HUDSON'S HOPE CHAPEL

# After God's Heart?

September 6, 2026 · Series: After God's Own Heart · Luke Hughes-Bunger

**Main Passage:** 1 Samuel 13:8-14 (ESV)

**Big Idea:** God seeks the king He chooses for Himself, then grace keeps drawing David's wandering heart back toward His will. Our final hope rests in Jesus, the perfectly faithful King who can forgive and save.

## Introduction

We often describe someone who shares our interests as "a person after my own heart." In ordinary conversation, the phrase means, "Here is someone who understands me and appreciates what I appreciate. A person who is ‘like me’ in an essential way”.

But that common meaning creates a problem when we come to David.

Scripture calls David "a man after God's own heart." Yet while David's life contains courage, worship, and remarkable trust alongside it also contains fear, manipulation, adultery, abused power, and murder. But God does not share David's sin. Nor does the Bible ignore the people David harms.

What, then, does the phrase mean?

This series follows David from the sheepfold, through years as a fugitive, onto the throne, into grievous sin, and through its consequences. It will neither polish him into a hero without shadows nor reduce him to his worst actions. David's life shows a faithful God choosing, forming, confronting, forgiving, and keeping His promise through a deeply imperfect servant who can never carry the weight of being our Saviour.

## When Fear Takes the Throne

**1 Samuel 13:8-14**

David first enters the biblical story before he is named. He appears as a promise spoken during the failure of Israel's first king.

Saul is facing a genuine crisis. The Philistines have gathered a terrifying army. Israel's soldiers are hiding or fleeing, and the few who remain are trembling. Saul must watch his army become smaller while the enemy comes closer.

He has been told to wait until Samuel arrives with God's instructions. But as the pressure increases, Saul begins to question that command and form another plan.

Saul calls for an offering because he wants God's favour before the battle. His choice looks religious, practical, and responsible. Yet Samuel names the problem plainly: "You have not kept

the command of the LORD your God" (1 Samuel 13:13).

Saul acts, but action itself is not the problem.

Faith is not passivity. Trusting God does not mean refusing to plan or waiting for other people to solve our problems. Faithful obedience may require courage, initiative, protection of the vulnerable, or a difficult decision.

Saul's failure is that he makes his own judgment the highest authority for how he will act. When fear and his best calculations point one way while God's word points another, Saul decides that God's word must make room for him.

The searching question is not simply, "Will I act?" It is, "Who has the final word as I act?"

Faith is not refusing to act. Faith is refusing to make ourselves ultimate as we act.

### Study Note: What Command Did Saul Break?

Earlier, Samuel had told Saul to go to Gilgal, wait seven days, and remain there until *Samuel came to offer sacrifices* and tell him what to do next (1 Samuel 10:8). He is told to wait 7 days — and he does wait until the 7th day — but at a certain point during that day, as the hours draw close, he loses faith.

Some suggest the mere failure of the test — losing faith at the final hour — was the sin. Others also ask whether the greater transgression occurs when Saul also crossed a priestly boundary. We need not settle that question. Scripture identifies the central offence: *Saul did not keep the Lord's command.*

The circumstances were frightening, and much of Saul's explanation was true. But real pressure did not give him authority to revise God's word. He waited until obedience appeared unworkable, then treated his own plan as necessary.

This does not mean every Christian must wait passively for a dramatic sign of God’s intervention. Oftentimes, faithfully following God means taking action, and making decisions. But Saul had received a specific command through God's appointed prophet not to wait a specific amount of time, and not to offer a sacrifice himself, and yet he still disobeyed.

Our calling is to use wisdom, counsel, and initiative under the Scripture God has given us. The issue is not whether we think carefully or make plans. It is whether our thinking remains accountable to God.

### Study Note: Sin as Idolatry

As we have often said at Hudson's Hope Chapel, at its heart all sin is idolatry. Sin allows something else to occupy God's rightful place.

Idolatry is not limited to bowing before a statue. It can take a good created thing and make it ultimate. We ask success, safety, family, approval, control, or reputation to provide what only God can finally give.

Saul is pursuing things that are good in themselves: the safety of his people, leadership in a crisis, and the favour of God. The disorder comes when he decides **he** must secure those things on his terms, even at the cost of disobedience. A gift received under God has become a master trusted instead of God.

Calling sin idolatry does not make disobedience less serious. It helps us see the sin, even when disobedience can feels reasonable, harmless or good even. We choose our way over God's because, in that moment, something else appears more trustworthy, necessary, desirable, fun, appealing, or precious than He is.

Ask: What am I convinced I must protect, possess, or control at any cost? What receives the final word when God's wisdom contradicts mine?

## The King God Chooses for Himself

**1 Samuel 13:14**

Israel had asked for a king like the surrounding nations: someone visible and impressive who could fight their battles. Saul looked the part. But Israel's king was never meant to replace the Lord. He could wear a crown, but he must remain a servant under the word of the true King.

Samuel announces:

> *"The LORD has sought out a man after his own heart, and the LORD has commanded him to be prince over his people."*

This is where the biblical phrase turns our ordinary use of it inside out.

When Callum called Pastor Luke a man after his own heart, he was recognizing a likeness already present. In 1 Samuel, the emphasis begins somewhere else: with the Lord seeking a king for Himself, according to His own will and purpose.

Israel wanted a king "for us" and "like the nations." God chooses a king for Himself.

"After God's own heart" is therefore not first a medal David earns through exceptional spiritual achievement. The phrase is spoken before Scripture records David fighting, worshipping, leading, failing, or repenting. Grace comes before David's record.

God's choice is not morally empty. Saul has refused to remain under God's command; the king God seeks is called to do God's will. Acts 13:22 later joins these ideas when it describes David as "a man after my heart, who will do all my will."

Grace comes first, and grace begins forming allegiance.

David is not called a man after God's heart because he is naturally better than everyone else. He is the king God chooses for Himself. Because God lays hold of David, David's wandering heart is drawn back, again and again, toward the God who chose him.

David's appointment as Israel's king is a unique calling in God's covenant story. Christians are not miniature versions of Israel's anointed king. Yet those of us who are saved recognize the gracious pattern: God does not wait for us to construct hearts worthy of His love. In Christ He

chooses and gives life; then His grace begins changing the people He has claimed.

## The Heart Grace Brings Home

David's life will show what this grace-formed allegiance looks like.

He will defend the honour of the living God, refuse to seize a throne God has not yet given, pray, worship, wait, and shepherd God's people. He will also take Bathsheba, arrange Uriah's death, abuse royal authority, and bring devastating consequences into his household and kingdom.

None of David's wrongdoing becomes less evil because he is chosen. "After God's heart" does not mean that motives are all that matter, that outward harm can be excused by inward sincerity, or that God overlooks the sins of people He loves.

God sends Nathan to expose David because grace will not protect his hiding place. David finally says, "I have sinned against the LORD" (2 Samuel 12:13).

Saul also uses the words "I have sinned," and David does not always repent quickly. The contrast is not that one man never confesses while the other responds perfectly. Their fuller stories reveal the direction their hearts take when God's word exposes them.

After Saul confesses, he asks Samuel, "Honour me now before the elders of my people" (1 Samuel 15:30). His attention returns to his public standing. He assumes repentance should bring vindication and immediate restoration.

David's prayer in Psalm 51 goes somewhere different:

> *"Have mercy on me, O God, according to your steadfast love" (Psalm 51:1).*
>
> *"Create in me a clean heart, O God, and renew a right spirit within me" (Psalm 51:10).*

David finally stops defending himself. He appeals to God's mercy and asks God to do what he cannot do for himself.

### Study Note: "Against You, You Only"

David also prays, "Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight" (Psalm 51:4).

He cannot mean that he did not sin against Bathsheba, Uriah, his family, his army, and the nation. The narrative makes that harm unmistakable, and Psalm 51 later names his bloodguiltiness — literally, a sin against someone so grievous it must be atoned for in blood.

But David is not minimizing his human victims, but rather, is recognizing the deepest reality beneath every human betrayal. When he uses people made in God's image, despises God's word, and treats royal power as his private possession, he also betrays the God whose love and authority should have been ultimate.

His sin reveals a heart that has been found chasing other gods: desire, lust, control, reputation, and power. But His repentance reveals a heart that knows grace and so cannot ultimately make peace with those things.

Repentance does not undo harm or erase consequences. God's forgiveness does not automatically restore a position, reopen access, or require those harmed to offer immediate trust. Wise boundaries, accountability, and the long work of repair may remain necessary.

Nor does every burden of shame belong to the person carrying it. If someone has sinned against you, that sin is not yours to confess. You do not need cleansing for what another person chose to do to you.

But when we carry genuine guilt for our own choices, explanations cannot cleanse us. Pressure, fear, or another person's failure may explain how we arrived at sin. They cannot make sin faithful or give us a clean heart.

Repentance is not payment offered to persuade God to receive us again. Repentance is what it looks like when His grace draws us home—the response of a heart once captured by His affections returning to its first love.

A heart after God is not a heart that never wanders. It is a heart God has claimed and will not leave comfortably facing away from Him.

## David Serves; Jesus Saves

**Acts 13:22-23, 36-39**

The apostle Paul remembers David as a servant through whom God carried His purpose forward:

> *"I have found in David the son of Jesse a man after my heart, who will do all my will" (Acts 13:22).*

Paul immediately moves beyond David:

> *"Of this man's offspring God has brought to Israel a Savior, Jesus, as he promised" (Acts 13:23).*

David serves God's purpose in his generation and then dies. He can defeat an enemy, gather a people, write songs, and shepherd a nation. He can also abuse his power and need forgiveness. David can show us a heart redirected by grace, but he cannot give us a clean heart, bear our guilt, or conquer death.

David can serve. David cannot save.

Jesus is the chosen King whose heart never turns from the Father. When obedience leads toward the cross, He does not become passive. He sets His face toward Jerusalem, prays, "Not my will, but yours, be done," and willingly gives Himself for sinners.

Saul sees his people scattering, his enemy gathering, and his control disappearing. He decides God's word can no longer have the final say.

Jesus sees the cross before Him and entrusts Himself completely to the Father's will.

He obeys where every earlier king fails. He dies for people who have crowned other things as ultimate, and God raises Him from the dead. Through Jesus, forgiveness is proclaimed, and everyone who believes is justified—declared right with God because of Christ rather than

personal achievement (Acts 13:38-39).

Our hope is not that our hearts have held onto God tightly enough. Our hope is that the faithful Son of David has laid hold of us.

## Living the Message

If you have never trusted Christ, you do not need to repair your record before coming to Him. Jesus obeyed, died, and rose so sinners could be forgiven and brought home to God. Entrust yourself to David's greater Son.

If you belong to Christ, bring your heart under His gracious rule again. Faith may call you to wait or to move. It may require confession, counsel, a hard conversation, a released outcome, or a courageous step.

The question is not merely whether we act. The question is whether Jesus is Lord as we act.

When fear demands control, remember that your future is held by the King who has passed through death and come out the other side.

When shame tells you to hide, remember that forgiveness is proclaimed in Jesus' name.

When your heart wanders, do not build a home in the far country. Return to the One who first loved you.

## Discussion Guide Questions

1. What do we ordinarily mean when we call someone "a person after my own heart"?
2. Why does David's complete story make that phrase difficult?
3. What pressures make Saul's choice appear understandable?
4. What is the difference between faithful initiative and making ourselves ultimate as we act?
5. How can a good gift become an idol?
6. Why must "after God's heart" begin with God's gracious choice rather than David's achievement?
7. What do Saul's concern for public honour and David's prayer for a clean heart reveal?
8. Why does Psalm 51:4 not erase David's sins against other people?
9. What is the difference between forgiveness and restored trust, position, or access?
10. How does David's life show a heart being drawn home by grace?
11. Why can David serve God's purpose but not save God's people?
12. Where are you being called to trust Christ, bring something into the light, accept accountability, release control, or take a faithful step?