - 1) Their lights aren't flashing, they're just behind you, but you immediately take your foot off the gas & look at the speedometer to see how fast you're going.
 - 2) You might be doing only 40 in a 45 MPH zone, but you still go through this little routine because up till that moment, you really had no idea how fast you were going.
 - 3) The presence of a police officer suddenly made you mindful of how you were driving.
 - c. Does your work improve when the boss comes by?
 - d. Tell a child not to take any of the warm cookies off the kitchen counter,
 - 1) And as long as you're there in the kitchen he/she will comply.
 - 2) Leave the room & they're much more likely to take one.
 - e. We have a 1 year old beagle that's still very puppyish.
 - 1) He loves to dig & chew & has gnawed on just about anything he can get his jaws around in our back yard.
 - 2) He knows it's wrong & doesn't do it when we're watching.
 - 3) But when we leave, he goes to town on the plants, roses, the chaise lounge, rocks, dirt clods, whatever fits between his teeth.
 - 4) But he doesn't do it when we're watching because he knows it's bad & that he's being a naughty dog.
 - 5) He only chews on stuff when he he's bored & knows we're not watching.
 - 6) When we're in the yard with him he's playing with us, which is more rewarding than gnawing on a lump of charcoal from the BBQ.
9. When we're conscious of God & His intense desire for us, it burns off the desire for anything sin has to offer.
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10. But *staying* in the Spirit is difficult.
11. It's a challenge because *self* is always right there eager to jump back in.

12. Follow me now & we'll tie all of this together with 1 Samuel 8
 - a. We're called into a relationship with God – that's what this is all about.
 - b. Relationships are work! They take effort.
 - c. The deeper & more rewarding the relationship, the more work it takes.
 - d. Over the years I've met many single people who craved companionship.
 - 1) They'd give anything to have a boyfriend or girlfriend.
 - 2) Then a few months after hitching up with someone, their want to end it.
 - 3) They wanted something **from** a companion & only realized after finding one that a relationship requires they give of themselves too.
13. In our relationship with God, He gives ALL of Himself without reserve.
 - a. Our part, the living by faith & walking in the Spirit part, means to surrender our self-sufficiency & place our dependence **entirely** on Him.
 - b. That's not easy because just about **everything** in this fallen world is designed to encourage self to reassert it's dominance of our lives.
 - c. That's why Paul tells us in Galatians 2 & Romans 6 we need to put self as death.
 - d. Jesus said that following Him meant dying to self-**daily!**
14. Now, death isn't fun! It can be hard work putting self down.
15. Many Christians get tired & follow in the same path as ancient Israel who found living by faith tough.
 - a. Just as Israel wanted a king, someone to tell them what to do,
 - b. They look for a "spiritual expert" who can lay out a **system** for them to follow – a **set of rules** that define the Christian life.
 - c. They don't want to think too hard about life – they want it simple – just tell them what to do.
16. Throughout the years there have been many well-meaning Christian leaders who've stepped in to provide such rules for Christians to live by.
 - a. But the Spirit of God **grieves** because He's not into rules.
 - b. He doesn't want us to think of Him in terms of rules.
 - c. What He's looking for is our hearts, our love.

17. Let me show how this mindset plays out in a subtle way . . .
 - a. Most churches realize the importance of **discipling** their people.
 - b. And one of the most common tools you'll find is the use of "personal devotions."
 - 1) We're told that taking time each day to read the Bible & pray is crucial; **essential** even, for spiritual growth.
 - 2) It doesn't take long before someone asks,
 - How **much** should I read?
 - How **long** should I pray?
 - **When & where** should I **do** devotions?
 - 3) There's always someone ready to give an answer detailing what devotions should **look** like.
18. The scriptures & prayer **are** important parts of maintaining a healthy spiritual life,
 - a. But "devotion" is not something you **DO!** It's something you **GIVE.**
 - b. Devotion is nothing more nor less than turning ourselves over—body, soul,

- & spirit—to God.
- c. When we read God’s Word & pray it ought to be motivated by a desire to commune **WITH** Him *in the act* of reading & praying.
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19. Think with me for a moment about what being a Christian has *come to mean* today.
- It’s assumed that the *good* Christian is the one who goes to church, carries a well-worn Bible, & either ushers or sings in the choir.
 - The marvelous offer of intimate friendship with God has been reduced to a neat little package of *religious practices*.
 - And sad to say, many Christians are quite content to fit into that mold.
20. Is that what Jesus had in mind when He sent out His followers to make disciples? Hardly!
21. Being a disciple means abiding fellowship with Jesus. It means joyous friendship with God.

III. CONCLUSION

A. Counsel

- I’ve pastored for nearly 25 years.
- And I don’t know how many times during that quarter century people have come seeking guidance for a challenge they were facing.
- Early on, I was quick to share my vast reservoir of Biblical wisdom, giving them the perfect prescription for their problem.
- But the Lord has taught me that it’s better to *first* ask them what God’s *been showing them*.
 - I’ve come to understand that trials & challenges in our lives are often God’s invitations to a deeper experience of His presence & power in our lives.
 - All too often we simply look for a way out,
 - And run to the nearest “expert” to find a solution without **FIRST** asking the Lord.
 - Proverbs tells us it’s good to seek counsel from the wise –
 - But in the final analysis, our decision has to be made *in faith*, looking not to the counsel of man but the voice of the Spirit.

B. Treadmill vs. Walkways

- Living the Christian life by a set of rules is like walking on a treadmill.
 - You put in a lot of effort & get tired & sweaty,
 - But you don’t really get anywhere.
 - There’s a lot of movement, and it looks impressive, but it can’t further your relationship with God.
- Walking in the Spirit is like one of those automated walkways in the airport.
 - By surrendering ourselves to God and looking to Him in each moment,
 - He carries us along into ever deeper & richer experiences of His grace.