

SHARING THE GOSPEL

The word **gospel** means “good news.” It is the message about **Christ, the kingdom of God, and salvation.** Use the following guide to share the gospel.



1. God rules. The Bible tells us God created everything, including you and me, and He is in charge of everything. (See Genesis 1:1; Revelation 4:11; and Colossians 1:16-17.)

2. We sinned. Since the time of Adam and Eve, everyone has chosen to disobey God. (See Romans 3:23.) The Bible calls this sin. Because God is holy, God cannot be around sin. Sin separates us from God and deserves God’s punishment of death. (See Romans 6:23.)

3. God provided. God sent His Son Jesus, the perfect solution to our sin problem, to rescue us from the punishment we deserve. It’s something we, as sinners, could never earn on our own. Jesus alone saves us. (See John 3:16 and Ephesians 2:8-9.)

4. Jesus gives. Jesus lived a perfect life, died on the cross for our sins, and rose again. Because Jesus gave up His life for us, we can be welcomed into God’s family for eternity. This is the best gift ever. (See Romans 5:8; 2 Corinthians 5:21; and 1 Peter 3:18.)

5. We respond. We can respond to Jesus. The ABCs of Becoming a Christian is a simple tool that helps us remember how to respond when prompted by the Holy Spirit to receive the gift Jesus offers.

Admit to God that you are a sinner. The first people God created chose to sin and disobey God. Ever since then, all people have chosen to sin and disobey. (See Romans 3:23.) Tell God you messed up and you are sorry for doing your own thing and turning away from Him through your thoughts, words, and actions. Repent, turn away from your sin. (See Acts 3:19 and 1 John 1:9.) Repent doesn’t just mean turning from doing bad things to doing good things. It means turning from sin and even from your own good works, and turning to Jesus, trusting only in Him to save you.

Believe that Jesus is God’s Son and accept God’s gift of forgiveness from sin. You must believe that only Jesus can save you, and you cannot save yourself from your sin problem—not even by praying to God, going to church, or reading your Bible. Your faith or your trust is only in Jesus and what He did for you through His life, death, and resurrection. (See Acts 16:31; Acts 4:12; John 14:6; and Ephesians 2:8-9.)

Confess your faith in Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord. Tell God and tell others what you believe. If Jesus is your Savior, you are trusting only in Him to save you. Jesus is also Lord, which means He is in charge of your life. You can start following Him and doing what He says in the Bible. You are born again into a new life and can look forward to being with God forever. (See Romans 10:9-10,13.)

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*Evangelistic Emphasis

» MEET THE WRITERS

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A WORD FROM THE GENERAL EDITOR



The Bible is an amazing gift from our awesome God. In it, He reveals Himself and His glory for us to witness. I'm excited that you are joining in for a journey through the Book of 1 Samuel. It is epic and beautiful.

In 1 Samuel we will see the story of God's people. As we do, we see the greatness of our God over His people. He is worthy. He is holy. He is the God above all gods, the King above all kings. As your group or class discusses this book, I want to encourage you to see the overarching theme of God's greatness as the umbrella that is above each story.

So many times, life takes its toll on us and we are prone to take our eyes off God and His great sufficiency for us. Because of this, your discussions and emphasis on God's greatness and the victories that He wins His people will be a great reminder and encouragement for those you are serving. In 1 Samuel, God's greatness will be a constant background as you discuss stories of deliverance, victory, forgiveness, and worship.

As you study the text in its context and seek to obey it in your context, I know the Lord will encourage you and challenge you. Enjoy the journey through 1 Samuel! Our God is still great, is still caring for His people, and is still the King above all kings.

In Christ,

Eric Geiger



Eric Geiger serves as Vice President of the Resources Division at LifeWay Christian Resources. Eric received his doctorate in leadership and church ministry from Southern Baptist Theological Seminary. He has authored and co-authored several books, including Creature of the Word and the best selling church leadership book, Simple Church. He also serves as the senior pastor of ClearView Baptist Church in Franklin, Tennessee. Eric is married to Kaye, and they have two daughters: Eden and Evie.



WORD WISE

Terms listed here are identified in the Bible commentary with a dot (•).

Abiathar [uh BIGH uh thahr]—the son of Ahimelech; sole survivor of the slaughter of the priests at Nob; high priest during the reign of David

Abishai [uh BIGH shigh]—David's nephew and brother of Joab, became one of David's most loyal generals

Abner [AB nuhr]—Saul's cousin and commander of Saul's army

Agag [AY gag]—personal name meaning "fiery one"; king of the Amalekites whose life Saul spared

Ahimelech [uh HIM uh lek]—a high priest during Saul's reign; unwittingly assisted David when he was on the run from Saul by giving him Goliath's sword and bread from the shrine

Amalekites [uh MAL uh kights]—a group of desert raiders and one of the rival groups of the Israelites; because of their sinfulness, God commanded Saul to completely destroy them

Ashdod [ASH dahd]—one of the principal cities of the Philistines; the place where the Philistines defeated Israel and captured the ark of the covenant; location of the temple of Dagon

Beth-shemesh [beth-SHEM mesh]—a town of southwestern Judah located on the edge of the Philistine territory; the place where the ark of the covenant reentered Israelite territory after being captured by the Philistines

Dagon [DAY gahn]—name of a god associated with the Philistines

Doeg [DOH ehg]—personal name meaning "full of fear"; an Edomite who served King Saul

Eliab [ih LIGH ab]—first son of Jesse to be rejected by Samuel when searching for a king to replace Saul

Ephod [EE fahd]—a priestly garment associated with seeking a word from God

Gibeah [GIB ih uh]—a place name meaning "a hill"; King Saul's capital city

Philistines [fih LISS teens]—one of the rival groups of the Israelites from the time the Israelites entered Canaan until the time of David; Saul was killed while fighting the Philistines

Shiloh [SHIGH loh]—a city that served as Israel's religious center for more than a century after the conquest of Canaan; location of the tabernacle during the period of the judges

BIBLE READING PLAN

JUNE

- 1. 1 Samuel 1:1-7
- 2. 1 Samuel 1:8-18
- 3. 1 Samuel 1:19-28
- 4. 1 Samuel 2:1-11
- 5. 1 Samuel 2:12-17
- 6. 1 Samuel 2:18-26
- 7. 1 Samuel 2:27-36
- 8. 1 Samuel 3:1-10
- 9. 1 Samuel 3:11-21
- 10. 1 Samuel 4:1-11
- 11. 1 Samuel 4:12-22
- 12. 1 Samuel 5:1-5
- 13. 1 Samuel 5:6-12
- 14. 1 Samuel 6:1-9
- 15. 1 Samuel 6:10-21
- 16. 1 Samuel 7:1-8
- 17. 1 Samuel 7:9-17
- 18. 1 Samuel 8:1-9
- 19. 1 Samuel 8:10-22
- 20. 1 Samuel 9:1-10
- 21. 1 Samuel 9:11-20
- 22. 1 Samuel 9:21-27
- 23. 1 Samuel 10:1-9
- 24. 1 Samuel 10:10-16
- 25. 1 Samuel 10:17-27
- 26. 1 Samuel 11:1-15
- 27. 1 Samuel 12:1-12
- 28. 1 Samuel 12:13-19
- 29. 1 Samuel 12:20-25
- 30. 1 Samuel 13:1-9

JULY

- 1. 1 Samuel 13:10-15
- 2. 1 Samuel 13:16-22
- 3. 1 Samuel 14:1-14
- 4. 1 Samuel 14:15-23
- 5. 1 Samuel 14:24-36
- 6. 1 Samuel 14:37-46
- 7. 1 Samuel 14:47-52
- 8. 1 Samuel 15:1-9
- 9. 1 Samuel 15:10-19
- 10. 1 Samuel 15:20-25
- 11. 1 Samuel 15:26-35
- 12. 1 Samuel 16:1-7
- 13. 1 Samuel 16:8-13
- 14. 1 Samuel 16:14-23
- 15. 1 Samuel 17:1-11
- 16. 1 Samuel 17:12-24
- 17. 1 Samuel 17:25-32
- 18. 1 Samuel 17:33-40
- 19. 1 Samuel 17:41-47
- 20. 1 Samuel 17:48-58
- 21. 1 Samuel 18:1-9
- 22. 1 Samuel 18:10-19
- 23. 1 Samuel 18:20-30
- 24. 1 Samuel 19:1-10
- 25. 1 Samuel 19:11-24
- 26. 1 Samuel 20:1-9
- 27. 1 Samuel 20:10-17
- 28. 1 Samuel 20:18-26
- 29. 1 Samuel 20:27-34
- 30. 1 Samuel 20:35-42
- 31. 1 Samuel 21:1-9

AUGUST

- 1. 1 Samuel 21:10-15
- 2. 1 Samuel 22:1-10
- 3. 1 Samuel 22:11-17
- 4. 1 Samuel 22:18-23
- 5. 1 Samuel 23:1-8
- 6. 1 Samuel 23:9-18
- 7. 1 Samuel 23:19-29
- 8. 1 Samuel 24:1-7
- 9. 1 Samuel 24:8-15
- 10. 1 Samuel 24:16-22
- 11. 1 Samuel 25:1-11
- 12. 1 Samuel 25:12-22
- 13. 1 Samuel 25:23-28
- 14. 1 Samuel 25:29-35
- 15. 1 Samuel 25:36-44
- 16. 1 Samuel 26:1-8
- 17. 1 Samuel 26:9-16
- 18. 1 Samuel 26:17-25
- 19. 1 Samuel 27:1-7
- 20. 1 Samuel 27:8-12
- 21. 1 Samuel 28:1-6
- 22. 1 Samuel 28:7-19
- 23. 1 Samuel 28:20-25
- 24. 1 Samuel 29:1-5
- 25. 1 Samuel 29:6-11
- 26. 1 Samuel 30:1-10
- 27. 1 Samuel 30:11-17
- 28. 1 Samuel 30:18-22
- 29. 1 Samuel 30:23-31
- 30. 1 Samuel 31:1-6
- 31. 1 Samuel 31:7-13



USING THIS GUIDE TO LEAD

» PRIOR TO THE GROUP TIME

1. Study the core passage.

Read Understand the Context to get a clear picture of how the core passage connects to the whole. Use Explore the Text to gain an understanding of the passage. Consult a study Bible like the *HCSB Study Bible* (also available online at MyWSB.com) and a Bible commentary like *Explore the Bible Adult Commentary* (available at LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible in both print and digital formats) to gain additional insight into the passage. Seek to define key words, phrases, places, and actions taken. Record ideas and insights gleaned from your personal study. Write a summary of the truths you discovered using the statement printed under the session title as a starting place.

TIP: Start preparing early. Life happens, and it tends to happen closer to times we are scheduled to lead a Bible study group.

2. Create a group time plan.

- a. Review First Thoughts for the session to identify a direction for the session and why that session is important to today's adults.
- b. Review the suggestions included in Lead Group Bible Study, identifying the suggestions you believe will work best with your group.
- c. Consider ways of incorporating a Bible Skill into the study, either following the suggestion given (see shaded box in each session) or by developing your own idea.
- d. Consult *QuickSource* (available from LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible) and the Explore the Bible blog (Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible/Adults/LeaderExtras) for additional questions and group time activities.
- e. Visit the Explore the Bible Ministry Grid page (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible) for additional ideas and insights.
- f. Review the *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* items suggested. Determine how to best use the items in your group's setting.

3. Gather your resources.

Use the list in Gather the Following Items list on the first page of each session as a starting place. Make sure you have everything you need to lead the group time using the plan you created. Make sure you have additional copies of *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* for anticipated guests.

TIP: If you plan to use the Suggested Music Idea and your small group meets with other groups prior to the study time, consider incorporating the music activity into the large group time.

4. Review and refine.

➤ DURING THE GROUP TIME

5. Arrive early.

The group time starts when the first person arrives. Make sure you are that person, so that you can set the tone and direction for the group Bible study time. Greet everyone as participants arrive and focus their attention on the Bible study.

6. Lead the group in a time of Bible study.

Use the plan you created to lead the group time. Record notes along the way to help you remember how the group responded. Remember, every group experience takes a few unexpected twists and turns; be flexible.

TIP: You can record your plan on a piece of paper and carry that into the group gathering, open the Leader Guide to the Lead Group Bible Study page and guide with those pages open, or use the DOC file provided on the CD-ROM included in the *Explore the Bible Adult Leader Pack* to create your own custom notes. (The DOC file is also included in the digital bundles and digital Adult Leader Pack. See *LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible* for more information.)

➤ AFTER THE GROUP TIME

7. Evaluate and Record.

Review Practice for ideas to encourage the group to put into practice the truths discovered. Record prayer requests and other insights you gained about the group and specific participants. Use these notes to help you be a better guide in the future.

8. Start preparing to lead the next group time.



INTRODUCTION TO 1 SAMUEL

»» BACKGROUND

The Hebrew Bible contains the same books as the English Old Testament, but they are arranged in a different order. As in our Bible, the Law (Genesis to Deuteronomy) comes first. Then comes a section called the Prophets. It has two parts: the Former Prophets (Joshua, Judges, 1 and 2 Samuel, 1 and 2 Kings) and the Latter Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and the twelve Minor Prophets). After this comes the Writings, which has everything else (notice that Ruth is in the Writings; it does not follow Judges, as in the English Bible).

The collection called Former Prophets reflects the fact that the books from Joshua to 2 Kings form a continuous historical narrative. Scholars sometimes call these six books the Primary History. The books describe the conquest (Joshua), Israel as a confederation loosely governed by judges (Judges), the transition to monarchy, the reign of Saul, and the rise of David (1 Samuel), the reign of David (2 Samuel), Solomon's reign, the splitting of the kingdom, and the history of the two kingdoms until each was destroyed (1 and 2 Kings).

First Samuel tells of the faithfulness of God to Israel during a time of upheaval. The era of the judges was ending, and the people clamored for a monarchy without really understanding how that would work or who would be king. The Philistines threatened Israel's very existence. Monarchy had a false start under Saul, but a young shepherd killed a great Philistine warrior and through severe testing learned to be a leader and a king.

»» OVERVIEW

First Samuel begins by telling how Samuel, the last and greatest of the judges, was born as an answer to prayer. It tells how he delivered Israel from the Philistines but also how the people demanded a king despite the disapproval of both God and Samuel. It describes the heroic exploits and tragic disobedience of Saul, the first king. It then tells of the origin and valor of David, as well as of his persecution at the hands of the increasingly paranoid and bitter Saul. It concludes with the death of Saul and with the stage set for the beginning of the dynasty of David.

»» WRITER

First Samuel is anonymous; it never names an author. Some people think that the title implies that Samuel wrote it, but the Bible never suggests such a thing. Samuel dies before the end of 1 Samuel, and he was long dead during the events of 2 Samuel. In fact, the title reflects the fact that he was the first of the three great leaders of Israel: Samuel, Saul, and David. In the ancient world, a book's name often reflected something or someone at the beginning of the book. Sometimes the first line of a book was its title.

»» DATE OF WRITING

First Samuel is one among the six volumes of the Primary History. The Primary History was obviously not finished until after the last event it describes, the fall of Jerusalem to Babylon in about 586 B.C. But this does not mean that the Primary History was at this time written from scratch. The author employed many sources, and most of these would have been written much earlier. First and Second Kings explicitly refer to sources, as at

2 Kings 1:18: “The rest of the events of Ahaziah’s reign, along with his accomplishments, are written in the Historical Record of Israel’s Kings.”

It may be that the stories behind 1 Samuel were compiled by scribes in the courts of David and Solomon. These scribes in turn would have relied on earlier material, perhaps some of it written by Samuel. Thus, although we cannot say that Samuel wrote 1 and 2 Samuel, we can say that some of its earlier material may come from him. Similarly, although the Primary History was not finished until after the end of the monarchy, much of its material is from much earlier.

»» PURPOSE

The whole of the Primary History tells the story of Israel, and in particular it describes how it was that this people, although in covenant with God, came to be conquered by a foreign nation and so lost their land and temple. The story begins gloriously with the conquest under Joshua, but it quickly degenerates during the time of the judges. The exile is foreshadowed in 1 Samuel when the Philistines take away the ark of the covenant. But Israel has a second glorious era in the reigns of David and Solomon, after which it again declines and finally falls to Babylon. First Samuel is transitional, telling of how one age ended and another began.

»» KEY THEMES

The transition from the loose confederation under the judges to a monarchy—First Samuel tells how Israel became a monarchy. Also, to the surprise of many readers, it treats Israel’s desire for a king as a sin against God.

The story behind the covenant with David—First Samuel explains why God rejected Saul’s monarchy but made an eternal covenant with David. It shows what qualities and actions made David the man after God’s own heart.

The life of David—The Old Testament gives far more attention to the biography of David than it gives to any other person. First Samuel begins the story, and Second Samuel finishes it. As the king who firmly established the monarchy and turned Israel into a great nation, as the focus of the covenant, and as the fountainhead of the psalms, David is a towering figure in the Old Testament.

Election and the will of God—Although 1 Samuel plainly shows Saul’s moral failings and thereby explains his fall from power, it does not exonerate David. God had, for His own reasons, chosen David.

Devotion and loyalty—David was loyal to God at all times, loyal to Saul even when fleeing from his insane wrath, and loyal to his subordinates. Jonathan alone matched David in this virtue. He gave steadfast friendship to David, and he died fighting alongside his father Saul even though he knew him to be in the wrong and deeply troubled.



OUTLINE OF 1 SAMUEL

- I. Samuel's Birth (1:1–2:11)
- II. Samuel's Call (2:12–3:21)
- III. Samuel's Ministry (4:1–7:17)
- IV. Crying for a King (8:1–11:15)
- V. Samuel's Warning (12:1-25)
- VI. Saul's Rise and Rebellion (13:1–15:35)
- VII. David's Selection (16:1-23)
- VIII. David's Victory (17:1-58)
- IX. Saul's Conflict with David (18:1–26:25)
- X. Saul's End (27:1–31:13)

ANSWERED!

God answers the prayers of those who humbly seek Him.

1 SAMUEL 1:10-18,26-28

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 2:1

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 1:1–2:11 and Understand the Context (pp. 14-15). View the video introduction by Dr. Eric Geiger at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible or on the Leader Pack CD-ROM.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 1:10-18,26-28, giving specific attention to Hannah's responses toward her need and God's provision. Consider Hannah's responsibility toward what God had entrusted to her. For further insight on Hannah's story, consult the *Explore the Bible Commentary*, found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 20-21). Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 22) and the ideas included on Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Posterboard and markers; Index cards and pens for each group member; Paper, envelopes, and stamps; and copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*); **PACK ITEM 3** (*Poster: Summer 2016*); and **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line of 1 Samuel*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Stewardship

Christians should recognize all these (their time, talents, and material possessions) as entrusted to them to use for the glory of God and for helping others.

Thinking about the subject of prayer can be overwhelming at times. Some say prayer is “letting go,” while others believe that it is “holding on.” Should you pray out loud or silently? Can you pray a written prayer, or does it need to be spontaneous? Does God accept prayer even when the one offering it feels despair and resentment? Is a prayer that is prayed in faith guaranteed to get a desired answer, or should it rather be viewed as an encounter with God in which the one praying submits to Him? There are so many questions about prayer. Unfortunately, some people let these unanswered questions keep them from the practice of prayer.

(In PSG, p. 13) **If you could ask God any question about prayer, what would it be?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “The Message and Purpose of 1 Samuel” in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Hannah was an Israelite woman who lived during the time of the judges. She was married to a devout man who loved her and provided for her. Yet, she struggled with a sense of incompleteness in her life because of infertility. The first chapter of the Book of 1 Samuel depicts a woman whose humility and sense of desperation led her to a life-changing encounter with the Lord in prayer.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 1:1–2:11

Although 1 Samuel tells the history of Israel’s first kings and of wide-ranging wars and dynastic struggles, it begins very simply with a story about a man named Elkanah and his wife Hannah who could not have a child. The beginning of the book is an account of how God answered Hannah’s prayers and gave her a son, Samuel.

In the order of the books of the Hebrew Bible, 1 Samuel immediately follows Judges (unlike the English order of books, where 1 Samuel follows Ruth). Judges ends with Israel in moral chaos and enduring severe oppression under the Philistines. The last judge was Samson, who, like Samuel, was miraculously born of a previously infertile couple. Samson’s birth was an act of mercy for all of Israel, for God sent him to be a mighty warrior and to save Israel from the Philistines. Samson did kill a lot of Philistines, but he was morally undisciplined and did nothing to improve Israel’s spiritual life.

Samuel would succeed where Samson had failed. Samuel would effectively keep the Philistines in check, partly by proxy. He would be the spiritual authority behind the two great enemies of the Philistines, Saul and David. In addition, Samuel would also be an example of godliness.

BIBLE SKILL

Compare passages with related themes.

Compare 1 Samuel 2:1-10 and Luke 1:46-55. At what points are the two songs similar? How are they different? What conclusions can be drawn about God from these two songs?

The story of Hannah also has a parallel in the New Testament story of Mary. Mary had no children, albeit not because of infertility but because she was a young virgin. Yet God did a great work of salvation through her pregnancy and her son. Like Hannah, Mary celebrated the event with a memorable song of praise (1 Sam. 2:1-10; Luke 1:46-55). In fact, if we compare Hannah's song to Mary's, it seems certain that Mary's words are modeled on Hannah's. Both speak at length about how God elevates the poor and humble but casts down the proud and mighty.

Nevertheless, the first story of 1 Samuel is not political or even grandly theological. It is about an ordinary woman who was in great distress and who prayed to God. This is what gives it such appeal. Life is made up of the struggles of ordinary people, and while God's work may have meant deliverance for Israel, it also meant deliverance for the private torments of one person.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

HANNAH'S PRAYER (1 SAM. 1:10-11)

VERSE 10

Verse 10 tells us: ***Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the LORD and wept with many tears.*** The words translated as *deeply hurt* are literally "bitter of soul." This is similar to how Naomi spoke of herself in Ruth 1:20: "Don't call me Naomi. Call me Mara." *Mara* is the Hebrew word found in 1 Samuel 1:10. As we shall see, Naomi and Hannah were in one respect in the same situation. If we consider Hannah's circumstances, we will see she had good reason to pray with tears.

Since Peninnah was the second wife (1:2), and since the text tells us that Elkanah, the husband of the two women, loved Hannah (v. 5), we can assume that Elkanah took Peninnah as a second wife only after a number of years of trying and failing to have a son by Hannah. In ancient Israel, people believed it was essential for every land-owning man to father a son to whom he could pass the property. The land was considered to be inalienable from the family that owned it. If the family fell into debt and had to sell the land, it was to be returned to them free of charge in the Year of Jubilee (Lev. 25:25-28). If a man died without having fathered a son, it was the duty of a near relative, usually a brother of the deceased, to father a son by the man's widow (Deut. 25:5-10). The child would be considered the son of the deceased man, and thus the property would continue to be held by his legal (albeit not biological) descendants. In light of these customs and laws, the taking of a second wife was not an indulgence or something done on a whim. For Elkanah, a son was an absolute necessity.

Women also had a strong incentive to want a son. A woman who had no son and who outlived her husband was in a precarious economic situation. The adult son had the duty of providing for aged parents, and especially for his mother, since women generally were not involved in economic life

1 SAMUEL 1:10

¹⁰ Deeply hurt, Hannah prayed to the LORD and wept with many tears.

and had few property rights. (The notion of the financially independent woman was alien to ancient Israelite culture.) Naomi, in the Book of Ruth, illustrates the plight of a woman in such circumstances. Naomi's late husband had possessed land in Bethlehem, but it did her no good until a near relative, Boaz, married into the family, took control of the property, and assumed responsibility for the care of Naomi and Ruth.

Therefore, when Hannah wept bitterly about her childless condition, it was not only because she was unable to find fulfillment for her maternal instincts (even though that, alone, would be a legitimate reason). She had good cause to be nervous about her future. If Elkanah were to die in the next ten or twenty years, she could not expect any help from Peninnah's children, and she might well find herself cast out of the house. This also accounts for Elkanah's seemingly clumsy attempt to console Hannah: "Am I not better to you than 10 sons?" (1 Sam. 1:8). He was trying to assure her, as best he could, that he would always be there to care for her.

Finally, the text gives a few more insights into Hannah's desperate unhappiness. First, she may well have felt that any hope of children was fast slipping away. When the story begins, Peninnah already has a number of sons and daughters (v. 4). Assuming that Hannah and Elkanah had been married for some years before he resorted to taking a second wife, Hannah was probably nearing the end of her normal childbearing years. Her situation, therefore, had become desperate. Second, Elkanah's preferential love for Hannah was obvious to all, especially to Peninnah. (He gave Hannah twice as much as anyone else at the feast, according to v. 5.) Also, if Hannah, the first wife, did have a son, he would immediately go to the head of the line as the principal heir. Peninnah knew that, and she was therefore jealous and hostile. She provoked Hannah at every turn (v. 6). Hannah's situation was an unhappy one indeed. As an aside, we observe that although the Old Testament did not explicitly forbid polygamy, it frequently shows what a dysfunctional mess the practice makes of family life.

(In PSG, p. 15) **Through prayer, Hannah directed her pain toward the Lord. Why is it important to be honest with God about our pains and frustrations?**

1 SAMUEL 1:11

¹¹ Making a vow, she pleaded, "LORD of Hosts, if You will take notice of Your servant's affliction, remember and not forget me, and give Your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut."

VERSE 11

We thus come to the content of Hannah's prayer: "***LORD of Hosts, if You will take notice of Your servant's affliction, remember and not forget me, and give Your servant a son, I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and his hair will never be cut.***" This was **a vow**. Hannah promised that if God gave her a son, she would give him up to God so that he could perpetually be a Nazirite. In ancient Israel, any man could take a Nazirite vow. The rules for the Nazirites are found in Numbers 6:1-21. While he was

under this vow, he would scrupulously seek to avoid anything defiling (such as touching a dead body), and he would not cut his hair. The vow typically was in force only for a short period of time—probably no more than a few months, or even less. Like fasting or going on a pilgrimage, it was a way to show devotion to God for a short time. A Nazirite did not normally live at the sanctuary, as Samuel did during his childhood. We know of only two men who were consecrated from birth to be lifelong Nazirites—Samson and Samuel. Both were born to women who had previously been barren, and both became judges in Israel. Otherwise, the only reference to Nazirites is in Amos 2:11-12, and so we do not know if taking the vow was a common or rare occurrence.

For most readers, the striking (if not disturbing) thing about this story is that Hannah made a kind of bargain with God in her prayer. We tend to associate this kind of prayer with people who are desperate but who don't really have a close relationship with God. Such a person may ordinarily never pray. But in a moment of extreme distress (a sudden, serious illness, or a financial crisis, or the like), he or she may promise any number of things if only God will help in this one circumstance. People who are habitually devoted to God and who pray daily typically are less likely to seek to work out a deal with God in a time of crisis.

There are good reasons to be cautious about making a promissory vow to God as part of an exchange. Our relationship to God is based on grace. We cannot earn His favor or benefits by making a grand gift or personal sacrifice. If God responds to our greatest need (forgiveness of sin) by grace through faith, should we seek other benefits through a process of deal making? God answers our prayers in ways that fulfill His bigger, redemptive plan. The mere fact that Hannah prayed such a prayer, and even that God honored it, does not mean that her action is one that should quickly be imitated.

On the other hand, the story does tell us that God sometimes responds positively to such a prayer. God is free to answer a personal appeal as He wishes. If someone offers a bargain with God, He can accept the proposal, or not. The Bible does not forbid the making of vows outright, but it does encourage restraint and forethought. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 states the matter quite clearly: "When you make a vow to God, don't delay fulfilling it, because He does not delight in fools. Fulfill what you vow. Better that you do not vow than that you vow and not fulfill it."

What are the dangers of making a vow to God while making a request for something? On the other hand, what are the dangers of assuming that since we receive gifts from God by grace, our behavior is an inconsequential matter? Does it matter to God if we do or do not give sacrificially?

1 SAMUEL 1:12-16

¹² While she continued praying in the LORD's presence, Eli watched her lips. ¹³ Hannah was praying silently, and though her lips were moving, her voice could not be heard. Eli thought she was drunk ¹⁴ and scolded her, "How long are you going to be drunk? Get rid of your wine!" ¹⁵ "No, my lord," Hannah replied. "I am a woman with a broken heart. I haven't had any wine or beer; I've been pouring out my heart before the LORD. ¹⁶ Don't think of me as a wicked woman; I've been praying from the depth of my anguish and resentment."

1 SAMUEL 1:17

¹⁷ Eli responded, "Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the petition you've requested from Him."

ELI'S AFFIRMATION (1 SAM. 1:12-18)

VERSES 12-16

It may well strike us as odd or harsh that the priest Eli supposed Hannah was **drunk**. Festivals and sacrifices at Israel's sanctuary, the tent of meeting, were celebratory affairs (unless it was a solemn event, such as the Day of Atonement). The animal sacrifice was analogous to a barbecue, and people ate and drank (as indicated in 1:4-5,9). A man under a Nazirite vow abstained from alcohol (Num. 6:3), although that was only a temporary matter (Num. 6:20). The angel who visited Samson's mother three times declared that she must not drink anything alcoholic while she was pregnant with him (Judg. 13:4,7,14). Apparently, Samson and Samuel were expected to remain abstinent throughout their lives, although the Bible does not explicitly assert this.

When Eli saw Hannah in her distress, possibly looking quite disheveled, he assumed the worst. He may well have seen others who, when they got drunk, took on a maudlin religious sentimentalism and made a show of exaggerated, emotional piety before God. Eli was not impressed by such behavior, and he told her to go sober up.

Hannah replied that she was not drunk but looked and behaved as she did because of the extreme anguish of her spirit. She insisted that although Eli had not heard what she was saying, she was actually pouring out her heart to God in sincere and sober prayer. She did not tell him why she was distressed or what was the content of her prayer, and he did not ask her.

VERSE 17

Eli responded with a priestly blessing: "***Go in peace, and may the God of Israel grant the petition you've requested from Him.***" He evidently recognized very quickly that what she said was true. His blessing was an appeal to God to respond favorably to her prayer. Eli did not need to know what the issue was. He knew that he did not have the power to rectify whatever was tormenting her but that God did. The most he could do, as a priest, was to invoke God's favor upon her. This is analogous to how, in Christian worship, we ask God to grant the "unspoken requests."

(In PSG, p. 18) **On what basis can we know that God has heard our prayer? What promises can we claim from Scripture?**

VERSE 18

Hannah's answer to Eli, "***May your servant find favor with you,***" may have been in Israelite culture a traditional response to a priestly blessing. By analogy, in liturgical tradition, when a worship leader says, "May the Lord be with you," the congregation responds, "And also with you." But Eli's blessing had a salutary effect on her. She found peace, and she was no

longer weeping and begging for God's help. She was able to enjoy the feast, and she looked different.

We often speak of the priesthood of the believer as though it were especially a matter of theological authority and autonomy. We are indeed free from the doctrinal dictatorship of clergy, but that is because our hearts are bound to the Word of God and not to human tradition. The real function of a priest is to bless others and intercede for them. If we want to show ourselves to be true priests before God, we ought to bless others and pray for them. We do not prove our priestly credentials by airing personal opinions on doctrinal matters.

HANNAH'S PRESENTATION (1 SAM. 1:26-28)

VERSES 26-28

God answered Hannah's prayer, and Hannah kept her vow. She gave birth to Samuel, and as soon as he was weaned and able to be out from under her direct care, she dedicated him to service at the tent of meeting. She reminded Eli of their earlier encounter, when she had been praying in the sanctuary. (She evidently had not even given him her name at that time.) She also told him what she had prayed; she had asked for a son and had vowed to dedicate him to God's service. Since God had answered her prayer, Eli could hardly refuse to receive the boy.

Eli did not formally adopt Samuel. Samuel's father, Elkanah, was an Ephraimite from Ramah, and when Samuel grew up he took over the family estate and moved back to Ramah (1 Sam. 8:4). But Eli conscientiously took on the role of father to his young charge. He accepted Samuel as a kind of apprentice and apparently did a better job of raising him than he had done with his own sons (see 2:12). As for Hannah, she wound up having three more sons and two daughters (2:21).

The two conversations between Eli and Hannah illustrate two facts about prayer among believers. First, it is not always necessary to tell others the details of a request. An unspoken request is legitimate. We do not have to spill all the details of what the request is, and sometimes we should not. Second, it is generally important and helpful to tell people who interceded for us when the prayer has been answered, and if possible, to explain what the matter was all about. This encourages others about the effectiveness of prayer. Also, God's answer may have other implications, as it did for Eli.

What stories do you have to tell about answered prayer?

1 SAMUEL 1:18

¹⁸ "May your servant find favor with you," she replied. Then Hannah went on her way; she ate and no longer looked despondent.

1 SAMUEL 1:26-28

²⁶ "Please, my lord," she said, "as sure as you live, my lord, I am the woman who stood here beside you praying to the LORD. ²⁷ I prayed for this boy, and since the LORD gave me what I asked Him for, ²⁸ I now give the boy to the LORD. For as long as he lives, he is given to the LORD." Then he bowed in worship to the LORD there.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

DO: As the group arrives, point out the word *entrust* that you've written on a posterboard. Direct individuals to write on the posterboard one person or thing that God has entrusted to them. After most of the group has arrived, discuss their responses.

TRANSITION: Point out **Pack Item 3** (*Poster: Summer 2016*) and explain: *In our study of 1 Samuel, we will be looking at the lives of several individuals to whom God entrusted great responsibility. Today we will be discussing our responsibilities when God entrusts something to us.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

INTRODUCE: Review **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*), and set the context for the session by using information in *Understand the Context* (pp. 14-15; PSG, p. 13) and **Pack Item 4** (*Time Line of 1 Samuel*).

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 1:10-18, as the group listens for the different emotions Hannah displayed.

ASK: *How would you describe Hannah's emotional state in this passage?*

EXPLAIN: *Hannah risked further humiliation and even faced being accused of inebriation in order to pour out her soul to the Lord.*

COMPARE: Divide the group into two smaller teams. Direct one team to review 1 Samuel 1:1-10 to understand why Hannah was so upset and discuss her subsequent reaction. Direct the second team to read Genesis 30:1-5 and consider Rachel's reaction to childlessness. Point out that we fail to seek God's will when we take matters into our own hands.

DISCUSS: Call both teams back together to discuss the differences in Hannah's and Rachel's reactions to childlessness.

ASK: *What is the danger of expecting people or possessions to meet needs that only God can meet?*

EXPLAIN: *Through prayer, Hannah directed her pain toward the Lord. Why is it important to be honest with God about our pains and frustrations?* (PSG, p. 15)

CONTRAST: Point out the difference in Hannah's emotional state between verse 10 and verse 18. Discuss how pouring out her heart before the Lord changed her attitude toward her situation.

ASK: *What role does submission play in prayer? How are humility and submission to God related?* (PSG, p. 16)

READ: Invite a volunteer to read aloud Philippians 4:6-7. Then lead volunteers to share about a time when they have experienced a change of attitude as a result of praying about a difficult situation.

ASK: *On what basis can we know that God has heard our prayer? What promises can we claim from Scripture?* (PSG, p. 18)

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 1:26-28, as the group listens for how Hannah responded to God's blessing.

EXPLAIN: *God answered Hannah's prayer by giving Hannah and Elkanah a son, whom they named Samuel. He remained at home with Hannah until he was weaned, and then they took him to the Lord's house to be dedicated.*

LIST: Share *Merriam-Webster's* definition of the word *entrust*: "to commit to another with confidence." Lead the group to list ways in which individuals can give back to God what He has entrusted to them.

ASK: Review the Key Doctrine (*Stewardship*) on page 19 of the PSG. Discuss the difference it makes in our lives when we understand that everything we have—family, friends, material possessions, physical health, spiritual gifts, time, and so forth—are gifts that God has entrusted to us.

EVALUATE: Use the commentary under Verse 11 (pp. 16-17; PSG, pp. 15-16) to explain the importance of Hannah's vow. Lead the group to discuss the implications of Hannah's decision to make a vow to the Lord. Encourage them to consider how Samuel, Elkanah, and Eli were affected by her decision. (For further insight on Elkanah's response to Hannah's vow, read Num. 30:10-15.)

ASK: *How does seeing an answered prayer encourage the person who prayed? How does it encourage others who were aware of the prayer? (PSG, p. 19) How often do you joyfully share with others how God has answered your prayers? What keeps you from sharing more often?*

APPLY: Give index cards to each person. On one side of the card, guide individuals to identify a need in their lives that only God can meet (ex.: salvation of a friend or family member through Christ). Encourage them to pray specifically about that need this week. Then, on the other side of the card, direct them to identify two or three gifts God has entrusted to them. Invite them to pray this week about how they can be good stewards of those gifts.

STATE: *Hannah responded faithfully to her commitment to the Lord. We also have a responsibility to be faithful stewards of what God gives to us.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

SUMMARIZE: *Hannah shared her burden with the Lord. She acknowledged God when He answered her prayer, and she was faithful to her commitment to the Lord.*

MEMORIZE: Point out today's memory verse (1 Samuel 2:1), and distribute copies of **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*). Discuss how Scripture memorization has helped you apply God's Word to your life. Instruct volunteers to share their own experiences.

CHALLENGE: Direct the group to the first question set in the PSG, and allow time for them to silently consider their personal response: *Describe your greatest disappointment in life at this moment. Take time to pray about this issue, following the example set by Hannah.* (PSG, p. 20)

PRAY: Close by thanking God for answering our prayers. Ask Him to help us rejoice in Him and His ways.



PRACTICE

- Using social media or text message, remind the group of the weekly memory verse, 1 Samuel 2:1, and challenge them to share with one person an answered prayer.
- Examine any areas in which you need to be honest with God about the burdens you are facing. Try journaling your prayers to help you remember in the future how God has answered your prayers.
- Make a list of each person in your group. Write one spiritual gift you see in each individual, and pray about how you can encourage that person to use the gifts you see.
- Make sure all group members received a new PSG for this study in 1 Samuel. Take the time to deliver a copy and connect with those who were absent this week.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Provide a sheet of paper and a pen to each person. Direct them to divide the sheet into four quadrants, labeling each section *time*, *material possessions*, *talents*, and *physical health*. Under each heading, direct them to list things that God has entrusted to them in each category. As a group, discuss ways to be a good steward over each area listed.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the discussion of honesty with God in prayer, provide a sheet of paper, pen, and envelope to each individual. Guide them to self-address the envelope and write a prayer to God concerning something they greatly desire. Once complete, direct individuals to fold and seal the prayer in the self-addressed envelope for the leader to mail to them in a month.
- To further develop the discussion of Hannah's vow, read 1 Samuel 1:28 and Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 for biblical insight. Then lead the group to discuss the merits of making a vow to God: (1) Making a vow to the Lord is acceptable as long as one fulfills it; (2) It is better not to make a vow to the Lord if you don't fulfill the vow.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Encourage the group to identify one area of life in which they need to be a more faithful steward of what God has given them. Challenge them to create a plan of action to be more committed in that area this week.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

In closing the session, ask a volunteer to read aloud Hannah's song in 1 Samuel 2:1-10. Identify each description of God found in the song, and imagine what type of tune may have accompanied the words. For further study of Hannah's song, complete the Bible Skill activity on page 14 of the PSG.

CALLED

God delivers His message through His faithful followers.

1 SAMUEL 3:1-10,17-21

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 3:10

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 2:12–3:21, First Thoughts (p. 24), and Understand the Context (pp. 24-25). As you read, look for contrasting characteristics between Samuel and the sons of Eli.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 3:1-10,17-21, using the commentary provided (pp. 25-29). Identify each step of preparation Samuel had in learning to recognize God's voice, especially concerning Eli's role in preparing Samuel for ministry.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 30-31). Customize your group plans using More Ideas (p. 32) and the ideas included in *QuickSource* and online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible or MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible. Consider ways to use the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 24) during the session.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Index cards and pens; Whiteboard and markers; Any type of filter; and copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*); and **PACK ITEM 12** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 3:10*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

The Family

Parents are to teach their children spiritual and moral values and to lead them, through consistent lifestyle example and loving discipline, to make choices based on biblical truth.

One of the marvels of modern technology is voice recognition—the ability of a machine or program to recognize spoken words and translate them into text. Unfortunately, there are times when the message gets garbled. The results of this failure may be humorous, but the results can also lead to problems.

Spiritual leaders should know what God desires and share that understanding with the people. Eli, a priest in ancient Israel, was a faulty conduit for God’s revelation to His people, as were his two sons. Eli was deaf to the voice of God; therefore, he was not a faithful messenger of the divine revelation. As a priest, Eli should have been calling the congregation of Israel to faithfulness, but he couldn’t because of his own spiritual deficiencies. As God frequently does in the Book of 1 Samuel, He would throw human expectations into upheaval by exalting a humble recipient of His grace over those who held positions of prominence.

(In PSG, p. 23) **Why is it crucial that people in positions of spiritual leadership possess the capacity of voice recognition in relation to God’s revelation?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “At Shiloh” and “Eli: His Life and Ministry” in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 2:12–3:21

Samuel was born at the end of one of the most tumultuous periods of the history of Israel. It was the latter part of the time of the judges, after Israel had gone through a long, slow descent into idolatry and moral degradation. The last major judge before Samuel, Samson, was a man whose passions were entirely out of control. The Book of Judges tells also of the superstition, violence, and moral outrages that characterized the era. To give one example: a Levite had a concubine, and a group of Israelites raped her until she died. Calling for vengeance, he cut her body into pieces and sent them as a message throughout the nation. This provoked a bloody civil war (Judg. 19–21).

At the root of all of this was Israel’s persistent idolatry. The people did not flat out abandon the Lord. Rather, they thought they could serve both God and Baal. They went back and forth between the two. It was like an addiction. Many times God sent an oppressor to punish them, and each time, after they had suffered enough, they called out to God for help. He would then send a judge to deliver them (see Judg. 2:11-19). But then they went back to their old ways. No matter how many times this happened, the people never learned their lesson. In fact, with every cycle they only

got worse. Samuel's ministry was a call for Israel to put an end to this spiritual inconsistency and decline. He was also the last judge.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A VOICE (1 SAM. 3:1-10)

VERSES 1-3

Samuel was at this time a **boy**, possibly around age 12. He was working as a hierodule, a person who took care of menial tasks at a sanctuary. Judging from the reference to the burning of the lamp in verse 3, it may be that his nocturnal duty was to see to it that the lamps in the sanctuary menorah kept burning through the night.

The text tells us that prophetic messages were **rare** at this time. Very few people were receiving direct messages from God. This narrative tells us this for two reasons. First, it helps to explain Samuel's confusion. It did not occur to him that God might be calling him because, as far as he knew, God hardly ever spoke to anyone. Second, it indicates the importance of the ministry that Samuel would carry out. After a long period of silence, God was again speaking, and Samuel would be his messenger.

The lamps of the sanctuary menorah were kept burning from evening until morning and were extinguished at dawn (Ex. 27:20-21). Verse 3 says the event took place **before the lamp of God had gone out**. This suggests that it was in the last hour of the night, just before morning. The detail could have symbolic significance. Israel, during the time of the judges, experienced moral decay, suffered defeats from their enemies, and lacked spiritual leadership. They had, so to speak, come through a very dark night. The ministry of Samuel would be the dawn of a new day and of new hope.

VERSES 4-8a

We may wonder why the Bible goes through the trouble of walking us through each of the three times that God called out to Samuel in these verses. In a biblical text, space is limited. The Bible can summarize the entire reign of a king of Israel in a few words and then move on. And yet this narrative takes the time to report each of the three occasions when God called Samuel, and Samuel ran to Eli. There are at least three reasons it did this.

The first reason is the simple rhetorical power of the repetition. Think of how this sounded to an ancient audience as the story was read aloud. As it works through the three times that God from his sanctuary calls to Samuel during the night, and the three times that the boy assumes it is Eli speaking, the audience feels a rising tension, wondering when and how Samuel will recognize what is really happening. This puts the audience on the edge of their seats, knowing that something important is coming.

1 SAMUEL 3:1-3

¹ The boy Samuel served the LORD in Eli's presence. In those days the word of the LORD was rare and prophetic visions were not widespread. ² One day Eli, whose eyesight was failing, was lying in his room. ³ Before the lamp of God had gone out, Samuel was lying down in the tabernacle of the LORD, where the ark of God was located.

1 SAMUEL 3:4-8a

⁴ Then the LORD called Samuel, and he answered, “Here I am.”

⁵ He ran to Eli and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “I didn’t call,” Eli replied. “Go back and lie down.” So he went and lay down. ⁶ Once again the LORD called, “Samuel!” Samuel got up, went to Eli, and said, “Here I am; you called me.” “I didn’t call, my son,” he replied. “Go back and lie down.”

⁷ Now Samuel had not yet experienced the LORD, because the word of the LORD had not yet been revealed to him.

^{8a} Once again, for the third time, the LORD called Samuel. He got up, went to Eli, and said, “Here I am; you called me.”

The second reason is that the threefold repetition affirms that God is deliberate and intentional about what He is doing. The closest parallel to this is in Peter’s threefold denial of Jesus (John 18). If Peter had only denied Christ once, we might think that it was unintentional. We could suppose he had blurted out a denial of his association with Jesus without thinking through what he was doing. But because he did it three times, we know that Peter had fairly made up his mind to hide the fact that he was a disciple. Only after he heard the rooster crow did he recognize the enormity of his betrayal.

The repetition of God’s call to Samuel implies that He was determined to make contact with the boy. He was not going to speak once and then give up. God had a high purpose for Samuel, and He would keep calling until He got through to him. This, in fact, is how it often is when people are called by God. He speaks to their hearts, and they either don’t recognize Him or refuse to listen. But He calls again and again. Finally, they can ignore it no longer. They know they have been called to a task or ministry, and they must yield to it.

The third reason is an outgrowth of the first two reasons: the story demonstrates to the audience that Samuel is a great prophet with a genuine call from God. He spoke to Samuel audibly and repeatedly. God kept calling him until Samuel responded, and then the Lord gave him a specific message. The audience in effect relives the moment when Samuel received God’s call, and they come away convinced that if there ever was a true prophet, Samuel was such a man.

VERSES 8b-10

The story gives us appreciation for Eli. We know that he had his failings, as shown by how he allowed his sons to abuse their privileges. But Eli himself was no reprobate. Like the rest of us, he was a sinner-saint. He recognized that God was speaking to Samuel, and he properly instructed him on how to receive the message. He did not deny what God was doing or tell Samuel to just shut up and go back to bed or try to co-opt the process (as if to say, “I’m the high priest; God should speak to me!”). After telling Samuel how to respond, Eli got out of the way and allowed God and Samuel to have a private conversation.

We need to be careful about what we make of God’s direct revelation to Samuel. In Old Testament times, God spoke in various ways through the prophets. He could give them dreams or visions, or he could directly speak to them, as in Samuel’s case. We would not want to say that God never uses such means today. We hear a steady stream of reports from the Islamic world of people coming to Christian faith after a direct encounter with Jesus in a dream. Apart from that, these people would never hear about Christ at all. God is free to do as He chooses, and this includes the freedom to address people directly.

On the other hand, direct revelation from God is rare and not necessarily superior. In many places, the Bible and the church are readily available, and these are witnesses that carry the Word of God to the nations. God expects us to grow in faith and grace through a consistent

practice of reading the Bible and of gathering together at the church. If what we want is a message from God, it is already near at hand. If what we want is the thrill of hearing a heavenly voice or of seeing an angel, then we are not seeking the Word of God but a spectacular experience. The apostle Paul had experienced heavenly visions, but in his opinion, they were far from being the most important thing about his office and ministry (2 Cor. 12:2-10). He certainly did not think that the kind of visions he had were part of the normal Christian life. Jesus also spoke indirectly to this issue when He told Thomas: “Those who believe without seeing are blessed” (John 20:29). It is all well and good for someone to have a direct encounter with Christ, but there is a special blessing for those who simply read or hear the Word and believe.

(In PSG, p. 26) **How can we prepare our hearts to hear God’s voice?**

A MESSAGE (1 SAM. 3:17-18)

VERSES 17-18

The message God wanted Samuel to deliver was harsh, and it was directed at Eli. Because Eli had not put a halt to the scandalous behavior of his sons (2:22-25), he and his sons would die and the family would lose its position as high priests over the sanctuary (3:11-14). An anonymous prophet had previously warned Eli that God would soon judge him and his house (2:27-30). Now the message came through Samuel that the hammer was about to fall. By the time Samuel delivered God’s message to Eli, there was no longer any room for repentance. God had determined that the time for judgment had come.

Eli was in many ways a tragic case. Everything we see about him implies he had a divided mind. According to 1 Samuel 2:22-25, Eli told his sons that their behavior was wrong, but he could not bring himself to remove them from their priestly offices. The prophet actually said that Eli honored his sons more than he honored God (2:29), but this accusation was really given for rhetorical effect, stating what Eli’s behavior implied; it was not necessarily a literal description of his emotional attitude. In fact, when the Israelites went off to war against the Philistines, Eli was far more concerned about the safety of the ark of the covenant than he was about the safety of his sons (4:13,17-18). Even so, loyalty to family and loyalty to God pulled his heart in different directions.

We see other evidence of Eli’s inner contradictions as well. On the one hand, he showed spiritual discernment and admirable restraint when he recognized that God was speaking to Samuel. Even in his submission to God’s verdict, he showed respect for God’s sovereignty and justice, and he did not rebel or complain: **He is the LORD. He will do what He thinks is good.** With this answer, he sounded a little bit like pious Job: “Naked I

1 SAMUEL 3:8b-10

^{8b} Then Eli understood that the LORD was calling the boy. ⁹ He told Samuel, “Go and lie down. If He calls you, say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant is listening.’” So Samuel went and lay down in his place. ¹⁰ The LORD came, stood there, and called as before, “Samuel, Samuel!” Samuel responded, “Speak, for Your servant is listening.”

1 SAMUEL 3:17-18

¹⁷ “What was the message He gave you?” Eli asked. “Don’t hide it from me. May God punish you and do so severely if you hide anything from me that He told you.” ¹⁸ So Samuel told him everything and did not hide anything from him. Eli responded, “He is the LORD. He will do what He thinks is good.”

came from my mother's womb, and naked I will leave this life. The LORD gives, and the LORD takes away. Praise the name of Yahweh."

On the other hand, Eli also sounded like the man in the parable who only received one talent. Jesus said, "Then the man who had received one talent also approached and said, 'Master, I know you. You're a difficult man, reaping where you haven't sown and gathering where you haven't scattered seed. So I was afraid and went off and hid your talent in the ground. Look, you have what is yours'" (Matt. 25:24-25). Eli knew right from wrong, and he knew that God would demand an accounting, but like the man in the parable he became completely passive. Instead of proactively dealing with the problems at the sanctuary by expelling his sons from the priesthood, he simply allowed events to follow their natural course. His faith in God was real, but it was not a wise faith. It led him to a kind of fatalism and paralysis rather than to active obedience.

Samuel had a message, even though it was not one that he wanted to deliver. But just as Eli had divided loyalties, so also did the people of Israel try to go in two directions. Years later, another prophet, Elijah, put it like this: "How long will you hesitate between two opinions? If Yahweh is God, follow Him. But if Baal, follow him" (1 Kings 18:21). Jesus taught that no one could serve two masters (Matt. 6:24). Samuel would be the first great prophet after Moses to give Israel the demand for simple, uncomplicated loyalty to God.

How can we be brought to ruin not by personal lust or unkindness or arrogance, but by the people we love?

BIBLE SKILL

Interpret Scripture with Scripture.

Read Matthew 10:34-39. Summarize the truths Jesus was teaching. How does what Jesus said in Matthew 10 relate to Eli's situation? In what ways is Eli's life an example of what Jesus was teaching in Matthew 10?

A PROPHET (1 SAM. 3:19-21)

VERSE 19

The words ***Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him*** have an echo in Luke 2:52: "And Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and with people." The two verses quickly pass over many years of growing up for their respective subjects, Samuel and Jesus, and they make the point that neither man had a misspent youth. Both stayed on the path of godliness.

Verse 19 also tells us that God ***fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied***. This literally says, "And God did not allow any of His words to fall to the ground." Put simply, none of Samuel's prophecies were flops. After his first prophecy—the message concerning the imminent fall of the house of Eli—he gave a series of messages not recorded in the Bible. Although we do not know the content of every prophecy he made, we know that every prophecy he made came to pass.

1 SAMUEL 3:19

¹⁹ Samuel grew, and the LORD was with him, and He fulfilled everything Samuel prophesied.

(In PSG, p. 28) **What impact does God’s Word have on situations that seem desperate or bleak? How does God use His Word to bring hope and direction?**

VERSES 20-21

Even as a boy at Shiloh, Samuel quickly gained a reputation for being a reliable conduit of God’s messages. His fame spread *from Dan to Beer-sheba*. This is a stock expression for describing the whole length of the land of Israel from north to south. Dan was the northernmost significant city of Israel, situated near the heavily wooded region of Lebanon, and Beer-sheba was in the semi-desert country of the far south. The expression is similar to the American English phrase “from coast to coast.”

Samuel continued to have revelations from God while growing up at Shiloh. Samuel did not spend his whole prophetic career there. In fact, he probably had to leave the town before he reached age 20 for the simple reason that the Philistines conquered the town and destroyed the sanctuary there. 1 Samuel 4 tells the story of how the Israelites were defeated in a great battle and lost possession of the ark of the covenant. But we also know from Jeremiah 26:6 that the Shiloh sanctuary was destroyed, and this almost certainly happened right after the Israelites lost the ark.

Therefore, it seems that Samuel continued to reside at Shiloh for a few years after he gave his initial message to Eli. During this time, he received many messages from God, and his fame spread far and wide. After the Shiloh sanctuary was razed, Samuel returned to his hometown in Ramah, where he built an altar to the Lord and continued to issue messages in His name (1 Sam. 7:17; 8:4). We must not miss how important this was. The destruction of the Shiloh sanctuary was a cataclysmic event for Israel. The sanctuary had been the center of their spiritual existence. With that gone, they were like lost sheep. But Samuel filled in the gap by continuing to give messages from God and by officiating at his makeshift altar in Ramah. Samuel gave the people divine guidance, comfort, and continuity until temple worship was fully reestablished under David and Solomon.

Can you recall any time of crisis when one person arose with the faith and strength necessary to hold things together and enable people to make it through to the end of the trouble? Have you seen such a thing in a church, a business, or a family?

1 SAMUEL 3:20-21

²⁰ All Israel from Dan to Beer-sheba knew that Samuel was a confirmed prophet of the LORD. ²¹ The LORD continued to appear in Shiloh, because there He revealed Himself to Samuel by His word.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

CONSIDER: Once most of the group has arrived, discuss responses to the following question: *What would life be like if God spoke to you audibly, giving directions at every turn, much like voice recognition software can give you specific directions on a GPS?*

REVIEW: Provide a brief overview of **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*).

TRANSITION: *As Samuel grew, Eli helped him learn to recognize God's voice. Today we will be looking at the importance of recognizing God's voice when He calls.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 3:1-5 and another to read aloud 1 Samuel 3:6-10. Invite the group to take note of how many times God called before Eli and Samuel recognized the Lord was speaking.

ASK: *Why do you think it took three times for Eli to recognize the Lord was speaking to Samuel?*

EXPLAIN: *In the Old Testament, God spoke in different ways. In addition to the Torah, at times God spoke audibly or through visions given to the prophets. However, during the time of Samuel, revelation from God was rare. Using 1 Samuel 2:12-36, discuss possible reasons why the Lord quit speaking as frequently to the Hebrew people.*

GUIDE: Lead the group to discuss the ways God speaks to us today.

ASK: *What makes the silence of God so troubling? (PSG, p. 24) How can we prepare our hearts to hear God's voice? (PSG, p. 26)*

ILLUSTRATE: Display the filter you brought to the session. Explain the purpose of a filter. Then, beside the filter, place a copy of the Bible. Emphasize: *Anytime we hear God's voice, it will be consistent with the whole of Scripture. As Christians, all of our experiences must be filtered through the truth of God's Word.*

DISCUSS: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Lead the group to discuss how God uses His Word to direct our lives.

DEFINE: Place the group into two smaller teams. Direct one team to outline the role of Eli as a mentor to Samuel (see 1 Sam. 3:1-20). Instruct the other team to define the role of Samuel as one being mentored. Bring everyone back together to discuss how each team outlined the roles.

ASK: *What characteristics are important to the role of a spiritual mentor? What characteristics are important for the one being mentored?*

TESTIFY: Invite the group to share about spiritually mature individuals who have helped them learn to recognize God's voice.

LIST: Provide an index card to each group member. Review 1 Samuel 3:7 and point out that when God spoke, Samuel did not yet know the Lord personally. Ask the group to list the

names of two or three people whom they can help to recognize God's voice, just as others have helped them. Call for volunteers to share their experiences.

MEMORIZE: Reflect on today's memory verse using **Pack Item 12** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 3:10*), and give out copies of **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) to those who need a copy.

READ: Direct someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 3:17-21, as the group looks for characteristics of Samuel in the passage.

CONTRAST: On a whiteboard, draw two columns with one labeled *Eli's Sons* and the other labeled *Samuel*. Guide the group to review 1 Samuel 2:12,22-23 and complete the chart. Lead the group to draw conclusions by comparing the two lists. Record responses on the whiteboard in the corresponding column.

ASK: *What does God expect of us in teaching those around us (children, extended family, new believers, friends) to recognize His voice and follow Him? In what ways can we lead by example?*

COMPARE: *Eli's failure to train his sons to fear the Lord resulted in judgment of his whole family. Read aloud Matthew 10:34-39. Ask the group to summarize the truths Jesus taught. How does what Jesus said in Matthew 10 relate to Eli's situation? In what ways is Eli's life an example of what Jesus taught in Matthew 10? As time allows, take this discussion a step further using the Bible Skill activity in the PSG (p. 24).*

CONSIDER: Examine verses 17-18. Samuel's first revelation from the Lord was a difficult message to share. *What parts of the gospel message are you tempted to omit when sharing with a friend? What makes it hard to tell a person the truth? (PSG, p. 27) What impact does God's Word have on situations that seem desperate or bleak? How does God use His Word to bring hope and direction? (PSG, p. 28)*

DISCUSS: *The Israelites worshiped a God who was heard, not seen (see Deut. 4:15). In Jesus, God would reveal Himself in a way that could be seen and touched. God would become visible and tangible in the Person of Jesus Christ (see John 1:14,18). What are the implications of the truth that God is heard and not simply seen? (PSG, p. 29)*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Guide the group to outline the steps Eli took as a mentor to prepare Samuel for God's calling and the steps Samuel took to be prepared.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 30): *Discuss with your Bible study group things the group can do to help each other grow in their faith and walk with Christ. What practical steps can be taken to help the group do the things discussed?*

APPLY: On the back of the index card provided earlier, direct the group to write a plan of action for teaching those listed how to recognize God's voice. Pray for opportunities to reach out to at least one person on the list this week.

PRAY: Give the group an opportunity to be quiet and listen to the Lord. If possible, encourage individuals to kneel or sit as they feel led. After a few minutes, close with this prayer: *Speak to us this week, Lord, for Your servants are listening.*



PRACTICE

- Send an email or text message to the group with the week's memory verse (1 Samuel 3:10), encouraging the group to spend a few quiet minutes each day reflecting on the Scripture.
- Set aside a block of time during the week to spend reading Scripture and quietly listening for the Lord's voice. Ask God to help you recognize when He is speaking.
- Pray for each individual in the group by name to take opportunities available this week to invest in the people they listed on their index cards.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Draw a large picture of a billboard on the whiteboard, and guide the group to write general questions people would like God to answer if He were to speak using a billboard. (Ex.: *Should I take a new job?* or *Should I move to a new city?*) State that while God can speak in any way He chooses, most often He speaks to us through His Word, the Bible. Today we will be looking at recognizing God's voice through His Word for direction in our lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To replace or supplement the small group discussions of mentoring roles, direct the groups to develop mentorship job descriptions based on the roles of Eli and Samuel. Direct one group to develop a job description for a mentor. Instruct the other group to develop a job description for a person being mentored. Discuss challenges that may occur while mentoring someone or being mentored.
- To supplement the discussion of helping others to recognize God's voice, read aloud Deuteronomy 6:4-9 to the group. Lead the group to list the requirements the Israelites were given for teaching their children. Initiate discussion of the responsibility God gives us to mentor younger family members and ideas for doing so effectively.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Challenge the group to assess themselves this week concerning whether or not they are intentionally being spiritual mentors for younger family members using the following questions: *To whom am I intentionally passing on my faith? In what ways am I purposefully teaching the younger generation to hear God's voice?*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Read the lyrics to the song "Hark, the Voice of Jesus Calling," by Daniel March. To close the session, sing the hymn as a group, giving special attention to God's call and our response.

WORTHY!

Only God is worthy of worship and praise.

1 SAMUEL 5:1-6; 6:11-16

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 6:20

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 4:1–7:17 and Understand the Context (pp. 34-35). Note the number of times the ark of the covenant changed hands and the consequences for each group of people who handled the ark without following proper procedure. Refer to **PACK ITEM 7** (*Movement/Locations of the Ark*) for helpful information.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 5:1-6; 6:11-16, using Explore the Text (pp. 35-39). Look for evidence of God's superiority over everything.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 40-41). Modify plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 42), ideas included in *QuickSource*, and those online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Items that can become idols (a football, a guitar, a credit card, a family photo, etc.); and Paper and pens for everyone. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 7** (*Movement/Locations of the Ark*); and **PACK ITEM 10** (*Israel's Counterparts in 1 Samuel*)



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God

There is one and only one living and true God.

People can get very angry when they see a symbol that is dear to them desecrated. If a patriotic American sees the Stars and Stripes pulled down and burned, his or her blood will boil. Christians grieve when they see churches or Bibles burned or crosses trampled underfoot. And well they should; symbols are not meaningless. People have deep emotional ties to symbols that they believe in, and an attack on those symbols can provoke the deepest rage.

(In PSG, p. 33) **What symbols are used to define your community? Your church? How do those symbols represent you?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Dagon, god of the Philistines," available digitally in *Biblical Illustrator for Explore the Bible* at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

At the same time, symbols are not everything. Christians need to be especially careful about this point. When we see an insult to a Christian symbol, our anger may be no different from the anger of any other partisan group. It may be an anger that arises from the flesh. After all, we can also get very angry if someone defiles the symbol of our favorite sports team!

We need to ask ourselves if we truly grieve over dishonor to the name of Christ, and if we respond to the reproach in the manner that Christ Himself did. We also need to consider what is the right way to think about the symbols of Christianity, being aware of the difference between proper respect for a symbol and having a superstitious attitude about it. The account of the ark of the covenant will enable us to shed some light on these difficult issues.

BIBLE SKILL

Compare and contrast similar passages.

Compare 1 Samuel 6:13-16 and Revelation 12:10-12. Consider how both passages describe the joy of worship. How are the circumstances different? Would you consider one grander than the other? Explain.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 4:1–7:17

Prior to the building of the Jerusalem temple, Israel's primary sanctuary was the tent of meeting (traditionally called the tabernacle), a structure built under Moses according to guidelines given by God (Ex. 25–31; 36–40). The Bible does not give us a complete history of the tent. Although it sometimes moved about, apparently it became something of a permanent fixture at Shiloh soon after the conquest under Joshua.

The tent housed several sacred items, including a lampstand, a table on which was set the daily offering of bread, and a small altar for burning incense. Most importantly, it housed the ark of the covenant. This was a small chest that contained tablets of the Ten Commandments and a jar of manna (Ex. 16:33; 25:16). It served as a symbolic throne of God and thus implied that God was present in the sanctuary. This was important because the tabernacle did not contain the one thing that ancient people would have considered essential for a sanctuary: an idol representing the

resident god. The ark was also necessary for carrying out the annual Day of Atonement ritual, since on that day the priest made atonement for the sins of Israel by sprinkling blood on the ark's surface (Lev. 16:15).

First Samuel 4 tells how Israel lost the ark to the Philistines. After losing an initial skirmish, the Israelites carried the ark with them to battle, thinking that it would insure victory. The Philistines were frightened but rallied, and they inflicted a major defeat on Israel. Hophni and Phineas, the two sons of Eli the high priest, had gone with the ark to the battle and were slain. The Philistines took away the ark as a battle trophy.

In the same calamity, the tent sanctuary at Shiloh was destroyed (Jer. 26:6 alludes to this event). After this, Israel had at least two other tent sanctuaries, one at Nob (1 Sam. 21–22) and the other at Gibeon (1 Kings 3:4; 2 Chron. 1:3). But neither tent possessed the ark. The ark, after being taken to and fro, finally settled at Kiriath-jearim (also called Jaar), where it was almost forgotten (1 Sam. 7:1; Ps. 132:6). David finally brought the ark to Jerusalem (2 Sam. 6:12–17), and Solomon reunited all the elements of the tent of meeting prior to building the temple (1 Kings 8:1–4).

The name *Ebenezer* marks the beginning and ending of this part of the story in 1 Samuel. In 4:1, we learn that the Israelites were encamped at Ebenezer prior to their disastrous battle with the Philistines. But in 7:12, after the Israelites routed the Philistines, Samuel set up a stone and called it *Ebenezer*, which means “the stone of (God’s) help.” At first, the Israelites wrongly thought that God would help them simply because they had the ark of the covenant. But then, after they listened to Samuel, God really did help them.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE HOLY GOD (1 SAM. 5:1–5)

VERSES 1–5

The Philistines came into Canaan from the north, probably from somewhere in the area of the Aegean Sea. They were closely related to the Greeks. The Greeks always set up trophies after their military victories, and it seems that the Philistines had a similar practice. For them, the ark of the covenant was a trophy to commemorate their triumph over Israel and Israel’s God.

Setting *the ark of God* in *the temple of Dagon* implied that their god had overcome and captured Yahweh of Israel. Very little is known of the god Dagon. He may have been associated with the grain harvest and with storms, but he was thought of as a very high god. The Philistines would have immediately grasped the significance of seeing the image of Dagon broken and prostrate before the ark of the covenant. It implied that although they had beaten the Israelite army, the Israelite God was still superior to their god. Even so, the Philistines remained confused and superstitious. They should have recognized that Yahweh was of such awesome holiness that even their god bowed to him. They should have bowed to Yahweh

1 SAMUEL 5:1–5

¹ After the Philistines had captured the ark of God, they took it from Ebenezer to Ashdod, ² brought it into the temple of Dagon and placed it next to his statue. ³ When the people of Ashdod got up early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen with his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. So they took Dagon and returned him to his place. ⁴ But when they got up early the next morning, there was Dagon, fallen with his face to the ground before the ark of the LORD. This time, both Dagon’s head and the palms of his hands were broken off and lying on the threshold. Only Dagon’s torso remained. ⁵ That is why, to this day, the priests of Dagon and everyone who enters the temple of Dagon in Ashdod do not step on Dagon’s threshold.

themselves, and they ought to have sought His favor. Instead of drawing the right conclusion, they instituted a new superstition. Since Dagon's head and hands had broken off at the threshold of the temple, they decided that the threshold was now especially holy, and that they should jump over it when going in or out.

How should we think about the holiness of the ark of the covenant? As Christians, we may have little experience with consecrated items such as holy water or sacred vestments, and we rightly suspect that such ideas can quickly degenerate into superstition. On the other hand, the ark was a genuinely holy object; it was made at the express command of God (Ex. 25:1-22).

The fact that the ark was truly sacred did not mean that it had magical powers. When the Israelites took the ark into battle, thinking it would guarantee a victory over their enemy, they were displaying superstition and not genuine faith. God, in effect, rebuked Israelite superstition by giving the Philistines a great victory and allowing the ark to fall into enemy hands. Even so, the ark was special. The Philistines blasphemed God when they treated it as a war trophy, and in response God first made a mockery of their god Dagon and then afflicted the people with disease.

For us, the elements of the Lord's Supper are a good analogy to the special status of the ark of the covenant. We do not believe that the bread and juice literally become the physical body and blood of Jesus when a preacher pronounces the words, "This is my body." We do not ascribe a mystical strength to the elements, as though they contained within them the power to remove sin or heal the body and soul. This does not mean, however, that we regard the communion bread and cup as ordinary, or that we can treat the Lord's Supper as though it were like any other meal. Paul reports that some Christians in Corinth did just that: they acted as though communion were a party, and they had no regard for this sacred time of worshiping Christ. Paul's judgment was direct (see 1 Cor. 11:27,30).

Only God is truly holy, and only He has the power to save. Neither the ark of the covenant nor a piece of bread used in communion has ever had supernatural power. But if God has designated something as special and therefore "holy" in the sense that it is set apart for special use, it should not be subjected to abuse. We blaspheme God when we show such an object no respect. By extension, we should have respect for physical copies of the Bible, for church buildings, and for ordained ministers, but we should not let this become superstitious awe. In the final analysis, the sin of the Philistines was not that they blasphemed the ark but that they blasphemed God.

Explain what the Lord's Supper is. How can its significance be exaggerated or understated? Should people regard the church building or a physical copy of the Bible as sacred? How might such ideas become dangerously exaggerated?

JUDGMENT EXPERIENCED (1 SAM. 5:6)

VERSE 6

Because the Philistines held the ark of the covenant as a trophy, God afflicted them with trauma and plague. The precise nature of their sickness is uncertain, but many believe it was bubonic plague. The **tumors** that the verse mentions may have been buboes, the inflammation of the lymph glands associated with bubonic plague. Also, the offering that the Philistines sent when they returned the ark included golden images of mice (6:4). Infected fleas that infest rodents often spread plague, and thus the Philistines may have associated their affliction with mice.

Curiously, the ancient Greek translation of this verse includes the words, “And (the hand of the Lord) came against them and spread to them in the ships, and mice swarmed over the middle of the land itself.” This implies that the infected mice arrived in Ashdod on cargo ships and then carried the disease throughout Philistia. This has a parallel in the European Black Death of the 14th century. It began in 1347, when galleys containing infected men and rats landed in Sicily and then in Genoa, Pisa, and Venice. Philistine Ashdod, like those cities, was on the coast.

Even so, we cannot be certain that bubonic plague was the disease that afflicted the Philistines. The Bible has little interest in giving us a precise diagnosis. The important point is that whenever one Philistine city would send the ark off to another one of their cities, almost immediately the new possessor of the ark would experience the disease (5:7-12). Holding the ark of God as a trophy was a visible act of blasphemy, and God punished it most severely. Things got so bad that the very sight of the ark approaching one of the Philistine cities was enough to throw the residents into panic (v. 10).

(In PSG, p. 36) **How would you explain the balance between God’s kindness and judgment?**

It is important to notice that God, not men, punished the Philistine blasphemy. We read in Romans 12:19, “Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord.” If we should leave vengeance to God when we are harmed, we should also leave it to Him when He is blasphemed. A zeal for God can be a good thing, and there are times when we should rebuke other people for their lack of respect for God and Christ. Even so, it is one thing to rebuke a person, but it is another thing entirely to physically attack that person in an act of vengeance.

A major cultural conflict has become very prominent in recent decades. Muslim activists have called for and have carried out acts of violence in retaliation for what they perceived to be insults directed toward Mohammed. Cartoonists have been murdered for drawing pictures representing Mohammed—as if drawing a picture of Mohammed were

1 SAMUEL 5:6

⁶ The LORD’s hand was heavy on the people of Ashdod, terrorizing and afflicting the people of Ashdod and its territory with tumors.

the same as making an image of God. The most famous episode was the massacre at the French periodical *Charlie Hebdo* in January of 2015.

A Christian might well be insulted by caricatures of Jesus. We might publicly express disapproval or write letters of protest, but we are never allowed to respond with violence. It is far better to pray for those who insult the name of Jesus, knowing that He will repay. God will punish all acts of blasphemy. But while He is patient and allows space for repentance, we should do the same.

INSTRUCTIONS FOLLOWED (1 SAM. 6:11-12)

VERSES 11-12

Having finally realized that nothing good could come of their holding on to the ark of the covenant, the Philistines decided they had to send it back. The instructions for how they should return the ark came from their own diviners (pagan priests who specialized in interpreting omens) and not from an Israelite priest or prophet, such as Samuel. Pagan religion dictated that if people had offended a god and suffered for it, they had to provide restitution, or something worse could happen to them. The gods were easily angered but could be bought off. Therefore, the Philistines believed that they had to send along gifts when they returned the ark.

They sent the ark back on a cart being pulled by two cows that had unweaned calves. The calves were penned up separately, so that the natural tendency of the cows would be to try to get back to the calves so that they could get relief from the pain in their full udders. When the cows instead headed straight down the road to Israelite territory, this proved to the Philistines that Yahweh was indeed punishing them for their impiety toward the ark. The disease had not been a coincidence.

They sent five **gold mice** and five **images of their tumors** back with the ark (see 6:4). The offerings were presumably made of solid gold, and thus would have represented a substantial financial gift. The number five represented the five cities of the Philistines: Ashdod, Gath, Gaza, Ekron, and Ashkelon.

The five golden tumors are analogous to what we see in later Greek religion. The Greek god of healing was named Asclepius, and a shrine to this god was located near Pergamum in modern Turkey (this is the same Pergamum that received one of the seven letters; see Rev. 2:12-17). People with various diseases would go to the Asclepius shrine looking for healing. If they got better, they would dedicate to the god an image of the part of the body that was healed. Archaeologists have found many sculptures of hands, feet, and other body parts that were prominently displayed in the shrine as supposed proof of the god's healing power. The golden tumors sent back with the ark served to acknowledge that Yahweh had afflicted them and to request that He relent and heal them.

As mentioned above, the Philistines may have sent golden mice because there had been a plague spread by rodents. But there could be another explanation. Some Greeks worshiped a god named Apollo Smintheus. This god was associated with plagues and also with mice. If the Philistines knew

1 SAMUEL 6:11-12

¹¹ Then they put the ark of the LORD on the cart, along with the box containing the gold mice and the images of their tumors. ¹² The cows went straight up the road to Beth-shemesh. They stayed on that one highway, lowing as they went; they never strayed to the right or to the left. The Philistine rulers were walking behind them to the territory of Beth-shemesh.

of a similar god, they might have offered golden mice because they thought that this was an appropriate way to recognize the power of a deity who had sent a plague.

For our purposes, the lesson of this passage is that God is compassionate when dealing with human ignorance. The Philistines had no clear notion of how to please Him, and so they did the best they could with the limited knowledge they had. In a primitive way, they were seeking for God to forgive their offense and to stop afflicting them with the plague. Although the text does not explicitly say so, it appears that the plague ended.

The apostle Paul would tell the Athenians that God “overlooked the times of ignorance” when pagans worshiped gods of wood and stone and when they lived by myths and omens. God was forbearing with human ignorance and superstition, but superstition is never a good thing. God has sent salvation in the Person of Jesus, and He demands that everyone repent of their idolatry and believe in His Son (Acts 17:29-31).

Can you think of a time when your understanding of the Bible and the Christian faith was very limited and you prayed in a way that you now know was primitive or even superstitious? How can we hold the fact that God is patient with us in our spiritual ignorance in balance with the fact that we must grow in knowledge?

WORSHIP OFFERED (1 SAM. 6:13-16)

VERSES 13-16

•**Beth-shemesh** was a town in southwestern Judah located on the edge of the Philistine territory. As such, it was where the ark entered Israelite territory. The local people immediately recognized the ark for what it was. They sacrificed the cows that had drawn the cart as an offering of thanksgiving. God had taken away the reproach of Israel by restoring the ark to His people, and He had shown Himself to be more powerful than the Philistines and their gods.

The people of Beth-shemesh had felt themselves to be crushed under the boot of the Philistine warriors. They experienced God’s salvation when they looked up and saw the ark of the covenant coming toward them, with humbled Philistines walking behind it. The only proper response was worship.

After witnessing the exuberant worship of the Israelites at the return of the ark, the Philistine rulers **returned to Ekron** with the satisfaction that their task had been completed. Unbeknownst to them, God’s purpose had been accomplished in their exposure to the worship of Him. One of the testimonies that believers give to a watching world is the heartfelt and dynamic worship of their Savior, Jesus Christ. He is the God above all gods, and one day every knee will bow before Him (Phil. 2:8-10).

1 SAMUEL 6:13-16

¹³ The people of Beth-shemesh were harvesting wheat in the valley, and when they looked up and saw the ark, they were overjoyed to see it. ¹⁴ The cart came to the field of Joshua of Beth-shemesh and stopped there near a large rock. The people of the city chopped up the cart and offered the cows as a burnt offering to the LORD. ¹⁵ The Levites removed the ark of the LORD, along with the box containing the gold objects, and placed them on the large rock. That day the men of Beth-shemesh offered burnt offerings and made sacrifices to the LORD. ¹⁶ When the five Philistine rulers observed this, they returned to Ekron that same day.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

BEGIN: Create a display of items that can become idols. (Ex.: A football, a guitar, a credit card, a family photo, etc.). As everyone settles in, direct attention to the items, and ask: *What do these have in common? How can each of these things become an idol in our lives?*

EXPLAIN: *Anything we put before God can become an idol in our lives. In today's session, we will discuss the importance of putting God first by giving Him the respect He deserves.*

INTRODUCE: Summarize 1 Samuel 4 for the group, and explain: *God executed judgment on Eli's family as promised, resulting in the death of Eli and his sons. In addition, Israel lost the ark of the covenant.* Using **Pack Item 10** (*Israel's Counterparts in 1 Samuel*), discuss Israelite contemporaries during 1 Samuel, with particular focus on the Philistines.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 5:1-5, noting what happened to the ark once it fell into Philistine hands.

EXAMINE: Place the group into two smaller teams. Assign the first team Exodus 25:21-22, and the second team Numbers 7:89. Direct them to identify the significance of the ark of the covenant based on their assigned passage. Bring the teams back together to discuss their observations on the significance of the ark.

ASK: *What did the capture of the ark by the Philistines signify for the Israelites?*

EXPLAIN: *In the Old Testament, the ark was God's dwelling place on earth. The ark itself was not God, like other nations had man-made idols, but God used the ark to display His power and glory.*

ASK: *In what ways does God demonstrate His superiority over false gods? How would you describe to a friend the destructive effect of worshiping a false god instead of the God of the universe? (PSG, p. 36)*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 5:6. Highlight the word *heavy*. Explain that the Hebrew word for *heavy* often translated *glory*.

ASK: *What does the glory of God mean to you? (From the PSG, p. 36): How would you explain the balance between God's kindness and judgment?*

OBSERVE: Using **Pack Item 7** (*Movement/Locations of the Ark*), outline the movement of the ark described in 1 Samuel 5:7-12. Explain why the Philistines did not want to keep the ark.

READ: Ask one individual to read aloud the two paragraphs under Instructions Followed in the PSG (p. 37). Then direct another person to read aloud 1 Samuel 6:11-12, as the rest of the group listens for the actions of the cows.

ASK: *In what ways have you witnessed God display His power in unlikely situations? (PSG, p. 38)*

READ: Direct someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 6:13-16. Observe the Israelites' response upon the return of the ark.

EXPLAIN: Using 1 Samuel 6:1-11,19-20 and the commentary under Worship Offered (p. 39; PSG, pp. 38-39), expound on the process by which the Philistines returned the ark to the Israelites and the Israelites' manner of worship in receiving the ark.

COMPARE: Discuss the similarities and differences in the treatment of the ark of the covenant by the Philistines and the Israelites.

ASK: *Who showed more reverence for the ark of the covenant? When have you observed non-believers who showed more reverence for the Lord than some people who identify as Christians? What does our attitude toward the holiness of God reveal to a lost world around us?*

DISCUSS: Read aloud John 4:24. Ask: *What two elements does Jesus describe as being necessary for worship? What does it mean to worship God in spirit and truth? Why are both elements of worship important? How does John 4:24 speak to what happened in 1 Samuel 6?*

EXPLAIN: *One of the testimonies that believers give to a watching world is the heartfelt and dynamic worship of their Savior, Jesus Christ. Unbelievers' exposure to true worship of God can plant seeds that have eternal impact on them.*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Corinthians 14:23-25, as the group reflects on their most meaningful worship experiences.

SHARE: *What worship encounters with the greatness and glory of God are fixed in your memory? What makes that particular encounter stick out in your mind?*

EXPLAIN: *We can worship false gods when we fail to be intentional with our focus. Let's take a moment to evaluate our priorities by looking at how we spend our time and money.*

EXAMINE: Provide each individual a sheet of paper and a pen. Label one side *Money* and the other side *Time*. On each side, have everyone draw a circle for a pie chart. Ask them to divide the pie by how much time and money they actually spent on individual categories in the last week. Direct the group to look for imbalances in priorities to identify potential idols and reflect on what may be taking a more important position in their lives than God.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Remind the group of the importance of placing Jesus first in our worship and in our lives. *Look over the idols we discussed at the start of today's session. In what ways can these idols easily creep into our lives? How can we guard against this creeping?*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 40): *Worship binds believers together, even in small group Bible studies. What steps can be taken to help your group grow in your worship together? Are there worship actions you can incorporate into your meeting time on a regular basis?*

PRAY: Take turns praying a sentence prayer describing God's worth to us. After each person in the group has had the opportunity to pray, close with this prayer. *Thank You, God! You—alone—are worthy to receive all our praise. Help us to worship You in spirit and in truth this week.*



PRACTICE

- Contact group members who were absent this week to ask for prayer requests. Spend some time praying for their requests.
- As a part of your daily Bible study, record two or three reasons to praise God each day.
- Send an email or text message to encourage the group to complete a new time and money priorities chart for this week, comparing the differences, if any, in how they've used their resources.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Call for the group to list local monuments and their significance. Explain that in 1 Samuel 7:12, Samuel led the Israelites to remember how God helped them through a difficult battle situation by commemorating a stone of remembrance. Ask: *Why is it important in our worship to remember how the Lord has helped us?*

Encourage the group to create additional stones of remembrance with their families or friends this week. They may want to display the stones in a special place as a reminder of the Lord's help in their lives.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion on idols, divide the group into smaller teams of two or three. Instruct each team to create a scenario of a person worshipping an idol who encounters the one true God (ex.: a person consumed with career, money, social media, or physical health). After allowing time to work, invite each team to share their scenarios.
- To enhance the discussion of worshipping God in spirit and truth, provide each individual a sheet of paper and a pen to write their own prayer of praise to God. Allow the group to share responses if desired.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Encourage everyone to choose one thing they think they could not live without. Lead them to pray about that one thing this week to determine if they have let it become an idol in their lives.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Locate the lyrics to "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing," by Robert Robinson. Read aloud verse 2, and discuss the context from 1 Samuel 7:12.

KING?

Only God is worthy of being looked to as the Ruler of His people and of His creation.

1 SAMUEL 8:4-9,19-22

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 8:7

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 8:1–11:15, First Thoughts (p. 44), and Understand the Context (pp. 44-45). Observe the progression that took place to transition Israel from a theocracy to a monarchy. Specifically note which people did or did not seek the Lord for direction throughout the process.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 8:4-9,19-22, using Explore the Text (pp. 46-49). Examine the Israelites' motives behind demanding a king.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 50-51). Use More Ideas (p. 52) and ideas online at MinistryGrid.com/ExploretheBible to customize the plans. Brainstorm creative ways to use the Suggested Music Idea (p. 52) that are appropriate for the talents of your group.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Paper and pens; Posterboard and markers; Stationery note cards; and Images of famous monarchs. Prepare to display the following Pack Item: **PACK ITEM 9** (*The Roles of Prophets, Priests, and Kings*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God

God is the Creator, Redeemer, Preserver, and Ruler of the universe.

Although the legends of King Arthur are a familiar source of enjoyment for us today, the tales originated from a culture of people who felt doubtful—even fearful—about their future survival. In the face of invading foreign tribes and ever-changing, contentious leadership, the early people of England longed for a protector who was powerful in battle, chivalrous in nature, and of the utmost Christian character. Out of these concerns emerged the tales of King Arthur, the ideal king in every way. It is unlikely that the King Arthur of these legends actually existed in history; nonetheless, these tales have endured for many centuries because they represent the potency of the idea of a king—the belief that one powerful leader can make all the difference between devastating defeat and triumphant victory. However, even mythical Arthur's reign carried the seeds of its own destruction—the legends conclude that his leadership eventually fell prey to human sin and collapsed.

(In PSG, p. 42) **What are your expectations of a leader? What are the qualities of a leader that inspire your trust?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Monarchy: Samuel's Apprehension," an archive *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Summer 2016 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

Like the early people of England, the Israelites also feared invasion and sought an earthly king for their protection. Up to this point, Israel did not have kings like the other nations; judges had led them after Joshua's death (Judg. 2:6-10). These judges were deliverers raised up by God to lead the people out of idolatry and the resulting misfortune. Typically, they were military leaders who guided Israel into battle with foreign enemies, but their impact was limited and temporary (Judg. 2:18).

While most of the judges led the nation in battle, Samuel's ministry as a judge demonstrated what Israel truly needed: righteousness, repentance, and a return to the Lord. The Lord God could be all the King that His people ever needed. Unfortunately, the Israelites were blind to such a vision, and as a result, the king they demanded would only delay the repercussions of their sin.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 8:1–11:15

Old Testament law contains all kinds of rules. For example, it demanded that the Israelites give a tithe to God (Lev. 27:30), refrain from charging interest on private loans (Ex. 22:25), leave parts of their fields for the poor to harvest (Lev. 19:9-10), and follow specific rules for dealing with captives in warfare (Deut. 21:10-14). These and similar regulations give us the impression that

early Israel had a strong central government. After all, how else could they have enforced these regulations? The reality was quite different. In fact, prior to King Saul, Israel had no central government whatsoever.

When Israel was on the plains of Moab and about to invade Canaan, Joshua was named as Moses' successor. Under Joshua's leadership, the conquest was carried out and the territory allotted to the tribes. But no successor was named for Joshua. After Joshua, early Israel had no king or national ruler, no capital city, no bureaucracy, no tax collectors, no highway department, no national court system, no representative body (like a congress or parliament), no welfare department, and no standing army. They did have "judges," but these were leaders who were sporadically raised up for specific purposes. (God would raise up a judge to deal with a foreign oppressor, as when Gideon fought the Midianites.) Judges served more as heroes and champions than as governors. We hear little about them after they defeat the oppressor. Their authority tended to be more local than national, and they had no administration serving under them. There was no office of "judge" that had to be filled (in contrast to a king or a president, whose office cannot be left vacant), and there was no system of succession.

How was Israel supposed to survive in this nearly anarchic situation? There was a kind of local government. Groups of city elders would meet to make decisions and especially to adjudicate in cases of crime (Someone stole my ox!) or civil lawsuits (Someone allowed his ox to graze in my wheat field!). Local militias served as defense against outside attack. In case of a national emergency, there would be an ad hoc national assembly (Judg. 20:1-11).

Most importantly, Israel was supposed to be faithful to their covenant with God and to regard Him as their king. The laws about tithes, provisions for the poor, military life, slavery, and so forth were not enforced by a central state. The people were expected to understand that God enforced the laws and punished all disobedience. They were to obey the laws about tithing, providing for the poor, and so forth out of respect for God alone.

If the Israelites had been faithful to God, He would have protected them and given them all the prosperity they could handle. Their society would have been orderly and a model of righteousness. But they were not faithful. We see this in the summary of the history of early Israel given in Judges 2:11-23. Because of disobedience to God, they descended into true anarchy. Being a lawless, disorganized people, they were prey to many outside invaders. Since they would not have God as their king, they wanted a human king to protect them.

This situation had been anticipated in Deuteronomy 17:14-20, and this is where the story in 1 Samuel 8 begins. But it is important to recognize that the original plan was for the Israelites to live as subjects of God, with Him as their only king. They were to show fealty to Him by keeping all the commands Moses had given them. This was their covenant duty.

BIBLE SKILL

Synthesize multiple passages related to a similar theme.

Review the following passages, looking for guidelines for how Christians should relate to their government or how they should govern: Romans 13:1-7; 1 Peter 2:13-19; and Matthew 20:20-28. Record the insights you gained about government and governing.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

A KING DEMANDED (1 SAM. 8:4-5)

1 SAMUEL 8:4-5

⁴ So all the elders of Israel gathered together and went to Samuel at Ramah. ⁵ They said to him, “Look, you are old, and your sons do not follow your example. Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have.”

VERSES 4-5

As Samuel aged, he appointed his two sons to assist him in fulfilling his duties as a judge. This was highly unusual; the sons of the earlier judges did not succeed their fathers or inherit their authority. The one exception was Abimelech, son of Gideon, who tried to succeed his father and to actually claim the title of king. That ended in complete disaster (Judg. 9). We do not know why Samuel gave his two sons such authority, and it did not work out well. They abused the prestige they had as the sons of Samuel and were notoriously corrupt (1 Sam. 8:1-3).

A delegation of *elders* came to Samuel at his hometown of **Ramah**. Their message was simple: the leadership Samuel provided was ending. He was too old to continue, and his sons were morally unqualified for leadership. Therefore, he should appoint for them a king.

When we analyze their argument, we can see what was really on their hearts. The fact that Samuel was old and that his sons were corrupt was no reason to select a king. Samuel could have relieved his sons of their authority and could have retired from office himself. Israel had gone on for hundreds of years in which a judge would die without having any successor. For much of that time they either had no judge or the living judge was not actively governing the nation. The real reason they wanted a king is given at the end of their petition: **Therefore, appoint a king to judge us the same as all the other nations have.**

(In PSG, p. 46) **How does a desire to be like other people impact a person’s values and character? How does that desire cloud a person’s decision making?**

The other nations were the model that the Israelites were following. Israel had been chosen to be God’s own possession and a holy nation, separate from all other nations (Ex. 19:5-6), but they wanted to be like the other nations. Without explicitly saying it, they were abandoning the distinctive relationship they had with God as His covenant people.

They wanted their king to *judge* them. This does not mean that his primary task would be to adjudicate cases in the court system. The main thing that Ehud, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, and Samson had done was to fight against oppressors. This was what the people wanted their king to do; he, too, should go out and wage war for them (1 Sam. 8:20). But they wanted his authority to be formally fixed and to be made permanent.

In summary, the Israelites wanted a permanent, central state under a ruler with authority to raise an army, collect taxes, and organize defenses. They were willing to cede decision-making power to this man, and they

were willing for his sons to succeed him as a ruling dynasty. The reason they chose to do this is that they thought that such an arrangement would give them security against foreign enemies. They made a classic trade-off. They gave up some freedom, wealth, and autonomy in order to be protected from various threats. The Israelites were implicitly confessing that they did not trust God to defend them.

Make a list of things we rely on instead of God. In what do we place our faith for financial security? What do we rely on for protection from illness, violence, and crime? How can these institutions take the place of God?

REJECTION DECLARED (1 SAM. 8:6-9)

VERSES 6-7

The Bible tells us little about Samuel's feelings in this matter beyond the fact that he considered their demand sinful. We do not know if he felt hurt by having his sons' faults pointed out to him or if he considered the demand to be a thinly veiled attack on his competence or integrity. But God told Samuel that he should not let his personal feelings blind him to the real point. This was not really an attack on Samuel at all. God said, ***They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their king.***

God would tell Samuel to do as the people wished and give them a king (v. 9). This does not mean that God approved of their action. It demonstrates God's forbearance. He is willing to let people choose their own path, even if their choices are poor and will cause them pain and regret.

VERSES 8-9

God did not consider Israel's decision to be anything new or surprising. They had been turning from God ever since the exodus from Egypt. They demonstrated a lack of faith when they panicked at the Red Sea and were convinced that Moses had brought them out of Egypt to get them all killed. They demonstrated a tendency toward idolatry when they made the golden calf and proclaimed that it was the god that had saved them from slavery. From that perspective, Israel's demand for a king was entirely predictable (and in fact was predicted in Deut. 17:14-20). Even so, this demand was a turning point in Israel's history.

Israel had many problems during the time of the judges. Much could be said about the folly and sinfulness of this era, but that is not the subject of this study. Even so, we need to recognize that the period of the judges was also a time of unparalleled freedom. They had no taxes, no conscription, and they bowed to no man. From the time of King Saul to the end of their history, the Israelites were always under a king, be he Israelite or foreigner. This lasted right up until they were under the

1 SAMUEL 8:6-7

⁶ When they said, "Give us a king to judge us," Samuel considered their demand sinful, so he prayed to the LORD. ⁷ But the LORD told him, "Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected Me as their king."

1 SAMUEL 8:8-9

⁸ They are doing the same thing to you that they have done to Me, since the day I brought them out of Egypt until this day, abandoning Me and worshiping other gods. ⁹ Listen to them, but you must solemnly warn them and tell them about the rights of the king who will rule over them."

thumb of the Roman emperors, who destroyed their city and put an end to ancient Israel.

In 1 Samuel 8:11-18, Samuel warned what would happen if a king ruled over the people. The warnings come down to two ideas: first, the king would have the power to confiscate persons and their wealth, and second, he would have the power to give favors to some people while crushing others.

According to Samuel, the king had the power to confiscate people by conscripting them into royal service. Young men were put into the ranks of the army, where they would charge ahead of the king into the teeth of battle. The king would live, but many of them would die. Some men were elevated to high rank, but others were set to manual labor. The former, the king's favorites, received honor and opportunities to enrich themselves. The latter plowed the king's fields, worked in his shops, and produced his weapons. Women, too, could be conscripted for service in the king's palace. The king could confiscate all kinds of property, including land, livestock, and slaves. The end result was that the Israelites would discover they had no rights at all: "He can take a tenth of your flocks, and you yourselves can become his servants. When that day comes, you will cry out because of the king you've chosen for yourselves, but the LORD won't answer you on that day" (1 Sam. 8:17-18).

1 SAMUEL 8:19-22

¹⁹ The people refused to listen to Samuel. "No!" they said. "We must have a king over us. ²⁰ Then we'll be like all the other nations: our king will judge us, go out before us, and fight our battles."

²¹ Samuel listened to all the people's words and then repeated them to the LORD. ²² "Listen to them," the LORD told Samuel. "Appoint a king for them." Then Samuel told the men of Israel, "Each of you, go back to your city."

How can we balance faith in God with simple prudence? What does this imply about our attitudes toward government, insurance, or bank accounts? What can we do to help ourselves maintain faith in God so that our true faith is not in human institutions?

REBELLION DETERMINED (1 SAM. 8:19-22)

VERSES 19-22

Samuel's words of warning had no impact on the Israelites, except that it made them more determined to get a king. They considered the old system to be a failure because they had suffered so much under the Philistines and earlier oppressors. In reality, the old system of trusting God by keeping the covenant had not failed. It had never been tried. Every generation of Israelites, from the conquest to the time of Samuel, had been faithless and idolatrous. But since things had gone so badly, the Israelites decided that the prudent thing to do was to get a king.

The Israelites said, "***We must have a king over us. Then we'll be like all the other nations.***" The key expression here is *like all the other nations*. The Israelites were like the other nations when they worshiped idols, and now they would be like the nations in having a king. The other nations imbued their kings with godlike qualities. They attributed to them something like superhero powers to defeat their enemies and to bring down blessings from

heaven. As the nations bowed down to idols of wood and stone, so also did they bow low before flesh and blood mortals. Pagan attitudes toward kings were really not far removed from idolatry, and the Israelites were determined to do the same thing.

We actually see pagan thinking about kings in action in Acts 12:20-23. Herod Agrippa I so impressed the Phoenicians with his generosity and splendor that when he spoke, they shouted, "It's the voice of a god and not of a man!" But God was not impressed with Herod. He struck him with a severe and sudden illness, and he died.

Sometimes modern people treat a human ruler as a semi-divine figure and surround him with a personality cult. Obvious examples include Adolf Hitler and Mao Zedong. In these cases, a man with political power was regarded as a god-like figure. Other cases involve a theocracy, in which a religious leader takes all political power for himself on the grounds that he speaks for God. The rulers of Iran and of the Islamic State have given us clear examples of this. How might these examples serve as warnings for us?

If the Israelites were not going to listen to Samuel, they might have listened to a much older speech, the parable of Jotham. It is found in Judges 9:7-15. When Abimelech, son of Gideon, decided to try to take his father's power and become king in Israel, he killed all of his brothers (Gideon's other sons) except for Jotham, who escaped the slaughter. The people of Shechem made Abimelech their king, but Jotham told them a strange parable. He said that the trees decided to choose a king. But when they offered the crown to various trees, they all refused. The olive tree, fig tree, and the grapevine all said that they had important work to do, producing olives, figs, and grapes. Becoming king of the trees would interfere with their much more useful work of providing rich produce for people to consume. Finally the trees went to the worthless bramble. He said that he would be their king.

There is much one could say about this parable, but one point is obvious. Jotham warns us not to place too much confidence in the ability or virtue of those who have worldly power. Any time we look to some human leader as our savior, thinking we have found someone as magnificent and as richly gifted as a great olive tree, we should look more closely. We may have actually chosen a bramble. When we fail to acknowledge Jesus as our Savior and the King of kings (Rev. 19:16), chaos will be the inevitable result.

**How is it spiritually dangerous to look to a human being as your savior?
What will that do to your relationship with God?**

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

NAME: As the group arrives, call for individuals to name popular monarchs in any country past or present. Discuss reasons for their popularity.

ASK: *It's estimated that two billion people around the world watched the 2011 wedding of William and Kate, Duke and Duchess of Cambridge, on television. Why are people so fascinated with royalty?*

TRANSITION: *In today's session we'll discuss Israel's desire to be ruled by an earthly king and the resulting transition from a theocracy (government ruled by God) to a monarchy (government ruled by a king). Pass around **Pack Item 9** (*The Roles of Prophets, Priests, and Kings*) to volunteers to read about the different roles found in 1 Samuel.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Provide Bibles to those who need one. Direct the group to read silently 1 Samuel 8:4-9, looking for specific reasons why Israel wanted a king.

ASK: *What reasons did the Israelites give Samuel for needing a king? Did the Israelites seek God in their decision to demand a king?*

GUIDE: Emphasize the first two reasons as relating to Samuel's age and the dereliction of duty by his sons. Ask: *Were these reasons or excuses? What's the difference?*

EXPLAIN: *The Israelites revealed that the third reason for wanting a king was to have what the other nations around them had. Summarize Deuteronomy 7:1-16, giving special attention to verses 4 and 16. Discuss possible reasons why God warned the Israelites not to be like other nations.*

DISCUSS: *Although Moses gave instructions for future kings in Deuteronomy 17, why was having a king not God's ideal plan for the Israelites? Referring back to reasons why people are fascinated with royalty, why are humans tempted to worship a visible person before God?*

ASK: *How does a desire to be like other people impact a person's values and character? How does that desire cloud a person's decision making? (PSG, p. 46)*

DISCUSS: Read aloud Romans 12:1-2, and ask: *What temptations do we face to be like the world around us? What does it mean to live set apart for Jesus while still living as a member of society?*

READ: Direct a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 8:6-9. Instruct the group to listen for the result of the request. Point to the last paragraph under Verse 7 in the PSG (p. 47) beginning, "God had been Israel's King" Solicit responses to the PSG paragraph.

EMPHASIZE: Highlight verse 9 and God's direction to warn the people. Explain that God acted with grace through giving a warning.

GUIDE: Summarize 1 Samuel 8:10-17, pointing out the six “takes” recorded in these verses.

ASK: *What does a believer lose by relying on a human authority more than Christ? How do we determine when we should rely on a human entity and when we should not? (PSG, p. 48)*

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 8:19-22, as others listen for the people’s response to the warning.

ASK: *What do the descriptions of the desired king in verse 20 reveal about the people’s hearts? (PSG, p. 48) What does God’s allowing Israel to have a king teach us about God? (PSG, p. 49)*

EXPLAIN: *God gave the Israelites the king they demanded to their own detriment. Sometimes the best answer God can give us is “no” when we ask for something that’s not in our best interest. At other times, God allows us to have what we demand—along with the negative consequences—to teach us that His plan is truly the best path for us.*

GUIDE: Lead the group to discuss Samuel’s role in Israel’s demand for a king. *Samuel was faithful to seek the Lord’s guidance and delivered an unpopular warning.* Invite the group to share about a difficult time when they have spoken God’s truth in love to an unreceptive person. Ask: *How did God help you through that situation?*

CONSIDER: Though Samuel did not agree with the Israelites’ choice in form of government, he obeyed the Lord’s instruction and helped institute a monarchy.

STUDY: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 44) on how Christians should relate to their government.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Read the first paragraph on page 50 of the PSG: *God desires His people to be distinct from others, trusting Him in all matters. When we reject God’s leaders and their warnings, we are rejecting God in the process. We can trust God to provide godly leaders even when we are tempted to take matters into our own hands.*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 50): *Who are the leaders God has placed in your life who give you godly counsel and direction? Record a prayer, thanking God for them and asking for God to give them courage and direction to lead you well.*

PRAY: Call for volunteers to pray aloud for government leaders at the national, state, and local level to have God’s wisdom in decision making.



PRACTICE

- Text or email everyone in the group to remind them to keep praying for government leaders and authority figures in their lives.
- Examine any areas in which you may be struggling to support authority figures. Pray for God's guidance and wisdom in your interactions and attitudes toward those individuals. Use this week's memory verse (1 Samuel 8:7) to encourage your efforts.
- Contact the group and challenge them to focus this week on at least one of their goals for leaving a godly legacy.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Search the Internet for pictures of famous monarchs. Print several and display in a prominent position in the room. As everyone arrives, point out the pictures and see who can identify all of them. Then discuss the qualities of a godly leader.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion of 1 Samuel 8:4-9, lead the group to identify ways people today demand something other than Christ as their ruler. Guide them to compare reasons given today with reasons given by the people of Israel.
- To supplement the discussion of 1 Samuel 8:19-22, ask: *Describe a time when you've experienced the results of failing to hear God's Word and/or to follow His direction. What did you learn about yourself? About God?*
- To supplement the discussion of Israel's demand for a king, direct the group to compare 1 Samuel 8:20 with Exodus 14:14. Point to a horizontal line that you've drawn on a board. On one end, write *The Lord Fights* and on the other end write *The King Fights*. Ask: *How did the Israelites go from trusting the Lord to fight for them to trusting an earthly king to fight for them?* Ask for responses and write them on the time line. Ask: *If we are not careful, how do we shift from putting our faith in the Lord to putting our confidence in ourselves or other people?*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Explain that Samuel did not immediately appoint a king but rather waited for the Lord's guidance. Provide the group with paper and pens to write one thing for which they are waiting on the Lord's guidance. Encourage them to keep the note until they receive an answer from the Lord, and then write the answer to their prayer on the back.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Sing together the first verse of "Have Thine Own Way, Lord," by Adelaide A. Pollard. Close the session by praying that we would allow God to have His way in our lives this next week.

FEARED

God's character and power demand reverential fear.

1 SAMUEL 12:12-22

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 12:20

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 12:1-25, First Thoughts (p. 54), and Understand the Context (pp. 54-55). Take note of how often Samuel used the word *fear* in some form. Observe the different types of fear discussed.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 12:12-22, using Explore the Text (pp. 55-59). Look for evidence of God's grace and mercy in the midst of the Israelites' rebellion.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 60-61). Look for ways to display the Key Doctrine (*God's Purpose of Grace*) listed on PSG, page 55. Additional ways to introduce and conclude your session can be found online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Posterboard and markers; Paper and pens; Index cards; A smartphone; Copies of a concordance listing for the word *fear*; A list of common phobias; and copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God's Purpose of Grace

God's grace is the glorious display of His sovereign goodness, and is infinitely wise, holy, and unchangeable.

Lou Gehrig stands among some of the most famous New York Yankee baseball players. He was elected to the game's highest honor, the Hall of Fame, in an unprecedented act shortly after his retirement from the game. Gehrig's name has become interchangeable with the debilitating disease ALS (amyotrophic lateral sclerosis) that forced him to retire in 1939. Though he is remembered for his remarkable accomplishments and longevity on the baseball diamond, perhaps his lasting legacy is the farewell speech he gave at Yankee Stadium on the day of his retirement. He corrected those who might surmise he was a victim of bad luck. Instead, he counted the many blessings he had been given and concluded that he considered himself the luckiest man on the face of the earth.

(In PSG, p. 53) **If you were preparing your farewell speech, what would be the major emphasis of your remarks?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Rain as Divine Communication" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Chapter 12 records a pivotal moment in the Book of 1 Samuel and in the public ministry of Samuel the prophet. What at first appeared to be the public inauguration of Saul as king became Samuel's farewell address to the nation and includes his lengthiest speech. As one might expect, the prophet's last words to the people touched on what was most important. Samuel called on the nation of Israel to renew their covenant with God. Part of their responsibility in this covenant was to fear and reverence God.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 12:1-25

This chapter marks one of the most significant episodes in the history of Israel. There are a number of such pivotal episodes. Among them would be the call of Abraham (Gen. 12:1-3), the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 7-15), the covenant at Sinai (Ex. 19-24), the conquest of Canaan (Josh. 3-12), the covenant with David (2 Sam. 7), and the fall of Jerusalem (Jer. 52). Like all of those events, 1 Samuel 12 marks a radical change in the history of Israel. It signaled the end of the loose confederation of judges and the beginning of the Israelite monarchy. From the day Samuel gave the address recorded here until the fall of Jerusalem, kings would rule the Israelites. There would be no going back to the old order.

Samuel's speech marked the standard by which God would judge Israel now that they were a monarchy. Henceforth, God's judgment would always make reference to the ruling kings. The nation would be evaluated in terms of whether the king did good or evil in the eyes of the Lord

(see 1 Kings 11:6; 15:26; 16:25; 2 Kings 8:18; 10:30). In order to grasp the crucial place 1 Samuel 12 holds, we need to see how it is laid out.

1. Samuel established his credentials with the testimony of his life (vv. 1-7).
2. Samuel retold the story of Israel from the exodus to the request for a king (vv. 8-12).
3. Samuel laid down God's conditions (vv. 13-15).
4. Samuel established his credentials with a sign (vv. 16-18).
5. The people responded with repentance and fear (v. 19).
6. Samuel gave words of exhortation and comfort (vv. 20-25).

Samuel established his credentials first by asking if anyone had cause to accuse him of having abused his power. Had he taken someone's property, such as an ox or donkey, or had he taken a bribe? The people willingly affirmed that Samuel had done no such thing. If he had behaved in such a manner, he would have had no moral authority to rebuke them or to lay down God's requirements. Since no one could make such a charge, he told them to brace themselves for what he had to say.

As Samuel retold the story of Israel, he focused on how God had always saved them from their troubles. Through Moses and Aaron, God had saved them from slavery in Egypt. When they sinned, God punished them with attacks from the Moabites, Philistines, and other enemies. When they repented, God gave them judges, including Gideon, Barak, Jephthah, and Samuel himself. These heroic figures gave them victories and security. But when Nahash of the Ammonites began to terrify them, the old strategy of calling out to God for help was no longer good enough for them. They wanted a king. Samuel's point was obvious. For hundreds of years God had proven that He could save Israel from any foe, as long as they put aside their idols and turned to Him for help. But now they were placing their hope in a king.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

THE COVENANT REVISITED (1 SAM. 12:12-15)

VERSES 12-14

In one sense, everything had changed. Israel went from being a loose confederation with no central government to being a monarchy. Political and social life would be radically different. In another sense, nothing had changed. The terms that set the relationship between God and Israel were found in the Sinai Covenant. It had been established at Mount Sinai, as described in Exodus 19–24, and reaffirmed and given careful elaboration on the Plains of Moab just before the conquest, as described in Deuteronomy. The core of the law was the Ten Commandments, but many other stipulations and regulations supplemented and explained the core. Israel had laws that governed the function of their judicial system, their property rights, how they were to worship God, and many other details

1 SAMUEL 12:12-14

¹² “But when you saw that Nahash king of the Ammonites was coming against you, you said to me, ‘No, we must have a king rule over us’—even though the LORD your God is your king. ¹³ Now here is the king you’ve chosen, the one you requested. Look, this is the king the LORD has placed over you. ¹⁴ If you fear the LORD, worship and obey Him, and if you don’t rebel against the LORD’s command, then both you and the king who rules over you will follow the LORD your God.

of life—including even how they were to dress. But the whole of the law came down to a few simple ideas. Israel was to show devotion to God by keeping His commands and especially by shunning idols and other gods. Doing this, they would love God with all their hearts. And Israel was to respect the rights, persons, and property of others. Doing this, they would love their neighbors. If they did these things, God would keep them safe and well.

This was the essence of the Sinai Covenant, and when Israel adopted a monarchy, none of it changed. Israel would still be judged by these terms. Samuel could not have put it more succinctly: ***If you fear the LORD, worship and obey Him, and if you don't rebel against the LORD's command, then both you and the king who rules over you will follow the LORD your God.*** Samuel's words sound redundant; obviously, if they obeyed God they would follow Him. But in this case, *you will follow* Him effectively means, "you will be right with Him." In other words, God wouldn't lay any more duties on them, and they would be under His protection as long as they kept the covenant and stayed away from idols. This would be true of both the king and the people. Both had to keep the covenant, and in that sense, being under a monarchy would make no difference in regard to how they related to God.

(In PSG, p. 55) **How would having a king change the relationship between God and His people? How would it be different? How would it be the same?**

1 SAMUEL 12:15

¹⁵ However, if you disobey the LORD and rebel against His command, the LORD's hand will be against you and against your ancestors.

VERSE 15

The contrary was also true: ***However, if you disobey the LORD and rebel against His command, the LORD's hand will be against you and against your ancestors.*** That last phrase, *against your ancestors*, seems odd because it is hard to imagine how God would punish their ancestors, who were already dead. The old Greek version says, "and against your king," and in this case the old Greek could be correct. Samuel makes the same point in verse 25. If the Israelites failed to keep the Sinai Covenant, having a king would make no difference. Both king and people would be destroyed for their sin.

The Christian church throughout its history has existed under many forms of government. The first churches existed under a multi-national empire governed by an emperor in the city of Rome. Persecution of the churches was at times severe. The late empire became officially Christian, and this produced different problems for the churches. The fall of Rome brought about chaos and many small states—the medieval world of duchies and kingdoms and competing dynasties. Christians in the east found themselves under Islamic states. The modern world has seen churches toiling under officially atheistic states in communist regimes. Christians in America lived first under a foreign power, then under a republic with a very

limited government, and now under a fairly omnipresent republic operating through a vast bureaucracy. Governments and the ideologies that support them come and go, but the essential duties laid upon the churches remain the same. We are to hold fast to our confession of Christ and to the word of our testimony. We are to behave with integrity and kindness, and we are to walk humbly with our God. We are look to God and to no human being for our salvation. No one can deny that Christians in different eras and places have lived in radically different circumstances, but the core of our identity and of what God expects of us remains the same.

List some different circumstances in which Christians live. Some are in prosperous societies and some are in poor ones. Some are persecuted and others are not. The world has many governments with many ideologies. How might our Christian duties change, if at all? What duties do not change? Do different circumstances make it easier to live as a Christian?

A SIGN DELIVERED (1 SAM. 12:16-18)

VERSES 16-18

Rain came to Israel in a predictable pattern. The rainy season in Israel began in late October and lasted until February. November–December rains were the “early rains” and January–February rains were the “latter rains.” Planting of cereals took place before the rains, and the rain was essential for the growth of the grains. Cereal harvest began with the barley crop around the time of Passover (generally in March or April). This was followed by the wheat harvest, which ended around the time of Pentecost, in May or early June. We see this sequence in Ruth 2:23, which indicates that Ruth worked the fields of Boaz first during the barley harvest and then through the wheat harvest. Samuel spoke to the Israelites at the time of the wheat harvest, meaning that it was probably May. Rain was virtually unheard of in Israel at this time.

In addition, rain at harvest time could spell disaster. Proverbs 26:1 alludes to this: “Like snow in summer and rain at harvest, honor is inappropriate for a fool.” If the fields were wet, it would be very difficult to cut, bind, carry, and thresh the heads of grain. Wet grain would be more likely to rot. And, of course, the crops could be badly damaged if the storms were severe.

When Samuel called down rain in the normally dry month of May, he was doing two things. First, he was demonstrating that the words he was about to speak truly came from God. His ability to command the rain to fall showed that he was a true prophet of God. Second, the rain at harvest time was a vivid metaphor. Storms in May implied that the harvest would be ruined; by analogy, Israel’s request for a king would end badly. The untimely rain, like a locust plague or like a drought in mid-winter, implied

1 SAMUEL 12:16-18

¹⁶ Now, therefore, present yourselves and see this great thing that the LORD will do before your eyes. ¹⁷ Isn’t the wheat harvest today? I will call on the LORD and He will send thunder and rain, so that you will know and see what a great evil you committed in the LORD’s sight by requesting a king for yourselves.” ¹⁸ Samuel called on the LORD, and on that day the LORD sent thunder and rain. As a result, all the people greatly feared the LORD and Samuel.

1 SAMUEL 12:19

¹⁹ They pleaded with Samuel, “Pray to the LORD your God for your servants, so we won’t die! For we have added to all our sins the evil of requesting a king for ourselves.”

1 SAMUEL 12:20

²⁰ Samuel replied, “Don’t be afraid. Even though you have committed all this evil, don’t turn away from following the LORD. Instead, worship the LORD with all your heart.

1 SAMUEL 12:21-22

²¹ Don’t turn away to follow worthless things that can’t profit or deliver you; they are worthless.

²² The LORD will not abandon His people, because of His great name and because He has determined to make you His own people.”

the wrath of God. Israel’s request for a king had been an act of rebellion. In addition, rains at this time implied a bad harvest, and this implied a year of want and the danger of starvation. In short, it was an economic disaster. Samuel had warned the people that having a king would be economically ruinous for them. The king would seize their lands, their cattle, their servants, and even conscript their children (1 Sam. 8:11-18). Thus, their king would come down upon them and their fields like a storm out of season.

Are all signs from God miraculous? In Matthew 16:2-4, Jesus told the Pharisees that an evil generation seeks a miraculous sign, but that they could not discern the signs of the times. Do you see any “signs” of what God is doing on the horizon right now?

GOD’S MERCY AND GRACE (1 SAM. 12:19-22)

VERSE 19

The Israelites were obviously alarmed by what they saw. The rainstorm not only vindicated Samuel, but it implied that they had committed a great sin in asking for a king. It is noteworthy that they did not try to take back their request for a king. They knew that what was done could not be undone. They instead asked Samuel to intercede for them: ***For we have added to all our sins the evil of requesting a king for ourselves.*** That is, asking for a king was just one of many sins for which they bore deep guilt. Their request looks back to the precedent of the first great prophet of Israel, Moses, who interceded for the nation when it built the golden calf (Ex. 32:11-14).

VERSE 20

Samuel responded with words of compassion and reassurance: ***“Don’t be afraid.”*** He did not deny that what they had done was wrong (the words ***you have committed all this evil*** affirm that the Israelites were right to view their request as a sin). But he knew that God was forgiving and could redeem even bad decisions. The Israelites would need to do two things.

First, they should remain loyal to God. They should not turn away from following Him. Sometimes, our sin can so discourage us that we give up entirely. People abandon the faith not because they are angry at God but because they are convinced that their guilt is so terrible that they cannot possibly come back. They should resolve to continue to serve God and to do what is right even though their actions make them feel unworthy.

VERSES 21-22

Second, they should shun all idols. These are the ***worthless things*** that Samuel mentioned. Ancient peoples turned to idols for health, for prosperity, and for protection from enemies. The Israelites had turned to a king for protection. But looking to an idol was many times worse. If the people would simply place their trust in God, He would continue to watch

over them and sustain them, king or no king. Put another way, asking for a king was a sin, but it was not a fatal sin. Worshiping an idol was a fatal sin.

Samuel vowed that he would not sin against God by ceasing to pray for Israel (v. 23). His attitude showed great maturity. Had he been bitter, he would have said, “Well, they didn’t listen to me, so they can just live in the mess they have made for themselves!” But he did not do this. He would continue to ask God to heal them and be merciful to them. He did, however, leave them with a warning. If they did not heed his advice and serve God faithfully, nothing else they did would matter. Both they and their king would go down together (v. 25).

Do you sometimes get so frustrated at political decisions your country or your government has made that you cease to pray for them? Do you do the same thing to family members, to friends, or to your church, when they do something that is wrong? Why should you continue to pray for people even when you know they have made a bad decision?

We sometimes make very bad decisions. These are decisions that are not only wrong but that can never be fully undone. To give a simple but obvious example: we all have at times gotten into bad relationships. We can often escape such entanglements with relative ease. But a bad marriage is something we never fully escape. Years can be lost in such a marriage, and we can never get those years back. Even if the marriage ends by death or divorce, it will be with us to the end of life. And this is just one example. There are many decisions that have repercussions that we never fully escape.

But even very big, very bad decisions do not mean that our relationship with God is forever ruined. To a great extent, it is not changed at all. God forgives, and the clearest picture of His heart of forgiveness is seen in the crucifixion of His Son, Jesus Christ. What God wants both before and after our bad decisions is that we fear and serve Him, that we grow in faith and grace, and that we love one another.

The Israelites made a bad decision that changed their nation forever. Nevertheless, God’s marching orders for them—that they keep the Sinai Covenant—remained the same. No matter what we have done, God’s marching orders for us remain unchanged: that we should believe and obey the gospel of Jesus Christ.

(In PSG, p. 59) **Describe the balance between God’s judgment and His grace. When can they complement each other? When do we see both working simultaneously?**

BIBLE SKILL

Compare and contrast similar situations.

Read 2 Corinthians 13:7-10, and describe how Paul prayed for the Corinthian Christians. The church at Corinth was filled with troubles, conflicts, and false beliefs. How does Paul’s attitude compare to Samuel’s attitude towards God’s people? How do both of them demonstrate a deep love for God’s people in spite of their failings?

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

MATCH: Search the Internet for a list of different phobias. As participants arrive, call out the names of various phobias, and ask individuals to guess the fear associated with the name. After most of the group has arrived, discuss any fears individuals in the group may have. Ask: *What other phobias can you think of that have not been mentioned?*

ASK: *Considering that Oxford University Press cites more than 200 phobias, why are humans so fearful?*

TRANSITION: *Today we're going to examine the differences between fearing the Lord and fearing people or things.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SUMMARIZE: Using 1 Samuel 12:1-11 and First Thoughts (p. 54; PSG, pp. 52-53), describe the setting. State: *Samuel was delivering his final public speech to the Israelites.*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 12:12-15, as the rest of the group listens for God's directives to the people.

IDENTIFY: Use the PSG to introduce Nahash (p. 54).

EMPHASIZE: Highlight the role fear played in the demand for a king. Then lead the group to discuss the relationship between fear and trust.

STUDY: Lead the group to identify the directives given in 1 Samuel 12:12-15. Record their responses on the posterboard.

DISCUSS: *How does obeying these directives show trust in God?*

ASK: *How would having a king change the relationship between God and His people? How would it be different? How would it be the same? (PSG, p. 55) How do you see God at work in your life despite the times when you have failed to follow Him?*

HIGHLIGHT: Explain that God continued to relate to His people.

READ: Direct the group to read silently 1 Samuel 12:16-18, instructing them to look for God's demonstration of His power.

EXPLAIN: Using the paragraph under Verse 17 (PSG, pp. 56-57), outline the reason why a thunderstorm would be so unexpected to the Israelites.

ASK: *Bearing in mind that even insurance companies often use the phrase "acts of God" to describe catastrophic weather events, why are people more likely to recognize God's power after an unexpected weather occurrence? From the PSG (p. 56): What aspects of nature best represent God's power and character? Explain. How do these aspects cause us to revere Him?*

GUIDE: Call on a volunteer to read the paragraph under Verse 18 (PSG, p. 57) to further explain God's showing His supernatural power through Samuel.

ASK: *What does it mean to fear the Lord?* Point to Exodus 20:20 and Proverbs 1:7; 2:5 for insight. *What does fearing the Lord look like on a daily basis?*

READ: Direct someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 12:19-22, inviting others to pay close attention to the Israelites' plea and Samuel's response.

DISCUSS: *How would you describe the difference between godly fear and sinful fear?* (PSG, p. 58) Point to the comments under Verse 20 in the PSG (p. 58) to foster discussion.

EXAMINE: Direct half of the group to look up Psalm 112:7 and the other half to look up Proverbs 3:25-26. Call for two volunteers to read these verses. Discuss as a group what God says about the fear of bad news in these verses. Ask: *How can we avoid succumbing to the fear of the unknown?*

GUIDE: Point out today's memory verse (1 Samuel 12:20), using **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*). Emphasize that no matter how many times we fail God, we should never be afraid to run to Him. Invite the group to share about an experience in which God helped them overcome something they greatly feared.

COMPARE: Lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity that compares Paul's and Samuel's attitudes toward God's people (PSG, p. 58).

DISCUSS: *Knowing Samuel was frustrated with the Israelites for demanding a king, consider Samuel's final remarks to the people of Israel.* Lead the group to examine how Samuel showed grace to the Israelites, using the information under Verse 22 (PSG, p. 59).

ASK: *Describe the balance between God's judgment and His grace. When can they complement each other? When do we see both working simultaneously?* (PSG, p. 59)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: *Samuel called the Israelite people to have a healthy, reverential fear of God. He encouraged them to avoid being scared or having an unhealthy fear of God. Samuel reassured the Israelites that, despite their shortcomings, God would graciously continue to lead His people if they would obey Him. The same is true for us; God is ever-faithful and deserves our reverent fear.*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 60): *Identify the sins that come between you and God. Spend time in prayer, asking God to forgive you and empower you to live a God-honoring life. If you have never placed your trust in Jesus, review the information on the inside front cover or talk to the group leader about that first step.* Review the inside front cover and make yourself available for anyone who wants to talk after the session.

PRAY: Encourage individuals to spend a few minutes silently praying for God's help to eliminate any unhealthy fears in their lives.



PRACTICE

- Pray for each person in the group to avoid giving in to unhealthy fear. Petition that God would help them to have healthy fear of Him.
- Send an email or text message to the group and encourage them to follow through with extending grace to the person they listed on their cards.
- If you use the second Explore the Text idea under More Ideas below, follow up with individuals who may have questions about a personal relationship with Jesus Christ. Ask the Lord for discernment and guidance as you share and answer questions or address doubts.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Using smartphones, lead the group to look up the most obscure phobias they can find on the Internet. Discuss their findings once most have arrived.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the discussion of godly and sinful fear, provide copies of the listings for *fear* in a concordance. Explain to the group that a concordance is used to understand the definitions of words written in Hebrew and Greek, the original languages in which the Bible was written. State that the copies provided list the number of times the word *fear* is found in the Bible. Lead the group to examine how many references to fear are found in the Scripture. Ask: *What does the number of times fear occurs in the Bible tell us about the human nature of fear?*
- To supplement the discussion of God's grace and judgment, acknowledge that we all make mistakes. Take time to show how Jesus Christ's sacrifice is the greatest display of those godly attributes. Use the information under Verse 22 on pages 58-59 and in the PSG (p. 59).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to complete the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 60): *Reflect on God's power and character as described by Samuel. Record ways you have seen God demonstrate His power in your life. Take time to worship Him in light of His power.* Challenge the group to do this activity individually as well.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Provide copies of the hymn "Trust and Obey" by John H. Sammis. Examine the words in the chorus. Discuss how the simple acts of trust and obedience can alleviate fears that cause us to suffer. Consider closing the session by singing the first verse and the chorus.

JUDGED

Judgment awaits those who reject God's instruction.

1 SAMUEL 15:7-15,22-23

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 15:22

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 13:1–15:35 and *Understand the Context* (pp. 64-65). Observe the results of Saul's disobedient acts in each chapter.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 15:7-15,22-23, giving special attention to Saul's justification of his actions. Notice Samuel's response to Saul's excuses for his behavior. Consult the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com) for further insight into Saul's descent from the throne.
- **PLAN** the group time using ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 70-71). Modify your group plans using More Ideas (p. 72) and those online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible. Look for ways to incorporate the Bible Skill in the PSG (p. 64) into the session.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Paper and colored pencils; Posterboard and markers; Index cards; and copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*); **PACK ITEM 10** (*Israel's Counterparts in 1 Samuel*); and **PACK ITEM 13** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 15:22*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

God

To God we owe the highest love, reverence, and obedience.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “Who Were the Amalekites?” and “Destroy Them All” in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

BIBLE SKILL

Use a Bible dictionary (either print or online) to learn more about the historical background.

Use a Bible dictionary to discover the history of the Amalekites. Notice the different interactions and altercations between them and the Israelites. How does their history help you better understand the conflict between the two nations?

Do you remember the parable Jesus told about the vineyard owner who had two sons? A father said to his first son: “My son, go, work in the vineyard today.” The son initially refused (“I don’t want to!”), but later he “changed his mind and went.” The father then went to the second son and likewise told him to go work in the vineyard. This son initially agreed: “I will, sir,” but he didn’t go. Then Jesus asked his listeners: “Which of the two did his father’s will?” (Matt. 21:28-32).

(In PSG, p. 63) **When God seeks someone to fulfill a task or role, what qualities does He desire?**

When the Lord God seeks a man or a woman for a particular task or role, He looks for someone who will obey Him. While other qualities can be spiritually valuable, they become meaningless if the person in question doesn’t take God at His word and obey Him. King Saul possessed some admirable qualities for leadership, such as discernment (1 Sam. 14:19) and courage (14:36). But at key moments, Saul failed the greatest test of a spiritual leader—the commitment to obey God.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 13:1–15:35

The account of the reign of Saul in 1 Samuel 13–14 is episodic, jumping from one incident to another to illustrate the nature of Saul’s reign. It concludes in 14:47-51 with a general summary of his early reign. This general summary is in some respects the most important part of the text. The individual episodes are important, but they skew our picture of Saul if we don’t take into account the broader summation of his deeds.

First, Saul was a great leader and military commander. As 14:47 says, “Wherever he turned, he caused havoc.” He had victories over Moab, the Ammonites, and Edom (located east and southeast of Israel), over the kings of Zobah (to the north of Israel), over the Amalekites (desert raiders who came in from the southeast), and over the Philistines (to the southwest of Israel). In short, he had victories in every direction. Saul laid the foundation for the great empires of David and Solomon. Because of Saul’s leadership, Israel was no longer the prey of the greedy peoples all around them. He “delivered Israel from the hand of those who plundered them” (v. 48). In that sense, the Israelites got exactly what they asked for: a king to go out and fight for them.

Second, we learn that the Philistines were Saul’s most formidable enemy. Because his whole life was spent fighting them, he was constantly

on the lookout for good soldiers. Verse 52 says, “The conflict with the Philistines was fierce all of Saul’s days, so whenever Saul noticed any strong or brave man, he enlisted him.” This demonstrated again Saul’s considerable military skills, and it shows us that he thought about the long term. He wanted a core of professional, competent soldiers. This was the beginning of a standing army in Israel. It fulfilled Samuel’s prediction that a king would conscript Israelite young men into his army (8:11). It also gave birth to the centralized, bureaucratic state that came to maturity in the reign of Solomon.

Third, we learn the names of Saul’s father (Kish), his wife (Ahinoam), his sons (Jonathan, Ishvi, and Malchishua), his daughters (Merab and Michal), and his military commander (his cousin Abner). Jonathan, Michal, and Abner would be important figures in the later history. Saul also fathered two sons by a concubine named Rizpah (2 Sam. 21:8). Saul does not appear to have kept a harem, and if his relationship with Rizpah came after the death of his wife, Ahinoam, he may have been monogamous. This is in stark contrast to David and Solomon, who kept large harems, and in so doing brought great trouble to their reigns.

In short, the summary in 1 Samuel 14:47-51 tells us that Saul had many qualities that made for a great king. But he also had fatal flaws that would make him a tragic figure. The episodes of chapters 13–14 foreshadow his downfall. First, Saul was in some respects a devout man, but he could also be headstrong, rash, and superstitious. This is illustrated by his foolish command that put the whole army under a vow not to eat anything while they were in the midst of a day of battle (14:24). His son, Jonathan, not knowing about the vow, ate some honey. Because of this, Saul very nearly killed his son (14:42-45). This behavior was an echo of Jephthah’s foolish vow and his subsequent sacrifice of his daughter (Judg. 11:30-39). To the alert Bible reader, this similarity to Jephthah is a warning that Saul was unstable, had a confused understanding of faith in God, and would come to a bad end.

Second, Saul could be persuaded to disobey a direct command from God, as when he did not wait for Samuel but personally officiated at a sacrifice (1 Sam. 13:8-14). This trait would be his undoing.

We should also notice that Jonathan’s heroic victory over a Philistine garrison near Michmash (14:1-14) is a parallel to David’s heroic victory over Goliath. This prepares the reader for the story of the friendship of David and Jonathan.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SAUL’S DISOBEDIENCE (1 SAM. 15:7-9)

VERSE 7

The command that God gave to Saul seems unbelievably harsh: he was to kill every living person among *the Amalekites*, and he was to slaughter all of

1 SAMUEL 15:7

⁷ Then Saul struck down the Amalekites from Havilah all the way to Shur, which is next to Egypt.

their livestock (15:3). This policy, often called the “ban,” was actually rarely given in the Old Testament. It is a directive that no one could be spared and that no plunder could be taken. Normally, ancient warfare meant spoils for the victors. They would take the survivors of the defeated people as captives and sell them into slavery, and they would take the property, including livestock, as plunder. The normal rules of warfare for Israel are found in Deuteronomy 20, and they indicate that the ban was primarily meant for the wars of conquest under Joshua. Even in the conquest, except for the city of Jericho, Israelites could take plunder for themselves. But Jericho was under the full ban, and so were the Amalekites that Saul was commanded to attack. Why were the Amalekites given such harsh treatment?

The answer is given in verse 2: “I witnessed what the Amalekites did to the Israelites when they opposed them along the way as they were coming out of Egypt.” This refers to the incident in Exodus 17:8-16, when the Amalekites attacked the Israelites at Rephidim. This was a particularly treacherous act. The Israelites, having recently come out of slavery in Egypt, no doubt appeared to be easy prey, and they had a large quantity of sheep that would have been tempting plunder. But Joshua defeated the Amalekites. (This was the episode in which Moses held up his rod, with Aaron and Hur supporting his arms.) At the end of the battle, Moses placed a curse on the Amalekites to the effect that God and His people would be forever at war with Amalek (Ex. 17:14-16). Thus, Amalek was permanently under the ban.

In addition, the Amalekites continued to threaten and harass Israel in later years, after the conquest. Amalekites raided Israel in force during the time of Gideon, both terrorizing and plundering the people (Judg. 6). A contingent of Amalekites attacked David’s base while he was away with his army, and they took away their wives and children as captives. David led his men on a forced march to overtake and defeat the Amalekites, thereby rescuing their families (1 Sam. 30). Although we naturally recoil at the command Saul received, we should not anachronistically read our values back into the early Iron Age. The Amalekites, even by the standards of the day, were a brutal, lawless people.

Complicating the matter was the fact that the Amalekites were closely associated with the Kenites, a group that was much more sympathetic to the Israelites. Moses’ father-in-law, Jethro, was a Kenite (Judg. 1:16; 4:11). The story of his visit to the Israelite camp is told in Exodus 18. This is why Saul warned the Kenites, “Since you showed kindness to all the Israelites when they came out of Egypt, go on and leave! Get away from the Amalekites, or I’ll sweep you away with them” (1 Sam. 15:6). This shows Saul in a favorable light. He knew his Israelite history, and he rightly spared the Kenites. Also, the notation that Saul set an ambush (v. 5) again shows that he was a careful military commander.

Saul defeated the Amalekites in a campaign near **Havilah** and **Shur**. The Amalekites came out of the Arabian Peninsula, and that is where Havilah was. Shur is often located at the northeast corner of Egypt, but the Hebrew in verse 7 more precisely means that Shur was “opposite Egypt.” It may have been just northwest of the Arabian Peninsula. Regardless of the

precise geographical location, it is clear that Saul won a complete victory over the Amalekites. Except for what followed, this would have been the greatest military achievement of his illustrious career.

VERSES 8-9

Saul partially obeyed the command he was given. He did slay all of the people except for their king, **Agag**. Saul's army destroyed all the worthless and unwanted things, but they did not kill **the best of the sheep, cattle, and choice animals**. It is clear enough why they kept the animals alive: greed. The animals were very valuable, and the men wanted them for themselves.

It is not clear why Saul kept Agag alive. It may be that there was a kind of reciprocal leniency among kings. They could kill one another's armies, but they did not kill each other. In that way, kings could ensure their own survival even in defeat. Or it may be that Saul intended to hold Agag for ransom. He might have received a very large payment from other Amalekites in return for the living Agag, but it was certain that he would get nothing for his corpse. It may be that Saul hoped to extract some kind of concession from Agag, much as Ahab did from Ben-Hadad (1 Kings 20:31-42). Whatever his motive was, his action was in direct disobedience to God.

This much is clear: Samuel did not condemn Saul because Saul had an abundance of compassion. As far as we can tell, Saul slaughtered the men, women, and children of Amalek without batting an eye. He and his men took the livestock out of avarice, and he certainly had some ulterior motive for sparing Agag. We should not suppose that Saul got a raw deal, being criticized and condemned just for being kind.

There is yet another element of the Old Testament story that makes Saul's disobedience particularly disturbing. We have noted that the only other place where the total ban was in effect was at Jericho. When the Israelites brought down that city, however, there was another example of a man who violated the command: Achan, who took some of the plunder of the city for himself. For his sin, he and his family were put to death (Josh. 7). Saul could not expect to repeat the sin of Achan and yet go unpunished.

(In PSG, p. 65) **What makes settling for partial obedience so tempting? In what ways could a believer exclude the "best" from his or her obedience to God?**

SAMUEL'S CONFRONTATION (1 SAM. 15:10-15)

VERSES 10-11

Samuel received a message from God: ***"I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from following Me and has not carried out***

1 SAMUEL 15:8-9

⁸ He captured Agag king of Amalek alive, but he completely destroyed all the rest of the people with the sword. ⁹ Saul and the troops spared Agag, and the best of the sheep, cattle, and choice animals, as well as the young rams and the best of everything else. They were not willing to destroy them, but they did destroy all the worthless and unwanted things.

1 SAMUEL 15:10-11

¹⁰ Then the word of the LORD came to Samuel, ¹¹ "I regret that I made Saul king, for he has turned away from following Me and has not carried out My instructions." So Samuel became angry and cried out to the LORD all night.

1 SAMUEL 15:12-15

¹² Early in the morning Samuel got up to confront Saul, but it was reported to Samuel, “Saul went to Carmel where he set up a monument for himself. Then he turned around and went down to Gilgal.” ¹³ When Samuel came to him, Saul said, “May the LORD bless you. I have carried out the LORD’s instructions.” ¹⁴ Samuel replied, “Then what is this sound of sheep and cattle I hear?” ¹⁵ Saul answered, “The troops brought them from the Amalekites and spared the best sheep and cattle in order to offer a sacrifice to the LORD your God, but the rest we destroyed.”

My instructions.” The text does not say that God had revealed to Samuel that Saul and his troops had kept some of the plunder for themselves. It is possible that Samuel had already heard about this in the ordinary way and that he was troubled about it, pondering how he should respond. But God’s message made everything clear. Saul had sinned, and God had decided that his dynasty must end. At that point, Samuel knew what he would have to tell Saul.

Christians may wonder what to make of God’s assertion that He regretted making Saul king. How can an omniscient God regret anything? The problem here is similar to the problem in Exodus 32:14. God had told Moses that He was going to wipe out the Israelites because of the sin of the golden calf, but when Moses interceded for Israel, God relented (that is, He changed His mind and did not destroy Israel). In fact, the same verb is used in both verses.

A common way of dealing with the problem is to say that the language here is condescending. In this interpretation, God never really regrets or changes His mind about anything, but He speaks as if He has had a change of heart so that human beings can relate to Him as to another person. Otherwise, God’s way of dealing with people would seem so alien that we, who naturally think in limited, finite terms, would find God incomprehensible. God was, so to speak, pretending to have regrets about Saul so that Samuel would understand that God was really serious about ending Saul’s dynasty.

This explanation has some serious drawbacks. First, it implies that God was deceiving Samuel, or at least that He made a phony pretense about having regret. Second, God could have just told Samuel outright that Saul’s kingship was finished without speaking about regret at all. Third, and most importantly, this explanation presumes we know more about the mind of God than we really do. We have no idea what it is like to be omniscient, and we are hardly in a position to describe how an omniscient being ought to act or think. It may be part of the greatness of God that He can simultaneously be outside of time and yet also function within time. Perhaps He can know all things and yet genuinely react to events and people as things play out. Perhaps He can know all things timelessly and, from that perspective, never feel regret. But also, in some manner we don’t fully understand, perhaps He can have genuine feelings in response to what people do. That, at least, is how the Old Testament always portrays Him.

Samuel was profoundly distressed by God’s decision, and he **cried out to the LORD all night**. Apparently, he pleaded with God to give Saul another chance. But it was not to be. Samuel’s anguish shows us that he was not just being a crotchety old prophet when he confronted Saul. The decision came from God, not Samuel.

VERSES 12-15

Samuel was told that Saul went to build a **monument for himself**. While Saul was seeking honor for himself, God’s honor had been diminished through disobedience. Ultimately, all sin is a blight on the honor of God, and all judgment is the restoration of His glory.

When Samuel confronted Saul, he was rather indirect. After Saul claimed to have obeyed God, Samuel said, ***“Then what is this sound of sheep and cattle I hear?”*** He did not say, “You liar! You kept all that plunder for yourself!” Even so, Saul immediately knew where the conversation was headed, and he proceeded to make excuses. He claimed to have kept only the best livestock in order to make a sacrifice to God. Samuel would have none of this.

(In PSG, p. 66) **What makes confronting someone about his or her disobedience a challenge? What risks are involved when confronting someone? What risks are involved when we don’t confront someone?**

GOD’S REJECTION (1 SAM. 15:22-23)

VERSES 22-23

After a fairly angry exchange, in which Saul claimed that he did obey God and that the livestock he kept were merely for a sacrifice, Samuel made one of the most memorable statements in the Bible: ***Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry.*** Even if Saul had been telling the truth, and even if he and all the men had intended to sacrifice all the livestock they had plundered, it did not change anything. Saul had been given a direct command, and he disobeyed it. Divination and idolatry are the most heinous sins of the Old Testament. When Samuel told Saul that what he had done was the equivalent of these, he meant that the deed was inexcusable. Because Saul ***rejected the word of the LORD***, God ***rejected*** Saul ***as king***.

Good intentions never cancel out disobedience. And the good intentions with which we excuse disobedience are often fraudulent. We disobey because of something we want, and then we try to salve our consciences with some religious act, such as giving something to the church. God is not fooled. His judgment is certain, even if delayed. The only preparation for divine judgment is to believe and obey Jesus Christ and His gospel.

(In PSG, p. 68) **How does accepting partial obedience or religious practice as a substitute for full obedience show disrespect for God?**

1 SAMUEL 15:22-23

²² Then Samuel said: Does the LORD take pleasure in burnt offerings and sacrifices as much as in obeying the LORD? Look: to obey is better than sacrifice, to pay attention is better than the fat of rams. ²³ For rebellion is like the sin of divination, and defiance is like wickedness and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He has rejected you as king.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, present the following scenarios:

1. You receive an unexpected bonus at work. It's a gift from the company. Are you most likely to tithe 10 percent, give charitably to someone or a good cause but give less than 10 percent, or give nothing to the church or charity?
2. You become aware of a person in a difficult situation. Are you most likely to personally help them, find someone else who can help them, or ignore them after you pray for them?

Lead the group to determine what they think most people would do in each situation. Guide them to share why people might choose each option. Then ask: *Which is easier to justify in our minds: partially disobedient actions or totally disobedient actions? Why is that?*

TRANSITION: Display **Pack Item 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) somewhere prominent in the room. As the group reviews the map, explain: *God entrusted Saul with leading the Israelite people. However, just as Saul ascended quickly to the throne, he also descended quickly because of his disobedient actions.* Set the context for the session by summarizing 1 Samuel 13:1–15:6 and Understand the Context (pp. 64–65; PSG, pp. 63–64). Using **Pack Item 10** (*Israel's Counterparts in 1 Samuel*), explain that God gave instructions on His judgment of the Amalekites (see Deut. 25:17–19; Ex. 17:14; and Num. 24:20).

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:7–9, directing the group to listen for compromises made by Saul.

GUIDE: Lead the group to place Saul's actions along the horizontal line used in the Label section at the beginning of the session. Instruct them to identify words or phrases in verses 7–9 that point to reasons for Saul's partial obedience.

ASK: *What makes settling for partial obedience so tempting? In what ways could a believer exclude the "best" from his or her obedience to God?* (PSG, p. 65)

READ: Direct one volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:10–12 and another person to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:13–15. Guide the group to pay close attention to Saul's response when confronted about his sin.

SKETCH: Distribute paper and colored pencils. Direct the group to draw a figure or face (or an emoji) that could have accompanied each verse in 1 Samuel 15:13–15. Share sketch ideas as a group if desired.

DISCUSS: *Saul spared the Amalekite king and allowed his men to keep the best animals despite God's directive to destroy them all.* Ask from the PSG (p. 66): *What makes confronting someone about his or her disobedience a challenge? What risks are involved when confronting someone? What risks are involved when we don't confront someone?*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 15:22-23, while others look for what God truly desires from His people.

COMPARE: Divide the group into two smaller teams. Lead one team to examine David's response to being confronted with sin in Psalm 51 (especially vv. 16-17). Guide the second group to outline Saul's response to Samuel's confrontation in 1 Samuel 15:12-21. Call the teams back together to discuss the differences between David's and Saul's responses to the sin in their lives.

ASK: *How does accepting partial obedience or religious practice as a substitute for full obedience show disrespect for God?* (PSG, p.68)

READ: Point out the adapted version of 1 Samuel 15:22 on **Pack Item 13** (Poster: 1 Samuel 15:22). Lead in reading aloud the verse from your Bible.

DISCUSS: *The original language of this verse could be translated "obedience surpasses sacrifice" (see PSG, p. 68). Why does God want our obedience more than our sacrifices?*

GUIDE: Point out the words "pay attention" in verse 22. Discuss the connection between paying attention and obedience. Ask: *What is the connection between disobedience and idolatry? How do they derive their existence from each other?* (PSG, p. 69)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: *First Samuel 15:22-23 essentially summarizes chapter 15. God expects our obedience rather than our partially obeying and offering sacrifices as a substitute. Discuss ways we can choose to fully obey God. Emphasize the Key Doctrine (PSG, p. 69).*

MEMORIZE: Provide the group with a 3x5 index card. Instruct them to record the memory verse for this session. Encourage the group to commit this verse to memory in the next week. Distribute copies of **Pack Item 5** (Bookmark: Memory Verses) to those who need one.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to reflect quietly on the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 70): *Review your life, looking for areas of partial obedience. What actions do you need to take to complete your obedience to God?*

PRAY: Create small groups of two or three, and invite each group to share among themselves about an area of their lives in which God is calling them to be more obedient. Then guide them to close in prayer for God's help to follow Him in obedience.



PRACTICE

- Encourage the group to connect through email or text message with those individuals with whom they prayed in the smaller groups. Invite them to check in with one another concerning continued prayer requests.
- As a leader in your church, pray and reflect on areas in your life in which God is calling you to greater obedience. Write your prayers and reflections in a journal, if desired.
- Contact the group through social media and encourage them to continue working on the memory verse for the week (1 Samuel 15:22).

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Poll everyone to see who prefers to listen to the voice-activated technology on a GPS navigation system and who prefers to read the step-by-step directions. Invite individuals to share an experience in which they got lost by not following the directions on their GPS system. Explain: *In today's session, we'll discuss the importance of fully following God's directions for life.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- For more background on the Amalekites, lead the group in completing the Bible Skill activity in the PSG (p. 64).
- In lieu of having volunteers read 1 Samuel 15:10-12,13-15, recruit two people to reenact the conversation between Samuel and Saul. Instruct one to play the part of Samuel and one to play Saul.
- To supplement the discussion of Saul's and David's responses to sin in their lives, lead the group to call out the best excuses for disobeying that they have heard from children or perhaps used themselves as a child. Using the example of Saul, discuss reasons why people continue to give excuses when they make wrong choices, even as adults.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

On the back side of the index card on which they wrote the weekly memory verse, encourage the group to write down areas of their lives in which they are offering sacrifices to the Lord instead of full obedience. Invite them to spend time this week praying about what they need to do in order to offer God their full obedience.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Provide copies of the hymn "Come, All Christians, Be Committed," by Eva B. Lloyd. Lead in a responsive reading of verses 1-2.

ANOINTED!

God desires people who seek to follow Him with all their hearts.

1 SAMUEL 16:4-13

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 16:7

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 16:1-23, First Thoughts (p. 74), and Understand the Context (pp. 74-75). Observe Samuel's reaction to each of the Lord's instructions.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 16:4-13, focusing particularly on the Lord's qualification for a new king. For further insight into the process of David's being anointed as the future king, consult the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com).
- **PLAN** the group time using the Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 80-81) section. Tailor the plans for your group using More Ideas (p. 82) and the Explore the Bible blog: Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Posterboard and markers; Paper, note cards, and pens; Pictures of famous military leaders of various heights. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*); and **PACK ITEM 14** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 16:7*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

The Church

Each congregation operates under the Lordship of Christ through democratic processes. In such a congregation each member is responsible and accountable to Christ as Lord.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "David as a Leader of Israel" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

BIBLE SKILL

Read for emphasis.

Read aloud 1 Samuel 16:7 several times, placing emphasis on different words or phrases in different ways with each reading. You may want to emphasize nouns, then verbs, and then prepositional phrases. Record how each reading gives a different insight into the verse.

Research indicates that there is a correlation between a person's height and the salary he or she earns. This is particularly true in occupations where the perception of others is crucial, such as sales and management. It is also documented that height is seen as a social asset and perceived as indicative of a person's competence. Of course, no research suggests that taller people actually fulfill these perceptions. It is merely indicative of the way we often judge people.

(In PSG, p. 72) **How much does a person's physical and outward appearance contribute to your perception of him or her as a leader?**

Even Samuel the prophet was not immune to the persuasion of outward appearance. Saul, the first king of Israel, was taller than most of his peers (1 Sam. 9:2). After God rejected Saul as king and the spiritual search for a successor began, one might wonder if precedent had an impact on Samuel's expectations for a new king. It is easy to make assumptions based on physical appearance or even birth order. God's admonition to Samuel (16:6-7) seems to indicate that even a godly prophet might be tempted to assume leadership suitability based on stature or appearance. However, God sought a certain type of heart in His next king of Israel. While it isn't necessary to assume that those who were rejected were sinful in heart, it is apparent that God chose David because his heart was inclined to follow the Lord unconditionally.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 16:1-23

By the time we get to 1 Samuel 16, it is not clear how many years had passed since Saul was anointed as king. It was a fairly extensive period, and it may have been decades. We first met Saul as a young man who was sent out by his father to look for lost donkeys (1 Sam. 9). The ceremony in which Saul was publicly hailed as king seems to have taken place not too long after that. At that time, Saul was still fairly young and was apparently somewhat timid. When he was selected as king, he was hiding among the people's baggage (10:20-22). On the other hand, Saul was not a child at this time. One of his first acts was to lead Israel in a war against Nahash the Ammonite, and that was not the work of a boy (1 Sam. 11).

At 1 Samuel 14, we are obviously at a time much later than Saul's coronation. In chapter 14, he has a son, Jonathan, who is old enough to serve in the army and to attack a Philistine garrison single-handedly. Assuming

that Jonathan was at most a small boy when Saul was inaugurated, we can probably say that at least 15 years elapsed between chapter 10 and chapter 14. By the time we get to the anointing of David in chapter 16, more time had passed.

This is important because we can see that a major change had come about in Saul's life in the intervening years. When first told that he would become king, he protested that he was unworthy (9:21). When his supporters wanted to kill some men who had opposed the choice of Saul as king, he spared his opponents (11:12-13). But years of ruling had turned Saul into a different man. He became so entrenched in his position that Samuel feared that Saul would kill him in order to hold on to his throne (16:2).

Our story begins in a politically tense situation. The once humble Saul is now determined to hold on to power, and he knows that Samuel no longer supports him (1 Sam. 15:28). God has commissioned Samuel to anoint a new king. Samuel, being as fallible as any other man, needs God's guidance in making his choice of whom to anoint.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

SAMUEL'S ASSIGNMENT (1 SAM. 16:4-5)

VERSES 4-5

God commanded Samuel to go to Bethlehem and anoint one of the sons of Jesse to be the next king of Israel (1 Sam. 16:1). Samuel protested, fearing that Saul would kill him as soon as he heard what Samuel had done (v. 2a). God replied that Samuel should take a young cow with him and tell people that he had come to Bethlehem to make a sacrifice (vv. 2b-3). Readers cannot fail to notice that this is something of a subterfuge. Although Samuel did make a sacrifice, that was not his real reason for going to Bethlehem. Some readers wonder how God could command this. Some would say that it involved a half-truth if not an outright act of deceit. Others would say that since Samuel did, after all, make a sacrifice, there was no real deceit.

We should begin by making two observations. First, the Bible is entirely unabashed in telling this part of the story. It does not excuse or justify God's action in any way. Either the author was untroubled by God's action, or he felt that there was a profound truth here that should be left unstated so that the reader would ponder the story. Second, as a historical fact, it was far too soon for Israel to be made aware of David's anointing. David would first need to build up the people's confidence by his great deeds, such as the slaying of Goliath. Apart from how Saul would react to hearing that this boy in Bethlehem had been anointed, the people of Israel as of yet had no reason to embrace young David as their king. At this time, even David's brothers had little use for him (see 17:28).

The moral dilemma we are dealing with is often described with a hypothetical situation: Imagine you are living in Nazi-controlled territory

1 SAMUEL 16:4-5

⁴ Samuel did what the LORD directed and went to Bethlehem. When the elders of the town met him, they trembled and asked, "Do you come in peace?" ⁵ "In peace," he replied. "I've come to sacrifice to the LORD. Consecrate yourselves and come with me to the sacrifice." Then he consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice.

and you are hiding a family of Jews in your house. The Gestapo bangs on your door, and an officer asks if there are any Jews here. You are able to deceive him, because the hiding place is very secure. But you have to make a decision. You can lie and save the lives of a Jewish family, or you can tell the truth and condemn them to a horrible death.

Some Christians say that you should lie but then confess your sin of lying to God. This is an understandable but difficult position, since it asserts that we are sometimes under a moral obligation to sin. Some say you should tell the truth but pray that God miraculously intervenes to save the family. Others say that you should boldly lie, telling the Gestapo that no Jews were in the house. This latter view regards the moral law as a hierarchy. It argues that lying is wrong, but that allowing the innocent to be murdered is much worse. When there is no alternative, saving a life outweighs deceit, even though under normal circumstances deceit is wrong. We see this moral dilemma actually played out in the Bible at Exodus 1:15-21, when Pharaoh commanded the Hebrew midwives, Shiphrah and the Puah, to kill all the newborn Israelite boys.

Regardless of what we make of the moral issue here, the simple fact of the story is that one day Samuel showed up unexpectedly at the town of Bethlehem. This alarmed the townspeople, who felt that his arrival could portend no good. Prophets so often brought bad news with them—messages of doom and judgment—and people preferred not to see them at all. When Elijah turned up at the court of Ahab, he received the greeting, “Is that you, you destroyer of Israel?” (1 Kings 18:17).

(In PSG, p. 74) **In what ways does pursuing the call of God upon one’s life bring isolation from others? What are the risks and rewards of such a pursuit?**

Samuel assured the people of Bethlehem that he was there to make a sacrifice and that they should not be frightened. He told them to sanctify themselves in preparation for the event, but he also made sure that the **Jesse and his sons** were invited and properly sanctified. He wanted to be sure that Jesse’s sons were in attendance. That, after all, was his real reason for being there.

The sanctification involved ritual preparation, since no one who was unclean could participate. If they were defiled (for example, by touching a dead body, or if a woman had just finished her monthly period), they had to go through cleansing. People also had to refrain from any ritually defiling activity, such as sexual activity, prior to such a sacrifice (see Ex. 19:15; 1 Sam. 21:4). The preparation would have taken several days, but Samuel did all that God had told him. He was ready both to make the sacrifice and to anoint one of Jesse’s sons as the next king.

Samuel did all that God told him, as the story narrates. Yet he did raise an objection at first, saying Saul would kill him for anointing a new king (1 Sam. 16:2). Does Samuel's initial question in verse 2 imply that he did not fully trust God, or was it simple prudence? Can following God involve forethought and questioning? What are examples of this in our lives?

GOD'S CRITERIA (1 SAM. 16:6-10)

VERSES 6-10

When Samuel saw Jesse's eldest son, **Eliab**, he was sure that this was the man he should anoint. Verse 7 implies that Eliab was tall, and this was also a trait of Saul (see 10:23). It looks as though Samuel was as likely as anyone to be swayed by appearances. But if height had not enabled Saul to be a good king, it was unlikely to make a real difference in Eliab. It turns out, moreover, that Eliab did not have a particularly strong character. In the Goliath episode, Eliab proved himself to be petty and jealous. He said to David, "Why did you come down here? ... Who did you leave those few sheep with in the wilderness? I know your arrogance and your evil heart—you came down to see the battle!" (17:28). A man who could be so unfair and spiteful toward his own brother would not refrain from vengeful recriminations against anyone else. He would not have been a good king. In the same measure God rejected all the sons of Jesse who were present at the sacrifice.

After God rejected Eliab, He said to Samuel that **man does not see what the LORD sees, for man sees what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart**. God did not say that what is visible is meaningless. If a person who is not in dire poverty habitually wears disheveled, dirty clothes, people are right to suspect that what is on the outside is a manifestation of something wrong on the inside. Part of what makes for a mature, socially adjusted adult is awareness that appearances do matter and that we should not be indifferent to how people perceive us. In addition, the cultivation of good habits in grooming, dress, demeanor, tact, and so forth reflects self-discipline. But appearances are only hints at the true character, intelligence, grace, and virtue of a person. They can be misleading. God sees directly into the heart. He has no need to use the outside as an indicator of what may be on the inside, because the inside is fully exposed to Him.

For example, consider a church that is evaluating two men for the job of pastor. Each comes with good recommendations and with support from the search committee. They both preach to the congregation, and both have good content and good delivery. One is tall, athletic looking, and strikingly handsome, but the other is overweight and physically unimpressive. Which one is likely to get the call? How might someone justify voting for the more handsome candidate?

1 SAMUEL 16:6-10

⁶ When they arrived, Samuel saw Eliab and said, "Certainly the LORD's anointed one is here before Him."

⁷ But the LORD said to Samuel, "Do not look at his appearance or his stature, because I have rejected him. Man does not see what the LORD sees, for man sees what is visible, but the LORD sees the heart."

⁸ Jesse called Abinadab and presented him to Samuel. "The LORD hasn't chosen this one either," Samuel said.

⁹ Then Jesse presented Shammah, but Samuel said, "The LORD hasn't chosen this one either."

¹⁰ After Jesse presented seven of his sons to him, Samuel told Jesse, "The LORD hasn't chosen any of these."

1 SAMUEL 16:11

¹¹ Samuel asked him, “Are these all the sons you have?” “There is still the youngest,” he answered, “but right now he’s tending the sheep.” Samuel told Jesse, “Send for him. We won’t sit down to eat until he gets here.”

1 SAMUEL 16:12

¹² So Jesse sent for him. He had beautiful eyes and a healthy, handsome appearance. Then the LORD said, “Anoint him, for he is the one.”

1 SAMUEL 16:13

¹³ So Samuel took the horn of oil, anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the LORD took control of David from that day forward. Then Samuel set out and went to Ramah.

(In PSG, p. 75) **What dangers lie in assuming that certain individuals are suited for leadership based on appearance or a generalization?**

(In PSG, p. 77) **What criteria do we use to select our leaders? How does God’s choice open the door for Him to be honored?**

DAVID’S SELECTION (1 SAM. 16:11-13)

VERSE 11

Aware that God had not chosen any of the sons of Jesse he had yet seen, Samuel asked if there were any others. David was then brought to him, and apparently as soon as he saw the boy Samuel heard the voice of God telling him that this was the one to anoint. The main lesson is that the choice of David was entirely God’s; Samuel was merely the agent for designating him as the next king.

VERSE 12

It is curious that, right after telling us that people look on external appearance but that God looks on the heart (v. 7), the passage says that David **had beautiful eyes and a healthy, handsome appearance**. The implication may be that God had so endowed David as a concession to human weakness. God chose David to be the next king, but the people probably would not have accepted him if he had been plain or homely. After the monarchy and a system of succession were well established, the physical appearance of a king was of less importance. It is no doubt significant that Absalom, David’s son, who with popular support illegally seized the throne, was a man of striking physical beauty (2 Sam. 14:25).

VERSE 13

So Samuel ... anointed David as king. Centuries later, another King would come from Bethlehem—God’s Anointed One (“Christ” means “anointed one”; see John 1:41). Jesus Christ is our perfect, eternal King.

Immediately after Samuel anointed him, the **Spirit of the LORD** came upon David. In earlier times, the Spirit came upon various judges, including Othniel (Judg. 3:10), Gideon (Judg. 6:34), Jephthah (Judg. 11:29), and Samson (Judg. 13:25; 14:6,19; 15:14). In every case, the Spirit enabled the judge to overcome his enemies or some immediate danger. (Judges 13:25 might be an exception; it literally says that the Spirit began to “agitate” Samson, but even this seems to mean that it stirred him to seek out battle with the Philistines.)

The case of King Saul was somewhat different. The Spirit enabled him both to prophesy and to fight. He prophesied soon after Samuel anointed him (1 Sam. 10:10-11). The Spirit also prompted Saul to lead a military expedition against Nahash the Ammonite in order to save the people of Jabesh-gilead (11:1-6). We do not see any indication that the Spirit specifically empowered David when he went into combat, although David did attribute his victories to the Lord (17:37). The Spirit is not mentioned even in David's most famous fight, his battle with Goliath. Yet the Spirit did enable David to prophesy (2 Sam. 23:2). The Spirit came upon one of David's leading soldiers, Amasai, and prompted him to declare allegiance to David (1 Chron. 12:18). Apart from Saul and David, the Bible never says that the Spirit came upon any king of Israel or Judah. In other places in the historical narrative, the Spirit of God comes upon prophets (1 Kings 18:12; 2 Kings 2:16; 2 Chron. 15:1; 20:13-15; 24:20).

Immediately after Samuel anointed David and the Spirit came upon him, the Spirit abandoned Saul (see 1 Sam. 16:14). Later, however, Saul prophesied again by the power of the Spirit (19:23). David, after his sin involving Bathsheba, was fearful that God would take away His Spirit (Ps. 51:11). Thus, it appears that the Spirit could come and go in the lives of kings. This is analogous to what we see in Samson, whom the Lord abandoned (Judg. 16:20), but later strengthened (Judg. 16:28-30).

All in all, it seems that the Spirit had a task-oriented relationship with these Old Testament heroes. Similarly, Exodus 31:2-5 says that God's Spirit enabled Bezalel to build the sacred objects of the tent of meeting. The main job of the judges was to fight off various oppressors, and the Spirit empowered them to do this. Saul and David had much larger roles in governing the people, and it may be that the prophetic gift enabled them to function as effective leaders at a time when people may have doubted their legitimacy. After David's death, the office of king was fully entrenched among the institutions of Israel, and the legitimacy of their kings no longer depended on a visible sign of the presence of God's Spirit.

(In PSG, p. 79) **On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it for a leader to be sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit? Would you consider their willingness to follow Him as a requirement for being an effective leader? Explain.**

In the New Testament, the Spirit dwells within believers primarily for their sanctification (Rom. 8; 1 Cor. 6:18-20; Gal. 5:22). Even the gifts of the Spirit are primarily for the edification of the church, and they were given to all rather than to a select few (1 Cor. 12:8-13). Paul indicated that believers can grieve the Spirit (Eph. 4:30), but he does not say that the Spirit might abandon us.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group arrives, guide them to imagine the following: *You are on the board of directors of a Fortune 500 company and in the process of hiring a new vice president who will eventually replace the existing president. Create a list of desired characteristics for the job candidate.* After most of the group has arrived, review the qualities listed. Highlight the qualities that are about appearances alone.

ASK: *How much does a person's physical and outward appearance contribute to your perception of him or her as a leader?* (PSG, p.72)

TRANSITION: *Today, we'll be looking at God's qualifications for a leader, which are quite different from our human qualifications.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPLAIN: Using 1 Samuel 16:1-3 and Understand the Context (pp. 74-75; PSG, p. 73), review how Saul had been rejected as king and how Samuel was saddened by Saul's disobedience. *The Lord told Samuel that it was time to move on and anoint another king.*

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 16:4-5. Point the group to the paragraph under Verse 4 in the PSG (p. 74) to identify potential reasons for the fearful response.

DISCUSS: *Leadership roles can often lead the leader to a place of isolation. Ask from the PSG (p. 74): In what ways does pursuing the call of God upon one's life bring isolation from others? What are the risks and rewards of such a pursuit?*

READ: Call on someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 16:6-10, as the rest of the group counts how many of Jesse's sons Samuel examined as the potential king.

EXPLAIN: *God could have told Samuel ahead of time which son to anoint. Sometimes discovering God's will in specific situations is a process, like Samuel experienced in looking at all of Jesse's sons for the future king.*

SHARE: Invite volunteers to share about an experience in which the Lord allowed them to explore different possibilities before leading them to the right direction for their lives. (Ex.: Searching for different jobs, looking at cities to move to, or trying different opportunities for service in the church.) Then ask: *What lessons did you learn through the process of discovering what God wanted you to do?*

DISCUSS: *What dangers lie in assuming that certain individuals are suited for leadership based on appearance or a generalization?* (PSG, p. 75) Highlight 1 Samuel 16:7 during the discussion. *What criteria do we use to select our leaders? How does God's choice open the door for Him to be honored?* (PSG, p. 77)

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 16:11-13. Lead the group to look for characteristics of David mentioned in the passage.

ASK: *What do we know about David up to this point in Scripture? From the PSG (p. 78): What similarities exist between a shepherd and an effective leader? Use the paragraphs under Verse 11 (PSG, pp. 77-78) for guidance.*

COMPARE: Using **Pack Item 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*), discuss the similarities and differences between Saul's and David's anointing as king.

COMMENT: *This event points to another anointing. Read the following paragraph from the PSG (p. 79): Samuel anointed David in Bethlehem (1 Sam. 16:4). Not only would Bethlehem be important for God's people in Samuel's day but also in days to come. The prophet Micah would point to Bethlehem as the birthplace of the Promised Messiah. Centuries later, that prophecy was fulfilled with the birth of Jesus Christ, God's Anointed One (John 1:41) who is our perfect King (Matt. 2:1-6).*

EXPLAIN: *In the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit indwelt certain individuals to help them carry out specific tasks. Read aloud Ephesians 1:13-14, and discuss: What does this passage reveal about the Holy Spirit's role in the lives of Christians?*

ASK: *On a scale of 1 to 10, how important is it for a leader to be sensitive and responsive to the Holy Spirit? Would you consider their willingness to follow Him as a requirement for being an effective leader? Explain. (PSG, p. 79)*

MEMORIZE: Point to **Pack Item 14** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 16:7*), and call for each individual to open their Bibles to the verse. Take turns saying one word of the verse until it has been read completely. After reading the verse one word at a time, lead the group to recite the verse aloud together.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: Direct a volunteer to read the first paragraph at the top of In My Context (PSG, p. 80) to summarize the session: *God chooses leaders for His people. At times, believers' motives are more important than their actions. When we are called upon to lead, we can trust the Holy Spirit for guidance.*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 80): *How can your group encourage your pastor as he seeks the guidance of the Holy Spirit for the church? Discuss options as a group and adopt at least one action for encouraging your pastor and other leaders to remain faithful to God's promptings.*

PRAY: Remind the group of the importance of praying for the spiritual leaders God has anointed to lead your church. Provide a sheet of paper to the group. Invite them to make a list of five ways in which they can pray for the pastor and staff as the spiritual leaders of their church this week. Close by praying for your pastor and other church leaders.



PRACTICE

- Contact the group through social media or email and encourage them to (1) continue memorizing the key verse for the week, and (2) pray each day this week for the individuals they listed on their cards.
- Spend time praying for the ministers on staff at your church this week. Pray for God's wisdom, guidance, and protection as they seek to lead your congregation.
- Plan a fellowship for the group before summer ends. Consider a family outing, a game night, or a brunch one Saturday morning.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As the group arrives, ask: *What superhero (or movie character) would you most want to be your partner in a trivia game?* Lead the group to analyze the characteristics of the superheroes they identified. Allow them to propose why the superhero they suggested would be desired.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion of Samuel's preparation for David's anointing, lead the group to look up Exodus 19:9-15 and read the verses silently. Discuss why the Israelites needed special preparation to come into the Lord's presence. Point out that Samuel led Jesse and his sons to consecrate or prepare themselves for worship as part of the process in anointing the next king. Ask: *What role does worship play in selecting a leader?*
- To enhance the discussion about how God sees the heart, point to the heart that you've drawn on a posterboard. Lead the group to call out characteristics of the heart that God sees. Discuss what it means that man sees the outside of a person, but God sees the heart.
- To encourage further Scripture memorization of 1 Samuel 16:7, lead everyone to complete the Bible Skill on page 76 of the PSG.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Provide the group with a note card and pen. Lead the group to write a note of encouragement to the pastor. Challenge them to give it to the pastor either in person or drop it in the mail this week.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, lead the group to sing verse 1 of the hymn "Take My Life, and Let It Be Consecrated," by Frances R. Havergal. Challenge them to live their lives consecrated to God this week.

DELIVERED

God uses faithful servants to deliver His people.

1 SAMUEL 17:32-37,42-50

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 17:46

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 17:1-58, First Thoughts (p. 84), and Understand the Context (pp. 84-85). Refamiliarize yourself with **PACK ITEM 9** (*The Roles of Prophets, Priests, and Kings*). Reflect on how each position affected the governance and stability of Israel.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 17:32-37,42-50. Using **PACK ITEM 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*), visualize the geographical location, the setting of the battlefield, and the ensuing encounter of the main characters. Review Explore the Text (pp. 85-89) and the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (found in both print and digital format at *LifeWay.com*) for additional observations.
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 90-91), looking for ways to approach the David and Goliath account from a fresh perspective. Reference *Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible* for supplemental ideas to customize your session.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (*LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry*).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Posterboard and markers; and Index cards, paper, and pens. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*); **PACK ITEM 9** (*The Roles of Prophets, Priests, and Kings*); and **PACK ITEM 11** (*Giants in the Bible*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

The Kingdom

The Kingdom of God includes both His general sovereignty over the universe and His particular kingship over men who willfully acknowledge Him as King.

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "The Goliath Inscription" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Few adults consider themselves heroes. The same is not true for children. As a kid, all you need is a tablecloth cape and a little imagination, and you can save the world. Around every tree is another villain to stop, a robber to catch, or a damsel in distress. When we transition from childhood to adulthood, we tend to lower our expectations from saving the day to just doing our best. What if God intended the fantasies of childhood to prepare us for the adventures of adulthood? Is it possible that God is calling us to a heroic life, but we've wrongly defined what it means to be a hero?

(In PSG, p. 83) **What heroic characteristics or feats most appealed to you as a child?**

The account of David and Goliath has become synonymous with heroism, taking on big challenges, or doing the impossible. The bigness of the story makes it exciting, but it's that same quality that makes it hard for people to relate. Most of us are not fighting giants or saving a nation. We're holding down jobs. We're making mortgage payments. We're dropping off our kids at ball practice, going to school and church, and trying to live well. Who has the time or energy to think about heroic adventure?

First Samuel 17 teaches a great truth. Heroes do in times of crisis what they've faithfully done in times of calm. David's early life was a picture of faithful service and trust in God. Yet there is an even greater truth in this chapter, for it points us to Jesus, who faced the giants of sin and death. He won the victory that we could not win on our own, and His victory is ours. He is the ultimate Hero.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 17:1-58

By the time we get to 1 Samuel 17, Saul had for many years waged wars against Israel's enemies, and his army had become quite formidable. Prior to this time, the Philistines had enjoyed military supremacy in the region, but now the Israelites were an equal adversary. The two armies thus stood opposite each other in a stalemate, each looking for a weakness and neither willing to engage prematurely.

Because the two armies were in a standoff, the Philistines hoped to gain the advantage through single combat by a champion. As told in Homer's *The Iliad*, the Greeks and Trojans before the gates of Troy were also in a prolonged standoff, and they, too, practiced single combat by champion. Heroes such as Achilles, Hector, Aeneas, Ajax, and Odysseus would not

march in ranks of battle lines but would go forth to engage each other in one-on-one combat. No single combat decided the war, but the loss of a champion was devastating to his side, as when the Greek Achilles slew the Trojan Hector. Although *The Iliad* is a literary tale, it probably reflects the reality of warfare as waged by people around the Aegean Sea area in about 1000 B.C. The Philistines seem to have come from this area, and their military ethos was similar to what we see in Homeric kings and warriors.

The Philistines had one particular warrior, Goliath, whom they considered unbeatable. He was a large man even by our standards. To the average Israelite he would have seemed truly enormous, since ancient people were generally much shorter than people today. No single man in the Israelite army could match Goliath, and thus the challenge he issued went unanswered for days.

The standoff was near Socoh, in southwestern Judah. Socoh was about 12 miles west of Bethlehem as the crow flies, but traversing the hill country would have made it a considerably longer journey. It would have taken David at least a full day to get from his home to the Israelite camp.

We do not know how old David was at this time. Since he had already fought against lions and bears, he was certainly not a small boy. The standard age at which an Israelite man was eligible for military service was twenty, as illustrated in Numbers 1:3. David was probably not yet of military age.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

CONFIDENCE IN GOD (1 SAM. 17:32-37)

Verses 26-31 tell us that David went around the camp inquiring about Goliath's challenge and voicing his irritation that no one had stood up to the Philistine champion. Goliath had been mocking the armies of the living God, and more was at stake than national pride. David thought it necessary to silence this blasphemer and show that the true God, the Maker of heaven and earth, was Yahweh, the God of Israel. For David, faith in God required that Israel put forth a warrior to show that they were sure He was watching over them. David gave his thoughts on the matter repeatedly and forthrightly. For his brother Eliab, this was insulting. It was as if David were calling him and all the other soldiers cowards (v. 28). But many of the troops were impressed by David's confidence, and he probably raised the morale of quite a few of them. Eventually, discussion in the ranks about this young man from Bethlehem reached Saul's ears. Desperate to find a way out of this impasse, the king was willing to give David a hearing. David's courage had made for a refreshing change of attitude after days of fear and paralysis in the Israelite camp. Verses 32-37 tell us what the marks of godly confidence are.

VERSE 32

First, David gave thought to the needs of his people and not just to his own needs and desires. David said, ***“Don't let anyone be discouraged by him.”*** He did not say, “I'll go out and gain glory for myself by killing that giant!”

BIBLE SKILL

Compare and contrast passages with related themes.

Read Luke 2:41-50 and Luke 4:1-13, identifying actions that prepared Jesus as a leader. Compare these actions to the actions taken by David to prepare to be a leader. What is unique? What is similar? What role did their relationship with the Father play in their preparation?

1 SAMUEL 17:32

³² David said to Saul, “Don't let anyone be discouraged by him; your servant will go and fight this Philistine!”

1 SAMUEL 17:33-37

³³ But Saul replied, “You can’t go fight this Philistine. You’re just a youth, and he’s been a warrior since he was young.” ³⁴ David answered Saul: “Your servant has been tending his father’s sheep. Whenever a lion or a bear came and carried off a lamb from the flock, ³⁵ I went after it, struck it down, and rescued the lamb from its mouth. If it reared up against me, I would grab it by its fur, strike it down, and kill it. ³⁶ Your servant has killed lions and bears; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, for he has defied the armies of the living God.” ³⁷ Then David said, “The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.” Saul said to David, “Go, and may the LORD be with you.”

Personal prestige and renown were in fact extremely important to warriors of this era. But David began by stating that the reason he was willing to go fight Goliath was that he did not want the morale of the Israelite army to break.

Second, David volunteered to deal with Goliath personally, saying, “**Your servant will go and fight this Philistine!**” He did not claim that he had faith in God and then ask for someone else to go fight the battle.

VERSES 33-37

Third, David listened to an argument against his proposal and gave a reasonable answer. Saul said, “**You can’t go fight this Philistine. You’re just a youth, and he’s been a warrior since he was young.**” David did not reply, “Hey! Don’t you have faith in God?” He did not pout that he was being ill-treated because of his age. He gave a sensible answer based on how he had approached dangerous enemies in the past with God’s help.

(In PSG, p. 85) **Saul questioned David’s experience in battle. How could David’s lack of battle experience have been a disadvantage? How could it have been an advantage?**

Fourth, although David’s confidence was in God, he also had evidence for his faith based on his personal history. He had killed large and dangerous carnivores—**lions and bears**—while tending sheep. These episodes demonstrated his courage, his skill with weapons, and his agility. Faith in God is not contradicted by employment of human skills. Nor is it wrong for someone who is gifted by God for certain tasks to also train and develop the skills relevant to those tasks. That is why those who are called to the ministry should train by studying theology, biblical languages, preaching, counseling, and other related skills. Developing one’s knowledge is not opposed to reliance upon God. In Psalm 18:34, David said, “He trains my hands for war; my arms can bend a bow of bronze.” David affirmed that ultimately it was God who gave him his military prowess, but he also asserted that he had those skills and that proper use of them involved practice. The evidence of David’s accomplishments against wild animals supported his confidence in God but did not replace it.

Fifth, David reiterated what was at stake: the claim of Israel to be the people of God. He told Saul that Goliath had defied **the armies of the living God**. David reminded Saul that this was an intolerable situation and called on him to do his duty by letting David fight.

Sixth, David forthrightly declared that God, and not his own martial prowess, was the source of his confidence: “**The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine.**” As the final point of his argument, David claimed that God, not his own proficiency, would save him. David showed maturity and balance here. He was an accomplished fighter, but he also acknowledged that ultimately victory comes from God.

How do David's six declarations in verses 32-37 help us to understand what it means to walk by faith?

FALSE CONFIDENCE IN HIMSELF (1 SAM. 17:42-44)

VERSE 42

Verse 42 gives us three reasons that Goliath despised David. First, **he was just a youth**. This does not mean that Goliath was many years older than David. He was almost certainly in the prime of life, since he was chosen as champion. Perhaps he was about 30 years old. We should think of how, in many schools, especially military academies and the like, upperclassmen look down on freshmen even though the freshmen may be only a year younger than themselves. This is not a particularly mature attitude, and it is a false basis for confidence.

Second, David looked **healthy**. This literally means “reddish,” and perhaps implies that he had a deep tan. It may be that his coloration marked him as someone who spent all day out watching the sheep. Curiously, the woman of Song of Songs makes a related comment, complaining that the other women looked down on her because of her dark complexion, something she got while working in the vineyards (Song of Sg. 1:6). Perhaps it was obvious to Goliath that David was by profession a shepherd and not a warrior.

Third, Goliath despised David because he was **handsome**. He perhaps took David for a pampered, pretty boy who was unprepared for the grim work of a soldier.

VERSES 43-44

All of Goliath's reasons for despising David and for his confidence that David posed no threat were superficial. He had no idea what David had really done during his life, and he had no reason to suppose that David was not up for a fight. He should have been suspicious and cautious, knowing that someone who approached him as David did would fight in an unconventional manner. Had David approached in full armor and with sword in hand, prepared to go toe-to-toe with Goliath, the Philistine would have known exactly how to deal with him. But David's approach to the battle was altogether unexpected, and Goliath should have known that something was not right. In his arrogance, he did not. He saw David's staff and foolishly assumed that David meant to fight him with **sticks**. He **cursed David** because he thought it was an insult that Israel had sent him such a ridiculous opponent.

We often think of how lack of faith in God makes us fearful and how faith gives us courage, and that is true. But there is another side to it. People who do not trust God may be arrogantly reckless, because they have far too much faith in themselves. Trusting God also makes us aware that life is not in our control. God-fearers are aware of their own limitations and will

1 SAMUEL 17:42

⁴² When the Philistine looked and saw David, he despised him because he was just a youth, healthy and handsome.

1 SAMUEL 17:43-44

⁴³ He said to David, “Am I a dog that you come against me with sticks?” Then he cursed David by his gods. ⁴⁴ “Come here,” the Philistine called to David, “and I’ll give your flesh to the birds of the sky and the wild beasts!”

1 SAMUEL 17:45-47

⁴⁵ David said to the Philistine: “You come against me with a dagger, spear, and sword, but I come against you in the name of Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel’s armies—you have defied Him. ⁴⁶ Today, the LORD will hand you over to me. Today, I’ll strike you down, cut your head off, and give the corpses of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the creatures of the earth. Then all the world will know that Israel has a God, ⁴⁷ and this whole assembly will know that it is not by sword or by spear that the LORD saves, for the battle is the LORD’s. He will hand you over to us.”

not assume that they are better than everyone else. Humility enables us to assess a situation accurately. Counterintuitively, faith in God can make a person more circumspect and less reckless.

In reality, the advantage in combat was not altogether on Goliath’s side. He was dressed as a heavy infantryman, with full body armor, a large shield, and a long spear (vv. 4-7). The shield was so large that a servant carried it ahead of him to the fight, but in the battle itself, Goliath would have to manage the shield on top of the weight and encumbrance of everything else.

David, by contrast, was going out as a skirmisher. These were light infantry who wore either no armor or very light armor, who may have carried no sword and no shield (or a very small sword or lightweight shield), and whose main weapons were projectiles (javelins, arrows, or stones from slings). Later in his military career, David had a sizable contingent of such skirmishers drawn from the tribe of Benjamin (1 Chron. 12:1-2).

Unlike the heavy infantry, the skirmishers did not line up in closed ranks. Their success depended on maneuverability. They would fire their weapons and retreat, remaining fleet of foot to keep themselves from harm while inflicting damage on the enemy. When David refused to take Saul’s armor and sword, we should not imagine him as a small boy who was swallowed up by the size and bulk of a grown man’s gear. He was no doubt large enough to wear the armor. But wearing it contradicted his purpose, which was to remain nimble while launching stones (a lethal form of attack) at his opponent. When David said he could not move in Saul’s armor, he did not mean that he was utterly immobile. But the armor did rob him of the agility that he needed.

If David had lacked confidence as he went into battle, then he would have grabbed every weapon and every bit of armor he could get his hands on. But because he had faith in God, he chose wisely. Once again, faith in God is not opposed to skill, discernment, or a cool-headed assessment of the situation. To the contrary, faith enabled David to exercise those traits to the fullest.

How can excessive confidence in our skills or assets undermine our faith in God? What characterizes presumption, as opposed to walking in faith? How can faith enable us to make the most of our skills and assets?

GOD’S VICTORY (1 SAM. 17:45-50)

Like two athletes in a bitter rivalry, Goliath and David began their combat with trash talk, a way of seeking a psychological advantage by putting doubt into the heart of the opposition. The text gives us only a brief summary of Goliath’s taunt: he would kill David and feed his flesh to the wild animals (v. 44). Verses 45-47 give us a much more complete account of what David said.

VERSES 45-50

David, too, said he would kill his adversary and give his body to the wild animals, but he actually made a much larger claim: ***Today, I'll strike you down, cut your head off, and give the corpses of the Philistine camp to the birds of the sky and the creatures of the earth.*** He threatened to turn the entire Philistine army, and not just Goliath personally, into a feast for the birds and beasts. Remarkably, though, everything David predicted came about. The reasons that David's boasts became historical facts are found within his speech.

First, David was not relying on weapons and human strength: ***You come against me with a dagger, spear, and sword, but I come against you in the name of Yahweh of Hosts, the God of Israel's armies.*** It is of course true that David did not go into combat weaponless, and faith did not demand that he fight Goliath barehanded. But the actual source of his confidence was not his weapons but God.

Second, he said, ***This whole assembly will know that it is not by sword or by spear that the LORD saves.*** David did not enter the battle to prove that he was a mighty warrior and to gain fame. He wanted everyone present to know that victory comes from God. He not only gave glory to God; he also set an example of faith and action for every man in the army. As Israel gained further victories, the nation would be more secure and God would get more praise and honor. David became that day not just a champion but a teacher and leader of his people.

Third, David summarized his beliefs with the simple axiom, ***the battle is the LORD's.*** This is not a claim that those who are on the Lord's side always win, although David was sure he would win this time. Rather, it asserts that win or lose, the believer can always go into conflict knowing that all things are in God's hands. Ultimately, faith is a matter of doing the right thing when confronting a severe trial. That is the essence of courage. Faith does not proceed on the expectation that the believer can never be beaten. Rather, our faith tells us that God will determine the outcome and will in the end be glorified.

David could have gone into the fight without answering Goliath at all. Why does the Bible tell us about David's answer? Why is it important to vocalize our faith—especially when we are taking a risk—instead of just believing in our hearts?

With a stone, a sling, and a faithful servant, God delivered His people. God used David, who in appearance was weak and insignificant, to win victory on behalf of his people. This account ultimately points us to Jesus, the representative leader of His people. Jesus faced and defeated the giants of sin and death on our behalf. On the cross, He delivered us from an enemy we were powerless to defeat.

1 SAMUEL 17:48-50

⁴⁸ When the Philistine started forward to attack him, David ran quickly to the battle line to meet the Philistine. ⁴⁹ David put his hand in the bag, took out a stone, slung it, and hit the Philistine on his forehead. The stone sank into his forehead, and he fell on his face to the ground. ⁵⁰ David defeated the Philistine with a sling and a stone. Even though David had no sword, he struck down the Philistine and killed him.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

CONSIDER: As everyone arrives, direct them to answer the following PSG question (p. 83): *What heroic characteristics or feats most appealed to you as a child?*

READ: Introduce the focus statement by writing it on posterboard and posting it on a focal wall: *God uses faithful servants to deliver His people* (PSG, p. 81). Underline the key words that you will emphasize during the session.

EXHIBIT: Use **Pack Item 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) to share the geographical location, the setting of the battlefield, and the ensuing encounter of the main characters. Call attention to **Pack Item 11** (*Giants in the Bible*). Review the three classes of giants, bringing attention to the giant in today's session: Goliath.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

STUDY: Assemble three teams, assigning each team two verses from 1 Samuel 17:32-37. Instruct one team to read verses 32-33, the second team to read verses 34-35, and the last team to read verses 36-37. Using the information under Explore the Text for each set of verses (PSG, pp. 84-87), guide teams to identify statements that might reflect important principles from their passage. Then call for each group to select a spokesperson to share what they have learned.

EMPHASIZE: Summarize the sequence of events in David's life that led to his encounter with Goliath—his roles as shepherd, hunter, and servant.

CREATE: Lead the group to read 1 Samuel 17:32-37 again, this time to develop a time line for how the Lord was preparing David for this conquest against Goliath.

ASK: *Saul questioned David's experience in battle. How could David's lack of battle experience have been a disadvantage? How could it have been an advantage?* (PSG, p. 85)

GUIDE: Share about a time when you had to convince someone that you had the ability, experience, and confidence to do a particular task. (Ex.: Seeking a new job or participating in a ministry of your church.) Explain how your experiences in that role prepared you for greater responsibility.

ASK: *How can God use our past as a foundation for our future? How can a person's past experiences help him or her succeed in the future?* (PSG, p. 87)

READ: Instruct a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 17:42-44, as the group listens for Goliath's attitude toward David.

SHARE: Contrast David's humility and confidence in battle with the pride and arrogance of Goliath. Read this statement from the PSG (p. 89): *Every challenge, trial, and problem is an opportunity for God to show Himself strong before the world.* Challenge the group to name other Bible verses that support this idea. (Ex.: Prov. 3:26; Phil. 1:6; Heb. 4:16; and 1 John 5:14.)

ASK: *In what items or people do we sometimes place our confidence? What are the limits of each item or person? How do those limits point to our need to trust in God at all times with all things?* (PSG, p. 88)

READ: Read aloud 1 Samuel 17:45-50, as others listen for David's response to Goliath.

DISCUSS: *God worked in David's life from the beginning as a shepherd to his emergence as a hero.* (From the PSG, p. 89): *How does God use the humble and simple to defeat the proud and self-sufficient?*

LEAD: Guide the group to compare the relationship between the Lord's faithfulness to David and His faithfulness to us. Emphasize: *A person's relationship with Christ and the role of the Holy Spirit in his or her life strengthens that person for daily living.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: *What principles did you glean from the study of David's encounter with Goliath? As volunteers share their suggestions, record these on your focal wall. Circle each one, and reiterate the context of the Bible passage source.*

APPLY: Lead the group to list principles found in today's Scripture passage. Record their responses on the board. Lead them to reword a principle, making it personal. (Ex.: Verses 32-37 might be stated, "God's faithfulness to David in the past strengthened David's dependence upon God in the future." Rewording this might become "The Lord has been faithful to me in many experiences of my life. I will trust his faithfulness the remainder of my life.") Instruct them to record the personal statement in the PSG on page 90.

CHALLENGE: Highlight 1 Samuel 17:46. Then lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 90): *Discuss with your Bible study group ways you could actively make known in your community God's name and His offer of redemption through His Son. Identify actions the group can take to be more actively engaged.*

PRAY: Close in a prayer of intercession, asking the Lord to speak to members of the group's immediate family and close friends to become faithful servants.



PRACTICE

- Use email, social media, or text message to contact the group, encouraging each person to practice the memory verse (1 Samuel 17:46). Suggest that they print this verse on an index card and tape it to a mirror or refrigerator.
- Begin a journal, recording incidences of family members doing heroic acts or expressions of heroism, such as sharing a testimony, doing a kind deed, or making a decision based on Scripture truths.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace or supplement the Focus Attention opening activity, distribute paper and pens to volunteers. Encourage each one to illustrate the encounter between David and Goliath. Lead the group to list descriptive words associated with the story. Challenge the group to look at the Bible story through fresh eyes. After a few minutes, instruct volunteers to share their illustrations.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the scrutiny of the Philistine nation and particularly Goliath, lead volunteers to research how the Philistines created fear and dominance in the region.
- For further study of 1 Samuel 17:32-37, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity in the PSG (p. 85).
- To enhance the study of 1 Samuel 17:42-43, search current news stories that portray self-confidence. Lead the group to discuss the following: *How do the attitudes in the news story compare to the attitude of Goliath? How do people express self-reliance today?* Remind the group that only through trusting in Jesus Christ can we have victory.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Before the session, consider speaking with your pastor or a staff person regarding ministries or mission opportunities in which your group could become involved. Share with the group that faithfulness to the Lord translates into tangible expressions of ministry and missions. A need may be listed on your church newsletter or worship bulletin. Challenge the group to take action on one of these opportunities.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close this session, lead the group to sing or read “Great Is Thy Faithfulness,” by Thomas O. Chisholm, or “My Deliverer,” by Chris Tomlin.

FAITHFUL

Godly friendship is built on commitment to God and provides lifelong encouragement.

1 SAMUEL 18:1-5; 20:35-42

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 18:3

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 18:1–20:42 and *Understand the Context* (pp. 94-95). Look for how a shared commitment with God impacted the friendship of David and Jonathan.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 18:1-5; 20:35-42. Consider Jonathan’s upbringing in the king’s court as compared to David’s upbringing in the country. Refer to **PACK ITEM 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*). Use *Explore the Text* (pp. 95-99) for your personal study.
- **PLAN** the group time using the concepts under *Lead Group Bible Study* (pp. 100-101). Refer to the *Explore the Bible* blog, available at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible, for additional ideas.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the *Ministry Grid* (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Index cards, paper, and pens; Posterboard and markers; Construction paper and scissors; A dictionary; and copies of **PACK ITEM 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*). Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 1** (*Map: David’s Flight from Saul*); **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*); **PACK ITEM 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*); and **PACK ITEM 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Christian Community

Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people.

Humanity is relational by design. It's a part of what it means to be created in God's image. Just as God exists relationally within the Trinity, He created us to exist relationally within community. There's no doubt that some people are more outgoing and personable. From the outside looking in, it seems that relationships just come easy to them. On the other end of the spectrum, many people are shy and reserved. It takes them a while to engage. While there are differences in how we relate, there's no question that we relate. Humanity is hardwired for relationships, community, and friendship.

(In PSG, p. 93) **To what level do you agree with this statement: "All areas of one's life are impacted by the friends he or she has"? In what ways is your life being impacted by your friends?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Jonathan: All We Know" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Much of the joy of life is found through our connections with other people. Friendship is a gift from God that enhances every part of life. First Samuel 18–20 records several stories that reveal the friendship of Jonathan and David. Both men loved each other (1 Sam. 18:1,3; 2 Sam. 1:26). They helped each other, served each other, sacrificed for each other, and respected each other. Jonathan's initial covenant with David was a source of incredible joy for David (1 Sam. 18:3). David's long-term kindness to Mephibosheth (Jonathan's son) shows how deeply he loved Jonathan (2 Sam. 9:1-13). Their story reminds us that good friendships don't just happen. Like anything of value, strong friendships require work, sacrifice, and intentionality. In almost every case, the depth of our friendships is determined by the depth of our investment. Above all, godly friendships are built on a commitment to God.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 18:1–20:42

1 Samuel 18–20 covers the period during which David served in Saul's military. It begins in the aftermath of the slaying of Goliath and ends with David's flight from Saul. The narrator does not give us a full account of this period. We know virtually nothing about David's military campaigns beyond the fact that he was very successful, especially in the matter of killing enough Philistines to win the hand of Saul's daughter. This is a significant omission. If we had been there with David's troops, we might have said that his military duties were the major concern in his day-to-day life, and they certainly occupied the majority of his time.

Within the story, however, the most important thing is not to chronicle David's routine activities but to track the relationship between him and the household of Saul. Four characters figure heavily in the account. David is of course the central figure. Saul knew he was destined to lose the kingdom and could easily see that David would take his place. Saul gave way to hatred and plans of murder. Michal, daughter of Saul, married David but could never fully side with him against her father, a fact which would seriously complicate their relationship. Jonathan, the son of Saul and the crown prince, saw greatness in David, loved him, and fully accepted that David would one day be king. The story is beautiful, as Jonathan is a profound example of unselfish regard for a friend. It is also tragic. Jonathan would have been a great lieutenant to David, and that was in fact his ambition. But his loyal character also required that he serve his father faithfully, and he would fall alongside Saul in a desperate battle against the Philistines before David could claim the throne.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

TRUE FRIENDS (1 SAM. 18:1-5)

VERSES 1-2

These verses introduce us to a new phase of David's life. They describe events that took place immediately after the battle with Goliath, and they also set an enduring pattern. Verse 1 indicates that Jonathan's love for David began with David's slaying of Goliath and his subsequent conversation with Saul, but it also implies that his appreciation for David continued to grow. Verse 2 tells us that David remained with Saul through many days to come.

David's triumph over Goliath was the initial cause for the mutual respect and friendship between David and Jonathan. The whole of Israel was profoundly excited by what they had seen David do, so Jonathan could hardly have failed to notice. Jonathan himself was a hero of courage and renown. He had single-handedly routed the Philistine garrison near Michmash (1 Sam. 14), and the men in the ranks held him in high esteem. We do not know why Jonathan did not volunteer to fight Goliath before David ever got to the camp. Perhaps he did, but Saul forbade him to go out, or perhaps the powerful Philistine warrior had genuinely unnerved Jonathan. In either case, it is clear that Jonathan fully appreciated how much courage it took for David to go face-to-face against the Philistine. Jonathan no doubt watched the battle closely and could see that David was brave, cunning, and devoted to God.

It is one thing to see what a fine man and hero David was, but it is another thing to know how to react to him. Saul also knew that David was capable and admirable, but he soon began to display extreme jealousy and fear, knowing that David could replace him. Yet if anyone had reason to react with jealousy toward David on a purely personal level, it was Jonathan. Prior to the Goliath episode, Jonathan had been the young champion of Israel, no doubt favored by men and women throughout Israel. Now he

BIBLE SKILL

Compare passages related to a similar theme.

Read Philippians 2:19-24, looking for ways Paul related to his colleagues. How do the relationships Paul had with the people identified compare to David's relationship with Jonathan? What principles about friendship can be drawn from the comparison?

1 SAMUEL 18:1-2

¹ When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan committed himself to David, and loved him as much as he loved himself. ² Saul kept David with him from that day on and did not let him return to his father's house.

stood to be displaced by a champion who was younger, who was probably better looking (the Bible repeatedly speaks of David's handsome features), and who had in a much more public way won acclaim for himself in battle. Like a quarterback who just saw a younger, stronger, and faster rookie score a touchdown, Jonathan could have reacted with pettiness, and he could have set about trying to undermine him or, in this violent era, plotted to murder him. But instead of doing that, Jonathan took the lead in showing honor to David, and he did so sincerely.

Because of jealousy, men often miss out on friendships that could not only give great personal joy but could also help them grow in their skills and advance in their careers. Women, too, sometimes show extreme jealousy of one another's gifts. A mother who sees another woman having obvious success with her children may befriend that woman and learn from her, or she may treat her as a rival, gossiping against her and denigrating how her children are turning out. It does not matter what our profession is. Salespeople, teachers, office workers, and pastors all must decide whether they will rejoice in the success of others, consider them partners, and learn from them, or if instead they will descend into petty envy. Whatever our career, age, or gender, we can all strangle friendships in the cradle by looking upon gifted colleagues as threatening rivals.

1 SAMUEL 18:3-5

³ Jonathan made a covenant with David because he loved him as much as himself. ⁴ Then Jonathan removed the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his military tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt. ⁵ David marched out with the army and was successful in everything Saul sent him to do. Saul put him in command of the soldiers, which pleased all the people and Saul's servants as well.

Give examples from your area of work of how rivalry and competition can be destructive. How should our experience of God's grace condition how we react to the success of others?

VERSES 3-5

Jonathan *made a covenant with David*. This was not the only covenant between the two men; they made another covenant on the day David fled from Saul (20:8,16), and yet another while David was a fugitive (23:16-18).

Verse 4 says that *Jonathan removed the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his military tunic, his sword, his bow, and his belt*. This was probably done as part of the covenant that David and Jonathan made. The giving of gifts cemented the relationship between the two men. Whenever David went out to battle with Jonathan's sword and bow, it would remind him that they very literally were comrades in arms. As a practical matter, David had no advanced military weapons, and Jonathan wanted him to have the best. Also, whenever people saw David wearing Jonathan's robe and military tunic, it was as if (to put it in our terms) the two men were wearing jerseys from the same team. It was obvious to all that they were working together.

Verse 5 summarizes David's exploits as an officer in Saul's army, a position he held until he fled for his life from Saul. David and Jonathan continued to show loyalty to one another and to nurture their friendship through many years.

TESTED FRIENDS (1 SAM. 20:35-40)

First Samuel 20 is in seven parts. *First, David persuaded Jonathan that he must do something (vv. 1-4).* Jonathan denied that Saul had any real evil intent toward David. Jonathan was not blind, but he wanted to avoid having to decide between siding with his father or with his friend. David convinced Jonathan that he had to do something and could not just hope for the best.

Second, David suggested a strategy for determining what Saul was thinking (vv. 5-11). David would be conspicuously absent from the king's table at the next New Moon banquet, and Jonathan would address Saul in order to gauge his response to the situation. If Saul became angry, it would be clear Saul wanted David there in order to arrest and kill him.

Third, David and Jonathan renewed their covenant of loyalty (vv. 12-17). The essential point was that Jonathan would show loyalty to David by reporting any plot to kill him and that David, after he had gained the throne, would show loyalty to Jonathan by honoring and protecting his household. Possibly it had become common knowledge that Samuel had anointed David, or David had privately told Jonathan about it. Either way, Jonathan was certain that David was destined to become king.

Fourth, Jonathan formulated a plan for communicating what he discovered about Saul to David (vv. 18-23). He would find out what was Saul's state of mind at the banquet while David hid at a rock called Ezel. The location of the rock is unknown; it may have simply been a large stone that they used for target practice. By overshooting the target, Jonathan would send David a signal to flee.

Fifth, Jonathan discovered the extent of Saul's hostility to David (vv. 24-34). The episode revealed Saul's unstable state of mind. The first day of the feast he did not even inquire about David, assuming he was missing for a legitimate reason. But on the second day he became enraged, angrily rebuked Jonathan, and even threw a spear at him. Jonathan fled the banquet, now fully convinced that Saul would do all he could to kill David. He did not head immediately toward David, which would have been suspicious, but waited until the next day. He probably made sure that people knew that he was going out to do some target practice with his bow.

VERSES 35-36

Sixth, Jonathan communicated with David by the prearranged plan (vv. 35-40). True to his word, Jonathan went out to warn David that his life was in danger. We may wonder why he had a servant boy with him, since he could have easily done this alone. But a personal attendant would always accompany a man in Jonathan's position. It would have aroused suspicion had he gone out alone. Furthermore, the servant actually gave Jonathan an alibi. The servant could back up his claim that he had just been out shooting arrows, should anyone ask what he had been doing.

1 SAMUEL 20:35-36

³⁵ In the morning Jonathan went out to the field for the appointed meeting with David. A small young man was with him.

³⁶ He said to the young man, "Run and find the arrows I'm shooting." As the young man ran, Jonathan shot an arrow beyond him.

1 SAMUEL 20:37-40

³⁷ He came to the location of the arrow that Jonathan had shot, but Jonathan called to him and said, “The arrow is beyond you, isn’t it?” ³⁸ Then Jonathan called to him, “Hurry up and don’t stop!” Jonathan’s young man picked up the arrow and returned to his master. ³⁹ He did not know anything; only Jonathan and David knew the arrangement. ⁴⁰ Then Jonathan gave his equipment to the young man who was with him and said, “Go, take it back to the city.”

1 SAMUEL 20:41

⁴¹ When the young man had gone, David got up from the south side of the stone Ezel, fell with his face to the ground, and bowed three times. Then he and Jonathan kissed each other and wept with each other, though David wept more.

VERSES 37-40

After Jonathan deliberately shot an arrow well beyond the servant, he yelled out: “**The arrow is beyond you, isn’t it?**” This was the signal to David that Saul meant to do him harm (see v. 22). But then Jonathan added, “**Hurry up and don’t stop!**” These words were ostensibly spoken to the servant, but in reality they were meant for David. Jonathan was telling his friend that things were really bad, and that if he valued his life, he would go as far away as he could and as fast as possible.

This was a decisive moment in Jonathan’s life. He knew that his father’s hostility to David was wrong, but he had to make a choice. He could continue to show friendship to David, or he could join his father in trying to kill him. True friendship never requires us to do what is evil, but it may require us to break other bonds in order to do what is right. Because of his loyalty to David, Jonathan could clearly see how immoral Saul’s behavior was. Had Jonathan been more neutral toward David, he might have supported Saul out of filial loyalty even though he knew that killing David was not right.

If someone asks you to do something wrong for the sake of preserving your friendship, is that person a true friend? On the other hand, how might friendship enable you to see more clearly what is the right thing to do? What are examples of either of these situations?

TIMELESS FRIENDS (1 SAM. 20:41-42)

VERSE 41

Seventh, David and Jonathan said farewell to one another (vv. 41-42). It seems odd that David and Jonathan would even bother with shooting the arrow as a signal since they ended up talking face-to-face anyway. But it may be that the arrow signal was employed in case it had turned out that Jonathan could not get to David without being seen. If others had been observing who might have seen and reported the presence of David, Jonathan would have left without risking a personal encounter.

It is also noteworthy that David prostrated himself three times before Jonathan. Of course, Jonathan was the high prince, and David at this time was not only a commoner but also a fugitive. Thus, respect for Jonathan’s rank and status may have played a role. Throughout 1 Samuel, David is portrayed as keenly aware of his low status and as deferential to the high offices held by Saul and his son. Also, David probably bowed out of profound gratitude; Jonathan had risked a great deal in working on David’s behalf.

Kissing was fairly common as an expression of greeting or farewell, but it also was of course a sign of affection. It would seem that people in the ancient world were much more free about showing emotion than many of us in the modern west are. Thus, David and Jonathan wept openly to express their grief over their parting and over how badly things had turned out, owing to Saul’s animosity.

VERSE 42

It is significant that Jonathan and David invoked the covenant they had made and invoked God as a witness between them. They had ***pledged in the name of the LORD***, and this gesture was an act that ancient Israelites would not take lightly (Ex. 20:7, Lev. 19:12). Their friendship was based on a commitment to God.

The danger was that Jonathan might betray David to Saul, or that David, once he had gained the upper hand, would turn against Jonathan and his sons. One might think that if they truly loved one another they would not need such oaths to keep them from betraying one another. But the flesh is weak, and that is precisely why we need oaths to keep us on the right path even with those whom we love. That is why a man and woman take marriage vows. While one might think that love would keep the couple from straying, it is important that they reinforce their mutual commitment with solemn vows. (It is also important that people learn to take vows seriously.) We can be thankful that Christ promises never to leave or forsake us. He is a Friend for eternity.

(In PSG, p. 99) **List elements required to make a timeless friendship. How many of these elements are seen in the relationship between Jonathan and David? Can these elements be fostered within a relationship, or do they just happen?**

This would not be the last time that David and Jonathan saw one another. They met at least one more time, when David was on the run from Saul and hiding out in the Wilderness of Ziph (1 Sam. 23:16-18). Jonathan went to see David, and the fact that he could find him implies that the two had stayed in communication. On that occasion, Jonathan encouraged David to have faith in God. Jonathan's words on this occasion were particularly poignant and ultimately sad. Jonathan was sure that David would win the crown in the end and that Jonathan would serve as his second-in-command. No doubt this would have happened had Jonathan survived, but he died in battle against the Philistines alongside his father at Mount Gilboa.

If two people care about each other, is love the only guide they need for how they should behave? Does a life guided by moral principles conflict with a life guided by love? How does respect for vows and for the giving of one's word enhance our ability to love?

1 SAMUEL 20:42

⁴² Jonathan then said to David, "Go in the assurance the two of us pledged in the name of the LORD when we said: The LORD will be a witness between you and me and between my offspring and your offspring forever." Then David left, and Jonathan went into the city.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

BRAINSTORM: Instruct the group to name synonyms for or words that define a friendship. Then lead a discussion on the merits of having a true friend. Ask: *How does doing good deeds for others exemplify friendship?*

READ: Introduce the focus statement: *Godly friendship is built on commitment to God and provides lifelong encouragement* (PSG, p. 91). Write the session title, *Faithful*, on your focal wall. Explain: *Jonathan and David's friendship was a commitment that transcended all situations and circumstances of life.*

EXHIBIT: Display **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*) and **Pack Item 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*). Spend time comparing and contrasting the characteristics of King Saul and David, who would eventually become king. Indicate that the events surrounding the abiding friendship of Jonathan and David contributed to David's role and rule as king of Israel.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 18:1-5, while everyone listens for words or phrases that define the friendship of David and Jonathan. Invite volunteers to share what they identified.

STUDY: Using a dictionary, read a definition for the word *covenant*. Guide the group to share examples of modern-day covenant relationships. Discuss: *What are the similarities and differences between the covenant relationship of Jonathan and David and those examples shared by our group today?* Allow time for reflection.

READ: Direct someone to read 1 Samuel 18:5 again, as the group considers their answers to the following question: *Do you agree or disagree that success reveals a person's character?*

GUIDE: Refer to the paragraph under Verse 5 (PSG, p. 95) that defines people who are successful as "those who act prudently and wisely." Lead the group to review pages 95-96 in the PSG and report anything else that stands out to them about verse 5.

ASK: *How can success change a friendship? Even if the gesture is never reciprocated, how can a person encourage friends in their successes?* (PSG, p. 96).

GUIDE: Use the information under Verses 35-40 (pp. 97-98) to fill in the events between 1 Samuel 18:5 and 20:35.

READ: Call for a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 20:35-40. Point out that the encounter between David and Jonathan was in code to protect David from Saul.

ASK: *David and Jonathan's friendship was tested at the deepest of levels. What kinds of tests make a friendship stronger? Would you view the smaller tests as more or less significant than a dramatic test?* (PSG, p. 98).

SHARE: Call on volunteers to provide examples of when a true friend acted prudently or wisely. Then lead the group to ponder what risks they would take to help a true friend.

DESIGNATE: Choose a volunteer to record on posterboard answers to these two questions posed to the group: (1) *What words, phrases, or examples can be used to indicate someone who is not a true friend?* (2) *What Scripture verses support the correct attitude and behavior of one called to be a true friend?*

READ: Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 20:41-42, while the group listens for David's and Jonathan's mutual expressions of love and respect.

HIGHLIGHT: Use **Pack Item 1** (*Map: David's Flight from Saul*) and **Pack Item 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) to visualize the distances David traveled to flee from Saul's attempts on his life.

EXPLAIN: *In verses 41-42, Jonathan renewed his covenant with David. However, he faced an ethical dilemma by going against the wishes of the king. Enduring friendships can be risky, but with the Lord's help, a greater good can be realized.* Review the Key Doctrine (*Christian Community*) in the PSG (p. 99).

DISCUSS: *List elements required to make a timeless friendship. How many of these elements are seen in the relationship between Jonathan and David? Can these elements be fostered within a relationship, or do they just happen?* (PSG, p. 99).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

ASK: *What biblical truth did you extract from the study of Jonathan's abiding friendship with David?* Distribute index cards, and ask each person to record one of the suggested truths.

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the second question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 100): *List the things you believe to be the greatest threats to true friendship. What actions are you taking to guard your friendships against those threats? Discuss with the group the role they can have in helping you guard godly friendships.*

EMPHASIZE: Call attention to today's Memory Verse (1 Samuel 18:3), and remind the group to continue using **Pack Item 5** (*Bookmark: Memory Verses*) as a reminder of what they have been learning during the sessions.

PRAY: Read the summary statement for today's session: *Godly friendship is built on commitment to God and provides lifelong encouragement.* Close in prayer, asking the Lord to create heartfelt attitudes which promote deeper friendships with each other.



PRACTICE

- Use email, social media, or text message to strengthen relationships with your group. Suggest that each person keep a daily log, listing personal acts of friendship. Encourage them to read and apply the following verse to their daily lives: Proverbs 17:17a. The group may share one or more examples of how this verse affected their lives during next week's session.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace or supplement the Focus Attention opening activity, lead the group to design a bookmark entitled *Friendship*. Distribute construction paper, markers, and scissors. On one side of the bookmark, lead volunteers to write a personal quote or action activity, such as "Friendship is important to growing the church." An action activity might be, "I will endeavor to be a friend to someone who needs to see the love of Christ."

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To further compare David's relationship with Jonathan, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity on page 96 of the PSG.
- To supplement the discussion of 1 Samuel 20:35-40, guide the group to create case studies that point to tests that strengthen relationships. As they share, compare the dynamics in the case study with the dynamics David and Jonathan faced.
- To support the discussion of friendship, lead the group to research illustrations or stories of Jesus exhibiting friendship. (Ex.: Jesus encountering Nicodemus, the woman at the well, or Lazarus.) Volunteers may give a synopsis of the story, sharing how Jesus' message was life changing—not only for those He encountered but for every generation.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Guide the group to create a list of their ten closest friends. Brainstorm ways to deepen their friendships with those whom they listed. Emphasize the importance of shared belief. When their lists are complete, volunteers can fold and place them in their Bibles as a reminder to pray for their friends and God's work in their lives.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, lead the group to ponder the application to their lives as you read the lyrics to "What a Friend We Have in Jesus," by Joseph Scriven, or "How He Loves," by David Crowder Band.

BLINDED

Personal ambition at the expense of others leads to paranoia and desperate decisions.

1 SAMUEL 22:6-17

MEMORY VERSE: PSALM 31:7

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 21:1–23:29, First Thoughts (p. 104), and Understand the Context (pp. 104-105). Note how Saul’s jealousy, fear, hatred, and paranoia fed each other. Use **PACK ITEM 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*) for ideas.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 22:6-17, using Explore the Text (pp. 106-109). Become more familiar with the characters in this passage—including the prophet Gad, Doeg the Edomite, and Ahimelech—by consulting the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* and the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com).
- **PLAN** the group time using the ideas under Lead the Group Bible Study (pp. 110-111). Look for other ideas for the session online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; A *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) and **PACK ITEM 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Social Order

Every Christian should seek to bring industry, government, and society as a whole under the sway of the principles of righteousness, truth, and brotherly love.

In his book *Creativity, Inc.*, Ed Catmull tells the story of an interview that was pivotal in his career. He and a small team of computer engineers had been working on the problem of how to use computer-generated images in films and television. At that time, this was a new and radical idea, and few filmmakers had any interest. One man who did begin to show interest was George Lucas, who had just enjoyed great success with his first *Star Wars* film. He realized that computer animation could enable him to do amazing things in his movies, and his studio, LucasFilm, began to interview candidates for the job of developing the technology. They interviewed Catmull. As the very last question of the interview, they asked, “Who else should LucasFilm be considering for this job?”

(In PSG, p. 103) **If you were asked “Who else should we consider for this job?” during a job interview, what would your answer reveal about your own qualifications and character?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read “David as an Outlaw,” an archive *Biblical Illustrator* article provided on the CD-ROM in the Summer 2016 *Explore the Bible: Leader Pack*.

Catmull was surprised, but he knew the field well and quickly ticked off the names of all the leading researchers in this area. He later found out that LucasFilm had already interviewed all the men whose names he had listed. The studio had asked each of them the same question, but the other candidates had given no names at all, acting as though they were the only people working on computer animation. Catmull got the job. Evidently the people at LucasFilm realized that someone who could not acknowledge the talents and drive of other people was not a good bet. Ed Catmull, because he could appreciate the abilities of other people, was much more likely to succeed.

Catmull and his team grew at LucasFilm until the studio, not sure that they were really able to fund this kind of research, sold the project to Steve Jobs. Under his leadership, Catmull and company created a new film studio. After years of work, they finally released their first movie, a film they called *Toy Story*. Almost overnight, people around the world got to know the name of Ed Catmull’s fledgling studio: Pixar.

Our study today focuses on Saul and his unwillingness to recognize David as the anointed one of God. Instead, the king was consumed by ambitious pride, triggering a chain reaction of jealousy, fear, hatred, paranoia, and desperate decisions. David’s popularity, success, and favor with God placed him in Saul’s crosshairs.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 21:1–23:29

First Samuel 21–23 continues the story of Saul’s relentless pursuit of David. This would have tragic consequences for Israel and ultimately for

Saul himself. Samuel had told Saul that God had repudiated him and he would have no dynasty to follow him (13:14). Like everyone else, Saul could see that David was highly gifted and was likely to be the next king. Saul may have known that Samuel had anointed David.

We may ask what Saul should have done. The answer is surprisingly simple: he should have acknowledged David as the anointed one of God. Had he done so, Israel could have had peace instead of civil war, and David could have served as Saul's military commander until he became king. There was no danger that David would seek to eliminate Saul or his family. He was never hostile, and he willingly entered a covenant with Jonathan. But Saul could not stand the thought of losing his crown. He could have had greatness, but instead he chose murder and madness.

David traveled extensively during his flight from Saul, and we need to be aware of the geography of these stories. David first fled for his life from Saul's capital city •Gibeah (in the hill country of Benjamin). He then made his way south to Nob, where there was a tent-shrine to the Lord (21:1). Nob was south of Gibeah and north of Jerusalem. From there, he traveled to the Philistine city of Gath and its king, Achish (21:10). Gath was to the west, located in the Shephelah (coastal foothills) and not in the rugged hill country. It seems odd that David would flee there, since he had fought many battles against the Philistines. Perhaps he thought that since Saul was now his enemy, the Philistines would aid him. David was nearly taken and killed and only escaped by feigning madness.

Leaving Gath, he went east to Adullam, southwest of Bethlehem, where many malcontents gathered to him and became the nucleus of his army (22:1). From there he went far to the southeast, to the other side of the Dead Sea. He took his parents over to Moab to keep them safe from Saul (22:3). He and his troops took refuge in the "stronghold" (22:4), which was probably located at Masada, on the west side of the Dead Sea. From here, he made his way northwest to Keilah, located near Adullam (23:4-5). He delivered Keilah from the Philistines, who had been raiding the city. But Saul planned to trap David inside Keilah's walls, and the people of that city, probably hoping to avoid a siege of their city, were willing to hand David over to Saul. But he escaped before Saul arrived. David fled south to Ziph, deep in the wilderness of Judah (23:14). Jonathan briefly met up with him there. The people of Ziph were loyal to Saul and ready to lead him to David, but Saul had to break off the pursuit to deal with a Philistine threat. David then took refuge at En-gedi (23:29), a beautiful oasis on the western shore of the Dead Sea.

This would have been an extremely demanding time for David. He was constantly on the run, and the hill country he had to traverse was harsh, rugged, and barren. What appears on the map to have been a distance of only a few miles in fact involved a very circuitous route involving constant movement up, down, and around countless hills of bare stone. In addition, he had to train and maintain the morale of his small army of misfits and discontents—men who, for the most part, were far from being the ideal recruits. This experience honed David's leadership skills and forged the bond between himself and his army.

1 SAMUEL 22:6

⁶ Saul heard that David and his men had been discovered. At that time Saul was in Gibeah, sitting under the tamarisk tree at the high place. His spear was in his hand, and all his servants were standing around him.

1 SAMUEL 22:7-8

⁷ Saul said to his servants, “Listen, men of Benjamin: Is Jesse’s son going to give all of you fields and vineyards? Do you think he’ll make all of you commanders of thousands and commanders of hundreds?” ⁸ That’s why all of you have conspired against me! Nobody tells me when my own son makes a covenant with Jesse’s son. None of you cares about me or tells me that my son has stirred up my own servant to wait in ambush for me, as is the case today.”

EXPLORE THE TEXT

PURSUED BY SAUL (1 SAM. 22:6-10)

David’s behavior in the early days of his flight was not entirely above reproach. But Saul was trying to kill him, and he was alone, hungry, and desperate, and so he made what he later recognized to be bad decisions (22:22). His first stop was at the shrine at Nob, where he lied to the priest Ahimelech, telling him that he had rushed away from the capital because he was sent by Saul on an urgent mission, and thus had no food or weapon. Ahimelech unwittingly assisted a fugitive by giving him Goliath’s sword and bread from the shrine (21:1-9). Had Ahimelech known the true story, he might have refused to help David. He would at least have known what he was getting himself into. The ramifications of this sequence of events would soon be apparent.

VERSE 6

Saul was at his capital city, **Gibeah**. It may seem strange that he was holding court out of doors, but most buildings at this time would have been too dark and cramped for a royal court, and Saul apparently did not have a true palace. Deborah similarly judged from under a palm tree (Judg. 4:5). Saul apparently held a **spear** whenever the royal court was in session, and it seems that if he got mad at someone, he threw the spear at him (see 18:10-11; 19:10; 20:33).

VERSES 7-8

On this occasion Saul took to complaining about how his men were not doing enough to help him find and kill David. He first appealed to the self-interest of his supporters, observing that he and his people were **men of Benjamin**. For that reason, he had shown them many favors, giving them land and high military offices. (In so saying, he confirmed 1 Sam. 8:11-18, Samuel’s warning that kings would favor their friends and oppress everyone else.) But David, Saul said, was **Jesse’s son**, a member of the tribe of Judah. The Benjamites of Saul’s court would lose all their perks when David took over.

Saul’s second strategy was to make himself an object of pity, complaining that no one had informed him of Jonathan’s **covenant** with David (although obviously somebody did tell him). He claimed that David was waiting **in ambush** to assassinate him, when in fact David had never threatened him at all. David had fled to save his own life. Saul’s jealous clinging to power had made him irrational, and he may well have believed the lies he was telling. Saul’s paranoia had begun to take hold; besides wrongly accusing David of planning an assassination, he thought his own court **conspired against** him.

VERSES 9-10

Among the members of Saul’s court was **Doeg the Edomite**. It may seem odd that Saul had a foreigner in his court, but non-Israelites did serve the kings. Uriah the Hittite was a loyal Israelite soldier and the husband

of Bathsheba. It is possible, however, that Doeg's foreign status made him especially eager to curry the king's favor. Doeg had been at Nob when David was there, and he chose this moment to give his report. Perhaps he sensed that, given Saul's state of mind, it would have maximum effect.

Doeg told Saul that **Ahimelech** had **inquired of the LORD** for David, that he **gave him provisions**, and that he armed David with **the sword of Goliath**. All of this was true (the account in 21:1-9 does not mention the oracle, but Ahimelech admits as much in 22:15). Nevertheless, coming from Doeg under these circumstances, it sounded as though Ahimelech was a partisan of David and was joining in a plot to overthrow Saul. Doeg had been there and had seen that Ahimelech had been deceived, but he said nothing to save Ahimelech's reputation.

Saul was holding greedily onto his power and was filled with self-pity and suspicion. In this frame of mind, he attracted people as bad as himself. Doeg, through flattery, manipulation, and half-truths, made himself a hero in Saul's eyes.

How does a complaining, bitter, or selfish spirit make us more vulnerable to manipulation? By contrast, how might a generous spirit that looks for and honors people of integrity protect us from the unscrupulous types?

GUILT BY ASSOCIATION (1 SAM. 22:11-15)

VERSES 11-13

Saul **sent messengers to summon Ahimelech**, certain that the priest was conspiring against him. Ahimelech came with his **whole family**, not knowing he was about to be charged with treason and tried in a kangaroo court.

Saul opened with a torrent of accusation, charging that Ahimelech was part of a conspiracy and then laying out the evidence, such as it was. In Saul's mind, Ahimelech represented a real threat to him. As the high priest at Nob, Ahimelech would have had great influence with the people. The Bible has other examples of priests or prophets in Israel who made a great difference in the politics of the day when they took sides against a monarch. Elisha had one of his disciples anoint Jehu as the new king of Israel, and when he did so, it was effectively the end of the reign of Joram, son of Ahab and Jezebel (2 Kings 9:1-3). Jehoiada the priest resisted the reign of terror carried out by Queen Athaliah, and he was instrumental in overthrowing her and putting the rightful heir, the young Joash, on the throne (2 Kings 11:1-16). For that matter, Samuel had already openly repudiated Saul and secretly anointed David (although apparently the secret was out by this time).

It is one thing to say that the priest Ahimelech could pose a significant threat to Saul if he allied with David, but it is another thing to say that Ahimelech was actually doing such a thing. As far as we can tell, Saul made no investigation of the matter whatsoever. He did not interview the sons

1 SAMUEL 22:9-10

⁹ Then Doeg the Edomite, who was in charge of Saul's servants, answered: "I saw Jesse's son come to Ahimelech son of Ahitub at Nob.

¹⁰ Ahimelech inquired of the LORD for him and gave him provisions. He also gave him the sword of Goliath the Philistine."

1 SAMUEL 22:11-13

¹¹ The king sent messengers to summon Ahimelech the priest, son of Ahitub, and his father's whole family, who were priests in Nob. All of them came to the king. ¹² Then Saul said, "Listen, son of Ahitub!" "I'm at your service, my lord," he said. ¹³ Saul asked him, "Why did you and Jesse's son conspire against me? You gave him bread and a sword and inquired of God for him, so he could rise up against me and wait in ambush, as is the case today."

of Ahimelech separately to see if any of them would say something to implicate the family. He did not inquire of the people in and around Nob to see if there had been communication between David and the priests there. This was an age in which communication had to be person to person (even written messages, inscribed on potsherds, would have to be carried to and fro by messengers). All people of rank had servants, and it was almost impossible to carry out meetings without their knowledge (as illustrated by the elaborate steps David and Jonathan took when trying to communicate with each other in 1 Sam. 20:18-24). Had Ahimelech really been involved in a conspiracy, people would have known. But Saul never bothered to check.

1 SAMUEL 22:14-15

¹⁴ Ahimelech replied to the king: “Who among all your servants is as faithful as David? He is the king’s son-in-law, captain of your bodyguard, and honored in your house. ¹⁵ Was today the first time I inquired of God for him? Of course not! Please don’t let the king make an accusation against your servant or any of my father’s household, for your servant didn’t have any idea about all this.”

1 SAMUEL 22:16

¹⁶ But the king said, “You will die, Ahimelech—you and your father’s whole family!”

VERSES 14-15

Saul’s evidence was flimsy. Ahimelech’s inquiring of the Lord on David’s behalf is hardly an act of treason. That Saul could regard it as treason indicates that Saul was in rebellion against God. He seems to have feared that God would side with David. Even giving David a sword and provisions, as Ahimelech did, is no sign of rebellion if he did it in ignorance.

Saul illustrates what happens when we let ambition and jealousy take hold of our hearts. We become suspicious, hostile, and quick to judge, and we do it in a particularly irrational manner. Our king, King Jesus, showed us a different and better way. In contrast to Saul’s selfish ambition, Jesus humbled Himself and took on the form of a servant, which led Him to the cross (Phil. 2:7-8). The apostle Paul said: “Make your own attitude that of Christ Jesus” (Phil. 2:5).

(In PSG, p. 108) **How do anger, jealousy, or envy cause you to judge others irrationally? In our law courts we have “due process” for dealing with an accused person. What kind of internal “due process” should take place in our heads when dealing with people that we think have done something wrong to us?**

DESPERATE MEASURES (1 SAM. 22:16-17)

VERSE 16

Saul was not interested in hearing any excuses; nor, for that matter, was he interested in hearing any facts. He had made up his mind that Ahimelech had turned against him. Even if that had been his frame of mind at the moment, he would have been well advised to put some time between his pronouncement of guilt and his handing down of a sentence. A week or even a day would have given him a chance to think carefully about what he should do. A brief delay is hardly unreasonable when someone’s life is on the line! But Saul rushed ahead, choosing to act when his passions were at their highest and his moral reasoning was at its lowest.

VERSE 17

Saul ordered the soldiers of his household guard to kill Ahimelech and his sons. They refused, probably out of pious fear of laying violent hands on God’s priests, and probably also because they could see that Ahimelech was guiltless. Despite Saul’s fury, his own men disobeyed his command outright. This, too, should have given Saul pause. Many of his men were Benjamites—members of his own tribe—and some were his relatives. When everyone, including friends, subordinates, and family members tell you that you are behaving in a wrongheaded way, you would do well to pay attention.

The aftermath of all this was especially tragic. Saul’s men were unwilling to kill the priests, but Doeg and his Edomite contingent were happy to oblige. That day, verse 18 tells us, they killed “85 men who wore linen ephods.” The ephod was a distinctive garb worn by Israelite priests. It seems to have been something like a vest. A large contingent of men of the priestly class was wiped out. But it did not end there. Doeg and his thugs also went to Nob, the city where the holy shrine was, and killed all the people there, obliterating the families of the priests as well as their servants and even local residents who had nothing to do with the shrine. They also killed all of the domestic animals in the town.

There is a grim irony in this. Saul had lost his crown because he refused to obey God when he was commanded to kill the king and the livestock of Israel’s Amalekite enemies (1 Sam. 15). Now Saul’s agent, Doeg, had carried out such an act. But the people he annihilated were not Israel’s enemies. They were the Israelite priests. Saul would not carry out the ultimate form of retribution against an enemy that had for centuries tormented Israel, but he did it to people he wrongly considered to be his own enemies and who were God’s anointed priests.

Saul no doubt justified the slaughter on the grounds that he had to make an example of Nob so that others in Israel would not dare to support David against him. He stands in a long line of rulers and military men who commit atrocities to coerce obedience from the larger populace. But such tactics backfire. Saul had already seen that his own men balked at obeying his evil orders. As the news of his atrocity and of his jealous rage spread, people sympathized with David, and their loyalty to Saul began to falter. Prior to this incident, Saul did not have any real rebellion against his rule at all. Because of his actions, Saul practically guaranteed that such a rebellion would come about.

(In PSG, p. 109) **How does unchecked ambition lead to irrational decisions and actions? How can other unchecked emotions and desires lead to the same kinds of irrational decisions and actions?**

1 SAMUEL 22:17

¹⁷ Then the king ordered the guards standing by him, “Turn and kill the priests of the LORD because they sided with David. For they knew he was fleeing, but they didn’t tell me.” But the king’s servants would not lift a hand to execute the priests of the LORD.

BIBLE SKILL

Outline a passage.

Psalms 52 records David’s response to the actions taken by Doeg the Edomite. Read the psalm, seeking to outline the major points expressed by David. What insights do you gain about unchecked ambition from David’s response?

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

REFLECT: As the group begins arriving, ask for volunteers to tell how they applied Proverbs 17:17a to their friendships during the previous week.

INTRODUCE: Lead a discussion on job interviews. Share questions that would surprise you. Ask: *How would you respond if asked, "Who else should we consider for this job?"* After responses, summarize the second paragraph under First Thoughts (p. 104; PSG, p. 103).

TRANSITION: *Our study today focuses on Saul and his unwillingness to recognize David as the anointed one of God. Instead, the king was consumed by ambitious pride, triggering a chain reaction of jealousy, fear, hatred, paranoia, and desperate decisions. David's popularity, success, and favor with God placed him in Saul's crosshairs* (PSG, p. 103). Display **Pack Item 6** (*Map: The Kingdom of Saul*) to demonstrate the amount of responsibility King Saul carried and how many were influenced by his decisions.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Direct the group to read silently 1 Samuel 22:6-10, looking for signs of Saul's paranoia. Remind them to consult the PSG (pp. 104-106) for insight and clarity.

GUIDE: Invite the group to identify words or phrases in the passage that indicate paranoia. Clarify as needed.

HIGHLIGHT: Post these words on your focal wall: *rejected, closed-minded, defiant, argumentative, and disagreeable*. Ask: *What other words would you add to this list to describe Saul's attitude?*

DISCUSS: Lead in a discussion of how these terms describe what might happen when a person decides that his or her decisions do not need counsel. Be prepared to cite examples of when you've seen or experienced this in your own life.

ASK: *How do unchecked ambition and pride lead to paranoia and fear? How can people convince themselves that what they want to believe is true?* (PSG, p. 105)

REVIEW: Call attention to 1 Samuel 22:9-10. Lead the group to use the information under Verses 9-10 in the PSG (pp. 105-106) to outline the process Doeg the Edomite used in dealing with Saul and David. Use your study of pages 106-107 to guide their discussion.

ASK: *How can unchecked ambition of one person add fuel to the unchecked ambition of others he or she may influence? How can the person who is influenced become an enabler of the person who is influencing?* (PSG, p. 106)

READ: Direct someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 22:11-15, while others underline Ahimelech's response to Saul. Lead them to summarize Saul's accusation.

HIGHLIGHT: Ahimelech displayed insight and courage in dealing with King Saul. He was “honest, sincere, and well-crafted” as he “defended David’s character” (PSG, p. 107).

BRAINSTORM: Lead the group to identify the five truths Ahimelech used to defend David. Ask: *How did these serve as a defense for Ahimelech?* Direct them to the information under Verses 11-15 for insight (PSG, pp. 107-108).

DISCUSS: *How do anger, jealousy, or envy cause you to judge others irrationally? In our law courts we have “due process” for dealing with an accused person. What kind of internal “due process” should take place in our heads when dealing with people that we think have done something wrong to us? How could a person use the approach taken by Ahimelech when responding to a critic or when accused? Are there other steps Ahimelech could have taken that would not have compromised his integrity?* (PSG, p. 108)

READ: Read aloud 1 Samuel 22:16-17, pointing out the Israelite guards’ refusal to obey.

GUIDE: Invite the group to propose reasons why the guards refused. Point the group to the comments under Verses 16-17 (PSG, pp. 108-109) for clarity.

EMPHASIZE: Highlight the Key Doctrine (*Social Order*) for today’s study (PSG, p. 109).

READ: Instruct someone to read Philippians 2:3-5, and then lead in a discussion of how we can know when to obey authorities and when doing so defies being Christlike. Use **Pack Item 8** (*King Saul vs. King David*) to compare and contrast humility and pride.

ASK: *How does unchecked ambition lead to irrational decisions and actions? How can other unchecked emotions and desires lead to the same kinds of irrational decisions and actions?* (PSG, p. 109)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: *What biblical precepts did you recognize from the study of Saul’s relationship with David? Point to the statements under In My Context (PSG, p. 110): Personal ambition when left unchecked can lead to sin and destruction. Believers may face opposition simply for doing the right thing. Believers need to stand against laws that violate God’s laws and principles. Ask: What would you add to these statements?*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 110): *As a group, how can the community of believers help people detect their blind spots when it comes to pride?*

PRAY: Lead the group in a prayer, asking for help as we seek to display a Christlike attitude that reflects humility and the consideration of others. End by saying, *Lord, help us honor You with our decisions.*



PRACTICE

- Take some time to evaluate your ambitions and motives for what you do. Ask God to reveal to you any selfish ambitions you need to give to Him.
- Use a variety of social media sources to contact your group. Suggest that each person seek a heart of humility in regard to upcoming decisions. Encourage them to memorize Psalm 31:7 as a way to remember to trust in God's direction for their lives.
- Challenge the group to be cognizant of sharing a biblical truth or word of wisdom when confronted with the opportunity to share Christ or address a moral issue. Being proactive means that our focus is not on ourselves but on the gospel.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace or supplement the Focus Attention opening activity, read the summary statement for today's session: *Personal ambition at the expense of others leads to paranoia and desperate decisions.* Ask: *In what ways have you seen personal ambition affect relationships with others? With God?*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To enhance the study, pre-enlist someone to read 1 Samuel 22:6-8 as a dramatic monologue.
- Record the names of the characters (Saul, Doeg, Ahimelech, the guards) on a posterboard and display on the focal wall. As each person is mentioned during the reading of Scripture in today's study, add descriptions that define the actions of that person or group.
- To enhance your study of 1 Samuel 22:9-10, guide the group to complete the Bible Skill activity on Psalm 52 in the PSG (p. 106).

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Highlight the second set of questions under In My Context in the PSG (p. 110): *Review how you respond to people who oppose Jesus and who also oppose you as a result of your commitment to Him. How can you give those people a confident yet loving response? What steps do you need to take today in preparation for giving an answer for your faith?* Lead the group to list ways that people oppose Christ and His followers. Then allow the group to role-play responses to people who oppose Christ.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, read Hebrews 12:4 and then guide the group to sing "Take Time to Be Holy," by William D. Longstaff, or "Lead Me to the Cross," by Chris and Conrad.

PROTECTED

God guards the honor of His name and the steps of His people.

1 SAMUEL 25:14-17,32-38

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 25:32-33

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 25:1-43. Review Understand the Context (pp. 114-115). Reflect on the statement from the PSG (p. 114): *Our perception of God's silence is never proof of God's absence.*
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 25:14-17,32-38, focusing on words that show God at work. Create a time line of the sequence of events; use **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line of 1 Samuel*) for assistance. Reflect on the actions and reactions of each character in this passage. Create a summary of the relationship between Nabal and his wife. Review the PSG and Explore the Text (pp. 115-119) for additional perspectives.
- **PLAN** the group time using suggestions under Lead the Group Bible Study (pp. 120-121). Be creative by rephrasing questions or ideas to personalize the session for your group. Refer to the resources at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible for more ideas.
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Construction paper, scissors, markers, and non-stick tape to design and cut nine interlocking puzzle pieces; Index cards; and A *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 4** (*Time Line of 1 Samuel*); **PACK ITEM 14** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 16:7*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Peace and War

It is the duty of Christians to seek peace with all men on principles of righteousness.

How do you react when you feel that you've been wronged? Think back over any recent insults, work-related problems, personality conflicts, or even attacks against people you love. While many Christians want their actions to be guided by prayer, grace, love, and patience, it's too tempting to settle for homegrown justice. We lash out in anger instead of waiting patiently on God. We buy into the cliché that *it's better to ask forgiveness than ask permission*. And yes, it may feel good in the moment, but will it be good in the long run?

(In PSG, p. 112) **Where is the line between defending yourself and trusting God to step in on your behalf? How do you know when to wait patiently on God when the only thing you want to do is defend yourself or those you love?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "David and His Wives" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

The story of Nabal and David addresses that exact problem through five main scenes: David and his men protected Nabal's shepherds, Nabal disrespected David, David started down a path of retaliation, Nabal's wife (Abigail) wisely deescalated the situation, and God punished Nabal. The story reminds us that God is so sovereign, so big, so completely in control that He doesn't need our help to defend His honor or His people. From David's limited perspective, he needed to act for the problem to be solved. From God's complete perspective, the problem was already being solved without David's help.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 25:1-43

The place called Carmel in 1 Samuel 25 is not the more famous Mount Carmel, where Elijah had his contest with the prophets of Baal (1 Kings 18). Mount Carmel is located in the north, due west of the Sea of Galilee and on the triangle of land that juts into the Mediterranean Sea. The Carmel of 1 Samuel 25 was a small town in the far south of the wilderness of Judah, about eight miles southeast of Hebron. The local economy was based on shepherding. The climate was too dry for large scale farming of grain crops.

By this time, David was well established in southern Judah. He had a significant following. His men constituted a small, personal army, and probably by now many local people were beginning to sympathize with him and against Saul. David was effectively in control of the region. He was now what is often called a "warlord." The term sounds negative and even vicious, but that is not necessarily the case. A warlord exists in a territory that is far

removed from effective central government. He has a private army, and he serves as the de facto government for the region. A warlord could be cruel and exploitative, but he could also be fair and decent, providing defense and justice for the local people. Indeed, a warlord could become a great hero to the general population—as was the case with David.

Readers may wonder why David felt he had the right to ask Nabal for payment for not harassing his shepherds or stealing his sheep. From the perspective of ancient culture, Nabal's flocks were in David's territory. As the warlord in control of the region, it was his domain. Less scrupulous warlords would have simply swooped in whenever they felt the need and taken as much as they wanted as a form of taxation. David refrained from bullying and from appropriating such supplies as he saw fit. Instead, he left the shepherds in peace and also protected them from bandits. Nabal knew what the unwritten code of conduct required of him. His shepherds operated under David's shadow; contemporary cultural standards as well as simple prudence and decency required that he send a substantial gift as a way of thanking David.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DISASTER FORESEEN (1 SAM. 25:14-17)

VERSES 14-16

When David's men came to him and told him how they had been treated, he was in no mood to be forgiving. Nabal's claim that David was a rebel against Saul was a slanderous insult (1 Sam. 25:10). It was also an excuse (justifying Nabal's refusal to reciprocate the good treatment his employees and livestock had received). By this time, it would have been clear to most honest observers, especially in Judah, that David was no rebel and that Saul was behaving outrageously. David's response was quick and resolute: "All of you, put on your swords!" (v. 13).

The anonymous servant in verse 14 showed great wisdom. First, he knew that Nabal had put everyone in danger by his haughty and selfish action. We have no reason to think that this servant, one of Nabal's shepherds, had seen or heard about David's anger and his intention to respond with violence. But he knew that, given the cultural realities of the day, such a response was to be expected.

Second, he went to Abigail, whom he apparently knew to be just, wise, and resourceful. He knew that there was no point in trying to persuade Nabal to change his mind.

Third, he gave a reasoned argument to Abigail. David's men, although vastly more powerful than Nabal's shepherds, had never harmed, harassed, or stolen from them. More than that, they had given them protection day and night. Both Abigail and the shepherd knew that by the code of the wilderness, David's troops were owed compensation.

1 SAMUEL 25:14-16

¹⁴ One of Nabal's young men informed Abigail, Nabal's wife: "Look, David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master, but he yelled at them.

¹⁵ The men treated us well. When we were in the field, we weren't harassed and nothing of ours was missing the whole time we were living among them.

¹⁶ They were a wall around us, both day and night, the entire time we were herding the sheep.

1 SAMUEL 25:17

¹⁷ Now consider carefully what you must do, because there is certain to be trouble for our master and his entire family. He is such a worthless fool nobody can talk to him!”

BIBLE SKILL

Use a Bible dictionary (either print or online) to learn more about a Bible character.

Use a Bible dictionary to look up the meaning of the name *Nabal*. How did Nabal in 1 Samuel 25 live up to his name? In what ways was his name fitting?

VERSE 17

Fourth, he told Abigail that she had to act: **Now consider carefully what you must do.** She could not just commiserate with the servant over Nabal’s actions; she had to do something to counteract them.

Fifth, the servant concluded his speech with an emotional appeal grounded in the truth: Nabal is **such a worthless fool nobody can talk to him!** It could have been very dangerous for the servant to speak to Nabal’s wife in this way, but he knew that she was too moral and decent to deny his words. The intensity of his language got her moving.

Prompted by the servant’s appeal, Abigail got together a large amount of provisions (v. 18), the very thing David had asked for. The wine, the loaves of bread, and the roasted grain may have represented considerable expense. We must remember that Carmel was in wilderness of Judah, country fitted for little besides raising sheep and goats. The grains and wine probably had to be purchased from far away. As they marched on Nabal, the last thing David and his angry army expected was to see was Nabal’s wife, prostrate on the ground in the middle of the path with a large peace offering all around her (v. 23).

We should also say a word about her comment, “His name is Nabal, and stupidity is all he knows” (v. 25). The Hebrew word *nabal* means “insolent, selfish, and stupid person.” It is astonishing that anyone should have such a name. It may be that originally this was an epithet, used only behind his back, but over the course of time, it became the only name by which he was remembered.

Wisdom can take many forms. Sometimes we must deal with a problem ourselves, and sometimes we must appeal to another person to deal with it. Why didn’t the servant deal with the problem himself? How does his approach serve as a model for us?

DAVID RELENTS (1 SAM. 25:32-35)

Face to face with Abigail, David realized how foolish he had been and how he had been saved from a terrible sin. To understand this, we need to look back for a moment.

At Saul’s direction, Doeg the Edomite killed the priests of Nob and then slaughtered all the inhabitants of the village (22:18-19). The episode described here parallels what we see there, but with several differences. Saul had only imagined that Ahimelech and the other priests were his enemies. Nabal, however, had genuinely insulted David, and his refusal to give any compensation to David and his men had been a serious offense against normal protocol and prudence. Even so, David in his anger let himself get out of control. He was prepared to do exactly what Saul had done. Leading his armed men toward Nabal’s household, he declared, “May God punish me and do so severely if I let any of his men survive until morning” (25:22).

Being a wealthy man, Nabal would have had a very extensive household, including his extended family, his employees and their families, slaves, and others. David was ready to kill them all. Once bloodlust had taken hold of David's men, they may not have stopped short of killing everyone in Carmel, Nabal's town. In his great rage, David was ready to kill many innocent people to avenge the arrogance of one man.

There is yet another curious parallel. Nabal was a descendant of Caleb (25:3). Caleb, although attached to the tribe of Judah, was a Kenizzite—a descendant of Kenaz (Josh. 14:6). Kenaz was an Edomite clan chief, making Caleb, and also Nabal, biologically of Edomite descent, although they were legally members of Judah (remember that Israel was a mixed multitude). Thus, the Edomite Doeg instigated the slaughter at Nob, and the Edomite Nabal almost instigated the slaughter at Carmel. The ancient reader would have caught the connections and the similarities and so would have known that David came perilously close to emulating Saul's crime and folly.

The consequences for such an act would have been enormous. First and foremost, David would have had great bloodguilt on his hands. Second, all the goodwill he had gained as a result of the restraint and respect his men had shown to the local people of southern Judah would have vanished. Third, Israel would have judged him to be no better than Saul, and in fact to be worse, since at least Saul had the authority of being the king, whereas David had no legal standing. People would have been more resistant to accepting David as king after Saul's death. Fourth, David's men would have become more callous, more accustomed to senseless killing, and more difficult to control.

VERSES 32-35

Brought to his senses, David realized what a near thing it had been: ***Today you kept me from participating in bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand.*** He acknowledged that but for her, he would have committed a great atrocity. He told her, ***Go home in peace,*** and he accepted the provisions and turned back.

David's repentance was complete. He did not send an angry message to Nabal, telling him that but for his wife, Nabal's head would now be on top of a spear. He did not tell Abigail to make sure Nabal never did something like this again. He simply went back. This is a model for us for letting go of wrath. When turned aside from doing evil, we should thank God and those who intervened, and we should turn away from the sin entirely. We should not hold on to a little piece of it, thinking we can always return to it if things don't go as we wish.

Can you recall episodes in your life when someone turned you from a wrong and foolish act? How did this serve as a milestone in your Christian pilgrimage?

1 SAMUEL 25:32-35

³² Then David said to Abigail, "Praise to the LORD God of Israel, who sent you to meet me today! ³³ Your discernment is blessed, and you are blessed. Today you kept me from participating in bloodshed and avenging myself by my own hand. ³⁴ Otherwise, as surely as the LORD God of Israel lives, who prevented me from harming you, if you had not come quickly to meet me, Nabal wouldn't have had any men left by morning light." ³⁵ Then David accepted what she had brought him and said, "Go home in peace. See, I have heard what you said and have granted your request."

1 SAMUEL 25:36

³⁶ Then Abigail went to Nabal, and there he was in his house, holding a feast fit for a king. Nabal was in a good mood and very drunk, so she didn't say anything to him until morning light.

1 SAMUEL 25:37-38

³⁷ In the morning when Nabal sobered up, his wife told him about these events. Then he had a seizure and became paralyzed.

³⁸ About 10 days later, the LORD struck Nabal dead.

GOD INTERVENES (1 SAM. 25:36-38)

VERSE 36

Nabal, blissfully ignorant of the fact that his life hung in the balance, gorged himself in a great feast. One can only imagine how the servant who had warned Abigail felt at this time, wondering if David's army would swoop in at any moment and strike down everyone. At least his mind would have been set at ease when Abigail returned. But she could not speak to Nabal, as he was too drunk to grasp what was going on.

VERSES 37-38

The next day Abigail told Nabal everything. It seems that on top of everything else, Nabal was a coward, and the account of David's anger gripped him with terror. Whether by cardiac arrest or aneurysm or some other cause, he collapsed. The Hebrew literally says that he "became a stone," apparently meaning that he was *paralyzed*, catatonic, or in a coma. **About 10 days later**, he died. Regardless of the natural causes, the Bible summarizes it well enough: ***the LORD struck Nabal dead***.

The outcome of this series of events vividly illustrates Romans 12:19: "Friends, do not avenge yourselves; instead, leave room for His wrath. For it is written: Vengeance belongs to Me; I will repay, says the Lord" (see also Deut. 32:35). David refrained from doing violence to Nabal, and God swiftly stepped in deal with him. But we should understand that pulling back had not been an easy thing for David to do. He would have never turned aside had Abigail not intervened. In addition, Nabal had violated one of David's core moral principles: he had repaid good with evil. Consider how frequently this motif appears in the psalms:

- "If I have done harm to one at peace with me or have plundered my adversary without cause, may an enemy pursue and overtake me" (Ps. 7:4-5).
- "Do not drag me away with the wicked, with the evildoers, who speak in friendly ways with their neighbors while malice is in their hearts" (Ps. 28:3).
- "Now it is not an enemy who insults me—otherwise I could bear it; it is not a foe who rises up against me—otherwise I could hide from him. But it is you, a man who is my peer, my companion and good friend!" (Ps. 55:12-13).

- "They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my love" (Ps. 109:5).

All of the above citations are from psalms of David, and they illustrate some of David's core values: loyalty to one's friends, reciprocity to those who deal fairly and kindly with you, and not engaging in unprovoked hostility. These are the virtues one would expect of a morally grounded professional soldier, which is precisely what David was at this time.

The point is this: when Nabal haughtily turned away David's emissaries, repaying David's kindness with insults, he violated the principles by which David governed his life. For his part, David's loyalty to Saul, as God's anointed, was so great that he would not retaliate even as Saul was trying to kill him (1 Sam. 24:3-6). For this reason, Nabal's provocation would have been intolerable to David. It would have been the hardest kind of offense

for David even to endure, much less to forgive. And yet, thanks to Abigail's intervention, he was able to turn away from his path of violence and put the matter in God's hands.

It is never easy to refrain from retaliation when we feel someone has wronged us. But God calls on us to be forbearing and to leave vengeance to Him, even when someone has done a wrong that we consider unconscionable. We can find the strength to do so when we remember that Christ paid for others' sins as He paid for ours.

(In PSG, p. 119) **What other examples come to mind in which God defended Himself and the honor of His name? How is Jesus' death and resurrection an act of God that counters humanity's taking matters into our own hands?**

At the end of this story, David took Abigail as his wife. She was only one of many. In the current moral and sexual chaos that is now sweeping over the United States, we can be sure that this issue will become more prominent. Homosexual marriage is now the law of the land, and agitation for legalizing polygamy has already begun. Thinking about polygamy in the Bible, we should be aware of the following points.

- In the harsh realities of Iron Age Israel, survival was marginal and people felt they had to do what was needed to preserve themselves and their families. A woman alone was in great danger. She needed the home of a man, and she also needed a son to care for her in her old age. In that sense, David's marriage to Abigail may have been a mercy. The world we live in is radically different from the Judean wilderness of the 10th century B.C.

- Abigail may have brought her wealth and connections to the Calebites with her into the marriage. If so, the marriage was politically advantageous to David. It is certain that in the polygamous world of the Old Testament, marriages were often contracted for purely economic and political reasons. These marriages were not characterized by love, and modern polygamy would soon take on the same qualities.

- David's many wives led to moral chaos in his household. There was murder, rape, intrigue, and civil war. Sin can arise in any family, but things are much worse if wives and their children are put in a situation where intense rivalry and factions are all but certain.

- Polygamy, like divorce, was never God's intention for humanity. These things were only allowed because of our hardness of heart. God desires for one man and one woman to be "one flesh." (See Gen. 2:24 and Matt. 19:3-9.)

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

GUIDE: As the group arrives, encourage them to share about a time when they had to defend themselves or a loved one. After most of the group has arrived, invite volunteers to analyze the stories, noting if and when a person moved from being on the defensive to being on the offensive.

DISCUSS: *Where is the line between defending yourself and trusting God to step in on your behalf? How do you know when to wait patiently on God when the only thing you want to do is defend yourself or those you love?* (PSG, p. 112)

TRANSITION: Explain that in 1 Samuel 25, we find a story where David faced this same dilemma, to defend or to wait on God. Call attention to the last paragraph of First Thoughts (PSG, p. 113). Highlight the five scenes identified in the paragraph to give an overview of the story. Explain that the group will look at critical verses within the story.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

READ: Summarize 1 Samuel 25:1-4. Read aloud 1 Samuel 25:14-17, calling attention to David's treatment of Nabal's men. Lead the group to contrast how David's men treated Nabal's people and possessions to Nabal's treatment of David's men.

GUIDE: Emphasize that the person speaking is a servant of Nabal. Call attention to how this servant referred to Nabal. Emphasize that the servant was talking to the spouse of Nabal. Reveal the meaning of Nabal's name. Ask: *How was Nabal living up to his name?*

REVIEW: Highlight the important role that Nabal's servant had in being a peacemaker. Lead the group to circle the actual steps used by Nabal's servant. Characterize the servant as acting with courage, especially in light of his knowledge of Nabal's character.

ASK: *Apart from fear, what keeps people silent? In what ways can silence be just as dangerous as exaggerating a potential conflict or issue?* (PSG, p. 116)

TRANSITION: Explain that the servant called on Abigail to consider carefully what she should do (see v. 17). Summarize 1 Samuel 25:18-31, highlighting the actions taken by Abigail.

READ: Instruct someone to read aloud 1 Samuel 25:32-35, as the group listens for David's response.

GUIDE: Guide the group to consider the various options that David faced. List options suggested by the group on a whiteboard. If not included, add *to go on the offensive and attack*. (David expressed this in his response.) Lead the group to propose pros and cons of each potential action.

DISCUSS: *What keeps a person from submitting to God in every situation? How are submitting to God and trusting in Him connected?* (PSG, p. 118)

READ: Direct a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 25:36-38, as you list each action on a whiteboard. Invite the group to help you develop a summary statement of each action described in the passage. Refer them to the PSG (pp. 118-119) for assistance. Record the statements next to each action on the whiteboard.

EMPHASIZE: *God orchestrated the events in response to David's faithfulness.* Call attention to the two paragraphs printed above the question on page 119 of the PSG that begin "God can defend Himself." Direct the group to read these two paragraphs. Solicit their responses to any statement in the paragraph.

ASK: *What other examples come to mind in which God defended Himself and the honor of His name? How is Jesus' death and resurrection an act of God that counters humanity's taking matters into our own hands?* (PSG, p. 119)

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

REVIEW: *Often, we take matters into our own hands, not waiting on God's perfect plan to materialize.*

REFLECT: Call attention to the statements on the top of page 120 under In My Context: *People can take definite action to intervene in the face of conflict. Believers are to be thankful when God keeps them from acting out of selfish motives, including out of personal revenge. Believers can trust God to bring about His judgment against evil in His time.* Lead the group to identify ways in which each statement is born out in this study. Allow the group to share any additional truths they discovered in this session. Remind the group that God is sovereign and He desires the very best for His children.

CHALLENGE: Remind the group of the stories shared at the beginning of the session. Lead the group to complete the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 120): *As a group, share stories of times when you took definite action in the face of conflict. Include what went well and what went wrong. How does today's Bible passage speak to what you learned in that situation?*

PRAY: Close with a prayer that God will find our decisions faithful to His will, despite the obstacles we face.



PRACTICE

- Use a variety of social media sources to contact your group. Remind them that God is never late, nor is He early; He is always right on time. Ask each person to apply this concept to their decisions and circumstances. Also, share with them the words of Proverbs 16:9.
- Focus on the importance of Scripture memorization, and work to apply this week's verses (1 Samuel 25:32-33) to your daily life.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

To replace or supplement the Focus Attention opening activity, lead the group to explore this question: *Have you ever wanted to see bad things happen to bad people?* Even though a variety of answers will be offered, remind the group that God is sovereign and we are to focus on our relationship with God and allow Him to judge accordingly. State: *David was treated unfairly by Nabal, yet David did not pray for Nabal's harm.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To replace the revealing of the meaning of Nabal's name, lead the group to complete the Bible Skill activity (PSG, p. 114). Provide a Bible dictionary or direct them to a Bible dictionary they can access on their smartphones.
- To supplement the listing of each action identified in 1 Samuel 25:36-38, call attention to **Pack Item 14** (Poster: 1 Samuel 16:7). Ask: *How is this verse relevant to Abigail's actions?*
- Challenge the group to scan the passages examined today looking for key phrases or words in that reflect God's character (ex.: Provider, Sustainer, Ruler, or Father). As expressions are shared, ask for a testimony of when God was one of these attributes to them.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Remind the group of this statement from the PSG (p. 114): *Our perception of God's silence is never proof of God's absence.* Lead the group to keep a seven-day diary, listing major events and their decisions related to those events. Instruct them to note when they experienced God's silence or His clear activity.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

To close the session, guide the group to sing "A Mighty Fortress Is Our God," by Martin Luther, or to play the song, "God Is in Control," by Twila Paris.

RESPECT

God is ultimately in charge of those who lead.

1 SAMUEL 26:7-12,21-25

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 26:9

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 24:1-22; 26:1-25; and 18:1-26, and Understand the Context (pp. 124-125). Note how respect and humility are demonstrated throughout the passages.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 26:7-12,21-25, using Explore the Text (pp. 125-129). Notice that David made three important statements in these verses; each time the key phrase was “the Lord’s anointed.” Using the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*, discover ways this phrase was applied to other biblical personalities. Consult the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com) for further background.
- **PLAN** the group time using recommendations under Lead the Group Bible Study (pp. 130-131). Use More Ideas (p. 132) and ideas online at Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible to customize the plans according to the needs of your group.
- **GROW** with other group leaders at the Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; Posterboard and markers; Paper and pens; Two Bible dictionaries or concordances that discuss the word *blessing*; and A lock and key (or a blank key without the lock). Prepare to display the following Pack Item: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Peace and War

The true remedy for the war spirit is the gospel of our Lord.

Look out for number one! Take what's yours! Control your own destiny! The sentiments of selfishness pervade our society. We seem to ignore our neighbor, treat strangers with contempt, and expect others to sacrifice for our good. It almost seems abnormal when people put others first. Most of us may see ourselves as the exception, but if we were to take a deep self-examination, we would find the same selfishness at work.

(In PSG, p. 123) **What percentage of people do you believe view the majority of others as selfish? What percentage of people do you believe view themselves as selfish?**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "Who Were the Amalekites?" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Diagnosing selfish tendencies is uncomfortable, but it's a critical discipline when learning to discern between God's will and good opportunities. In this session, we see how God delivered Saul into David's hands (1 Sam. 26:23). On the surface, it would seem like a good opportunity to put an end to Saul's personal vendetta against David. Saul's attempts to kill David are well-documented. However, David did not immediately equate opportunity with God's will. Out of deep respect for the Lord and the Lord's anointed, David refused to harm Saul in any way.

Through this account, we discover three important truths. First, God's plans are always better than our plans. Second, selfish tendencies can lead to premature victories (complete with additional problems and a guilty conscience). Third, God's plans require us to filter opportunities through the lens of respect for others and godly principles.

BIBLE SKILL

Compare similar situations.

Read 1 Samuel 13:8-15 and compare Saul's actions with David's actions in this passage. What do these passages reveal about each man's character? How do these two passages illustrate the value of patience and the danger of impatience?

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 24:1-22; 26:1-25

David and his men were "on the hill of Hachilah opposite Jeshimon" (26:1). While we don't precisely know where these places were, they were probably on the east side of the Judean wilderness, just west of the Dead Sea. David spent a good deal of time here at the stronghold (23:14), which was apparently at Masada and which became famous much later. The local inhabitants, the Ziphites, informed Saul that David was nearby. We don't know why the Ziphites were partisans of Saul, or indeed if all of them were. We can be sure that the political turmoil, with its factions and frequent shifts of allegiance, was far more complex than the Bible tells us.

David, perhaps informed by one of his partisans, heard that Saul was coming with an army to look for him. He sent out scouts on a reconnaissance mission, and they located Saul's troops as they moved south.

Rather than take his forces and flee the area, David moved to intercept Saul. His purpose at this point is unclear; he may have been planning on setting up an ambush. It is unlikely that he was going there to negotiate. Rivals would typically negotiate by sending a few representatives to a neutral place, not by bringing their two armies into a face-to-face confrontation.

At 3,000 men, Saul's forces were several times larger than David's, but David's men knew the terrain well and had the advantage of surprise. His army actually came upon Saul's as they were bedded down for the night. If David had been considering a surprise attack, this was as good a setup as he could have hoped for. But if that was his intent, he hesitated, probably because he did not want to shed Israelite blood and because he did not want to attack the Lord's anointed.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

OPPORTUNITY KNOCKS (1 SAM. 26:7-8)

VERSES 7-8

Finding himself directly adjacent to the enemy army, David decided instead to do something exceedingly risky: go into Saul's camp in person to reconnoiter the situation. David could be bold to the point of near recklessness. However, he probably did this out of honorable motives: rather than ask others to do something so dangerous, he would do it himself. Also, only he could make the decision about what to do once inside Saul's camp. He could not delegate that to someone else. David asked two men, Ahimelech the Hittite and brother of Joab and Abishai son of Zeruiah: "Who will go with me into the camp to Saul?" Only Abishai volunteered (1 Sam. 26:6). The narrative does not censure Ahimelech for cowardice; the text probably includes this detail in order to make the point that it was obvious to all that this was a very dicey operation. Also, the story sets up a contrast between Saul, who was in the middle of his camp with all of his men all around him, and David, who went into danger with a single companion.

Eventually, the two made their way to the very center of the camp, tiptoeing through the sleeping troops. There they found the sleeping king. Abishai responded to this good fortune in the way any soldier would: **"Today God has handed your enemy over to you. Let me thrust the spear through him into the ground just once. I won't have to strike him twice!"** What better way to end this long conflict? Without Saul, the rest of his army would be irrelevant. Furthermore, wars of succession were often settled in this way. As soon as one rival was killed, the game was over—like the checkmate of a king in chess. Just a single thrust of the spear, and all of this misery of moving from place to place in the barren Judean wilderness would be over. David's men could return to their ancestral villages without fear of capture by Saul's forces.

Abishai would make the decision easy for David. Saul's death would be swift and silent, and David wouldn't even have to lift a finger. David would

1 SAMUEL 26:7-8

⁷ That night, David and Abishai came to the troops, and Saul was lying there asleep in the inner circle of the camp with his spear stuck in the ground by his head. Abner and the troops were lying around him. ⁸ Then Abishai said to David, "Today God has handed your enemy over to you. Let me thrust the spear through him into the ground just once. I won't have to strike him twice!"

have plausible deniability. He wouldn't have to take any blame for killing Saul; he had never touched the king.

In addition, one could easily interpret the situation as Abishai did: God had arranged this, and God intended for David to kill Saul. David by now believed that he had been chosen by God to succeed Saul, and thus this theological justification might have had real appeal to him. He could have thought, "If God wants me to be king, and He does, and God has placed Saul in my hands, and He has, then obviously God wants me to kill him."

1 SAMUEL 26:9

⁹ But David said to Abishai, "Don't destroy him, for who can lift a hand against the LORD's anointed and be blameless?"

1 SAMUEL 26:10

¹⁰ David added, "As the LORD lives, the LORD will certainly strike him down: either his day will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish."

1 SAMUEL 26:11

¹¹ However, because of the LORD, I will never lift my hand against the LORD's anointed. Instead, take the spear and the water jug by his head, and let's go."

(In PSG, p. 126) **What are the dangers of equating an open door with God's will? How does one know the difference between a true open door and a test disguised as an open door?**

GODLY RESPECT (1 SAM. 26:9-12)

VERSE 9

David's response was resolute and clear: "***Don't destroy him, for who can lift a hand against the LORD's anointed and be blameless?***" Whatever had been his motives for bringing his army to meet Saul's, and whatever had been his motives for sneaking into the camp, he had no intention of assassinating the king. He knew that this would leave guilt on his hands that, like the bloodstains on the hands of Lady Macbeth, he could never wash out. He did not rationalize the act as the will of God or as something he would not be guilty for since Abishai would actually do the deed.

VERSE 10

David's next statement shows that by this time he was sure that God would give him the victory: "***As the LORD lives, the LORD will certainly strike him down.***" He did not know when or how God would bring this about: ***either his day will come and he will die, or he will go into battle and perish.*** In other words, for all David knew, it could take a very long time for Saul to finally die so that David could take his place. But however long it would take, David would receive the crown only as a gift from God; he would not seize it by force.

VERSE 11

David wanted evidence that he had been there and that he could have killed Saul, had he chosen to do it. Thus, he took Saul's **spear** and **water jug**. They were conveniently at hand and obvious things to take if David wanted to prove that he had stood over the sleeping Saul. But they probably had symbolic meaning as well. First Samuel 22:6 implies that Saul held the spear while he was in a formal session with his court. It was thus the sign of his royal power, like a king's scepter, and, being a spear,

it was the sign of his military strength. Water was the most precious commodity for men traveling through the barren wilderness of Judah. It was essential for their lives. By taking Saul's water jug, he showed that he held Saul's life in his hands.

VERSE 12

With spear and jug in hand, David and Abishai quietly departed the camp. The reader might find it implausible that these two men could walk right through Saul's camp without being spotted by someone. Was Saul such a careless military commander that he had neglected to post a sentry? Was there not a single light sleeper in the camp? The narrator anticipates these questions and tells us that the heavy sleep on the Israelite soldiers had been a work of God.

How does this text show us that we need to have our moral principles firmly in place before we get into a situation where it is easy to compromise?

REMORSE (1 SAM. 26:21)

VERSE 21

David crossed over the gorge between Saul's camp and his, and from there he called out to the commander of the Israelite army, Abner. By this time dawn was apparently breaking, and the men were beginning to stir. It might seem that it was risky for David to call attention to himself but, depending on the terrain, it probably was not. The descent from Saul's hill and ascent up David's may have been through a narrow defile, making it almost impossible for Saul's troops to effectively launch an attack. David's men could either have escaped or simply stood their ground against an army that would have had to fight uphill and with only a few men at a time.

It is difficult to know whether David was taunting Abner or seriously accusing him of dereliction of duty. From what we know of him, Abner was a conscientious and highly effective field officer. But the most important thing, and the actual reason David shouted across to Abner, was to make sure that Saul and his men knew that David had been right in their midst of their camp and that the king's life would have been forfeit had it not been for David's mercy and sense of honor. Perhaps it would have been too disrespectful for David to address the king personally to make this point.

David produced the spear and the water flask as evidence of what a near thing it had been. Saul, who was the real object of David's address, then spoke up. This allowed a dialogue between the two men to begin. David appealed to him to stop his relentless pursuit and to recognize that

1 SAMUEL 26:12

¹² So David took the spear and the water jug by Saul's head, and they went their way. No one saw them, no one knew, and no one woke up; they all remained asleep because a deep sleep from the LORD came over them.

1 SAMUEL 26:21

²¹ Saul responded, "I have sinned. Come back, my son David, I will never harm you again because today you considered my life precious. I have been a fool! I've committed a grave error."

David was no threat to him at all. Because of Saul's hostility, David could not come and worship within Israel. He was treated as though he were a Gentile pagan. Using rather exaggerated language, he said he was like a flea (that is, he and his men were no threat to Saul). Actually, David's force could have given Saul a significant headache had he wanted to harass and raid the kingdom, but in fact he had no desire to do that.

A key moment in the narrative is verse 21, where Saul admits that he has done wrong and appeals for David to come back to him: ***"I have sinned. Come back, my son David, I will never harm you again because today you considered my life precious. I have been a fool! I've committed a grave error."*** His repeated statements of remorse sound sincere, but the astute Bible reader here recognizes an allusion to Exodus 10:16-17, where Pharaoh said, "I have sinned against Yahweh your God and against you. Please forgive my sin once more and make an appeal to Yahweh your God, so that He will take this death away from me." But Pharaoh's feelings of repentance were fleeting and his promises were treacherous. After he finally let Israel go, he changed his mind one more time and pursued the Israelites with his chariots. Pharaoh was at his most dangerous when he seemed to have seen the light and to have become reasonable and generous.

Saul, in his moral degeneracy, had become like the biblical paradigm of a wicked ruler: the pharaoh of the exodus. David could not and did not entrust himself to this man.

Did David show a lack of love and forgiveness when he did not take Saul at his word and go back to him? Why or why not?

(In PSG, p. 128) **True repentance comes when God convicts a person of sin (John 16:8). Saul showed genuine remorse. Did he also display genuine repentance? Why or why not? What are the marks of true repentance?**

1 SAMUEL 26:22

²² David answered, "Here is the king's spear; have one of the young men come over and get it."

TRUST IN GOD (1 SAM. 26:22-25)

VERSE 22

David returned Saul's *spear* to him because it was an emblem of Saul's royal power. To have kept it would have been to humiliate Saul, and it would have implied that David really was seeking the throne for himself. At the same time, he would only allow a single young man to come over and get it. He was taking no chances, knowing that Saul could do something underhanded if he were allowed to send a full contingent of soldiers over.

VERSES 23-24

Verses 23-24 contain a solemn declaration, but it carries at least four implications. First, David was appealing to God to serve as arbiter between himself and Saul, and he was asserting his own innocence in the process. In effect, David treated this as though it were a civil trial and God were the judge. This was also a kind of challenge to Saul. David effectively said, “I will not avenge myself upon you; I am calling on God to judge between us and to determine which of us is in the right.”

Second, David recognized the rule of law. It would have been wrong to strike down the lawful king: ***I wasn't willing to lift my hand against the LORD's anointed.*** True authority did not reside in any man but in God and in the laws God had established. As king, David would submit to and enforce the law rather than claim to be above it.

Third, David realized that he had passed a severe test. He told Saul he spared him ***even though the LORD handed you over to me today.*** He could have taken that as a sign that God wanted him to kill Saul, as Abishai did. But David knew that God would never lead him to do what was wrong. If God wanted David to have the crown, God would give it to him. David would wear a crown of righteousness, not a bloody crown.

Fourth, David's declaration was an appeal to God to help him and save him from all his troubles. ***Just as I considered your life valuable today, so may the LORD consider my life valuable and rescue me from all trouble.*** David lived a precarious life, and many more dangers were still ahead of him. Just as he had shown mercy, he hoped God would show mercy to him. David's attitude is similar to what we see in Jesus' teachings on grace: “For if you forgive people their wrongdoing, your heavenly Father will forgive you as well. But if you don't forgive people, your Father will not forgive your wrongdoing” (Matt. 6:14-15).

How can we forgive others in the way David forgave Saul? The only way David could is because he found his joy in God, not in Saul's approval. We can forgive in the same way. As Christians, we forgive others as God has forgiven us. God's Word instructs us: “Just as the Lord has forgiven you, so you must also forgive” (Col. 3:13; see also Eph. 4:32).

VERSE 25

In a rare moment of insight or honesty, Saul acknowledged that God had chosen David and that he would eventually become king. ***“You are blessed, my son David. You will certainly do great things and will also prevail.”*** This tells us that on a certain level, intellectually, Saul knew that God had chosen David and that all of Saul's efforts to destroy him were more than futile; they were acts of open rebellion against God. Even though his mind knew this, his heart refused to accept it. Saul ended his life kicking against the goads. Many years later, another Saul—Saul of Tarsus—did the same thing until Jesus intervened (see Acts 26:14).

1 SAMUEL 26:23-24

²³ May the LORD repay every man for his righteousness and his loyalty. I wasn't willing to lift my hand against the LORD's anointed, even though the LORD handed you over to me today. ²⁴ Just as I considered your life valuable today, so may the LORD consider my life valuable and rescue me from all trouble.”

1 SAMUEL 26:25

²⁵ Saul said to him, “You are blessed, my son David. You will certainly do great things and will also prevail.” Then David went on his way, and Saul returned home.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

INTRODUCE: As the group settles in, call for volunteers to describe some common actions of a selfish person. (Ex.: Concerned for his own success, constantly turns conversations to himself, unwilling to give to others.) Then ask: *What percentage of people do you believe view the majority of others as selfish? What percentage of people do you believe view themselves as selfish?* (PSG, p. 123)

EXPLORE: Share these three concepts from the First Thoughts section of the PSG (p. 123): *First, God's plans are always better than our plans. Second, selfish tendencies can lead to premature victories (complete with additional problems and a guilty conscience). Third, God's plans require us to filter opportunities through the lens of respect for others and godly principles.* Then, guide the group to discover Bible personalities who exhibited these concepts.

TRANSITION: *Today, as we continue our study of David and Saul, we'll learn that God wants us to filter opportunities through the lens of respect for others and godly principles.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

EXPLAIN: Set the context by explaining that David had been on the run with Saul in pursuit.

READ: Direct a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 26:7-8, while others listen for Abishai's advice to David.

DISCUSS: *What words did David use to express being a humble servant? Why did David refrain from killing Saul? When have you seen that a hurried decision doesn't necessarily lead to a good decision?*

ASK: *What are the dangers of equating an open door with God's will? How does one know the difference between a true open door and a test disguised as an open door?* (PSG, p. 126)

GUIDE: Lead a discussion on the value of patience by completing the Bible Skill activity on page 124 of the PSG.

READ: Direct the group to read silently 1 Samuel 26:9-12 and circle David's response to his opportunity to kill Saul.

STUDY: Guide the group to reread verse 10 and discuss what it reveals about David's character.

STATE: *David refrained from doing evil, allowing God to show him a greater purpose and direction.*

DISCUSS: *What's the significance of David directing Abishai to take Saul's spear and water jug?* Lead the group to review the information under Verses 9-12 (PSG, pp. 126-127) to clarify this point.

ASK: *Respect is often seen as something that must be earned. David showed respect to someone who didn't show respect to him. Why is it hard to respect people who disrespect us? Why should we?* (PSG, p. 127)

COMPARE: Call on a volunteer to read aloud 1 Samuel 26:21. Call on another to read aloud 1 Samuel 24:17-21, as the group listens for the difference in Saul's confessions. Lead the group to compare and contrast Saul's two admissions of guilt in these two passages. After allowing the group to share their comparisons, focus on 1 Samuel 26:21, and ask: *How did Saul express repentance? What did David say to convince Saul that he had committed a sin?*

ASK: *True repentance comes when God convicts a person of sin (John 16:8). Saul showed genuine remorse. Did he also display genuine repentance? Why or why not? What are the marks of true repentance?* (PSG, p. 128)

READ: Direct a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 26:22-25. Explain that David's words in these verses foreshadow Paul's teachings in Galatians 6:7: We reap what we sow.

HIGHLIGHT: *This was the second opportunity David had to kill Saul (see 1 Sam. 24:3-4), yet David chose to wait on God's timing.*

ASK: *God promises to protect and care for His people (Ex. 14:13-14; Pss. 34:19; 91:7; 2 Cor. 4:8-9; 1 John 5:18). What causes a person to transition from knowing God's promises to taking action based on those promises?* (PSG, p. 129) *Describe a time when you have taken action based on the promises listed in these verses.* Note: Be prepared to share one of your own experiences to promote the discussion.

EMPHASIZE: Show a lock and a key (or a blank key). Share: *An open door is an unhindered access, a passage, or an opportunity for freedom.* Read 1 Corinthians 16:9. Explain: *Daily we face opportunities that are open doors for ministry. What we choose to do with the opportunities God gives us determines whether we humbly follow His path or make selfish decisions.* Lead the group to brainstorm ways we can filter our daily opportunities through godly respect and Christ's mission.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

ASK: *What biblical principles did you discover from our study of David and Saul? (Ex.: God's redemptive plan for believers coincides with a believer's respect for life and humility in accepting God's will.) Read the summary statement for today's study as one of the biblical principles: God is ultimately in charge of those who lead.*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 130): *As a group, discuss the correlation between humility and respect. How does humility promote respect? In what ways is God calling you to humble yourself before others? How does your group encourage humility and respect among the group members?* Encourage them to record their responses to the second question in their PSGs.

PRAY: Encourage the group to select and review a Scripture verse referring to humility or respect. Then pray that God will reveal areas in which each person needs to show humility before the Lord and/or greater respect for others.



PRACTICE

- Contact your group during the week to encourage them to participate in a ministry opportunity. Explain that if God opens a door of ministry within which we can serve, He will provide all that is needed.
- Brainstorm opportunities for your group to serve. Also, ask your pastor for ideas on how your group could encourage open doors in the church. Be prepared to share your findings with the group.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

Tape these two sentences on your focal wall. Lead the group to scrutinize each one according to their understanding of biblical truth: (1) When good things happen, people see this as a sign of God's approval. (2) When bad things happen, people see this as a sign of God's disapproval.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To further emphasize humility in 1 Samuel 26:7-8, lead the group to read Philippians 2:3-4, and identify how David demonstrated the truth of this passage. Then lead the group to discuss ways to apply this verse to the daily situations we face.
- To enhance the discussion of genuine repentance in 1 Samuel 26:21, challenge the group to find evidence that Saul feared God, and in doing so, corrected a behavior. Then tell of a personal experience when the Lord directed your path as a result of your changing a behavior or accepting His purpose for your life.
- To supplement the discussion of opportunities to make right decisions, direct the group to write these phrases on the front side of paper that you provide for them: *righteous living*, *deep respect for authority*, *humility in making decisions*, and *trusting the Lord's guidance*. Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*) to record the Scripture references in which David exemplified these concepts. Advise the group to select and record on the back side of the paper how they will initiate that concept in their own lives.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to complete the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 130): *What open doors are presently in front of you? What steps are you taking to determine which door or doors are within God's will?* Challenge them to seek God's counsel.

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

Read the words to "Make Me a Blessing," by Ira B. Wilson, as the closing prayer.

VICTORY

Only God supplies a true and lasting victory.

1 SAMUEL 30:6-8,18-25

MEMORY VERSE: 1 SAMUEL 30:6

PREPARE TO LEAD THE GROUP TIME

- **READ** 1 Samuel 27:1–31:13, First Thoughts (p. 134), and Understand the Context (pp. 134-135). Be mindful that God was orchestrating events leading to David’s coronation as king.
- **STUDY** 1 Samuel 30:6-8,18-25. Recognize the sequence of events—from anticipation of victory to a crisis of belief. Consult Explore the Text (pp. 135-139) and the *Explore the Bible Commentary* (found in both print and digital format at LifeWay.com) for further input. Contemplate how God can bring sustained victory and hope in the context of individual struggles or crises.
- **PLAN** the group time using suggestions under Lead Group Bible Study (pp. 140-141). Also refer to *QuickSource* and Blog.LifeWay.com/ExploretheBible for other ideas. Look for ways to creatively call attention to this session’s memory verse (1 Samuel 30:6).
- **GROW** from expert insights on weekly studies through the Ministry Grid (MinistryGrid.com/Web/ExploretheBible).
- **GATHER** the following items: Personal Study Guides; A *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*; Paper and markers. Prepare to display the following Pack Items: **PACK ITEM 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*); **PACK ITEM 10** (*Israel’s Counterparts in 1 Samuel*); and **PACK ITEM 15** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 30:6*).



FIRST THOUGHTS

KEY DOCTRINE

Church

Christian unity in the New Testament sense is spiritual harmony and voluntary cooperation for common ends by various groups of Christ's people.

For sports lovers, seasons are defined by their respective sports. Fall is for football. Winter and spring are for basketball. Summer is all about baseball. There is a continual roller coaster of wins and losses, victories and defeats. Depending on the sport, fans can ride that roller coaster weekly, a couple of times a week, or daily. Ultimately, sports fans live in one of two worlds: my team is the best, or there's always next year.

Winning and losing are a part of life. For just a moment, imagine what it would be like to experience lasting victory. Move beyond the realm of sports and look at life as a whole. What would it be like to experience lasting victory over sinful habits, financial setbacks, church conflicts, or marital struggles?

(In PSG, p. 133) **How would you define success for any sports teams or players for whom you cheer? Are winning and victory the same thing? Explain.**

BIBLICAL ILLUSTRATOR

For additional context, read "David and His Wives" in the Summer 2016 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. Available at LifeWay.com/BiblicalIllustrator.

Scripture provides incredible promises about the victory we have through Christ. We are more than conquerors (Rom. 8:37). We have victory through our Lord Jesus Christ (1 Cor. 15:57). Sin will have no dominion over us (Rom. 6:14). All of those passages are encouraging. However, we are so accustomed to the cycles of victory and defeat that it's difficult to process sustained victory.

In this session we're going to study a passage of Scripture that emphasizes how God alone brings true and lasting victory. In this biblical passage, David's camp was raided; possessions and family members were taken. David and his warriors wept until they had no strength. David prayed about their course of action, and God replied, "Pursue them, for you will certainly overtake them and rescue the people" (1 Sam. 30:8). David and his men obeyed God, and the Lord brought an incredible victory.

UNDERSTAND THE CONTEXT

1 SAMUEL 27:1–31:13

First Samuel 27–31 probably covered a fairly long period of time. David and his men eventually wearied of running, hiding, and struggling to survive in the harsh environment of the Judean wilderness, and they finally decided to seek refuge among the Philistines (27:1-7). David went to the same King Achish of Gath that he went to in 1 Samuel 21:10-15. On that occasion, he was alone and had to feign insanity in order to get out of the city alive. In chapter 27 David came with an army, and he had been estranged from Saul for so long that Achish decided that he could now regard him as an ally.

Achish gave David the town of Ziklag in which he and his people could settle. Ziklag was located in the transitional area between the wilderness of Judah and the coastal lowlands of the Philistines.

While living there, David played a dangerous game. He raided local peoples—the Geshurites, the Girzites, and the Amalekites—plundered them, and killed everyone he raided. David kept the plunder for himself (this was the very thing for which Saul had been criticized). One could argue that David was resuming the conquest of Canaan, but the Bible does not make such a claim for him. David told the Philistines that he was raiding Judah and not these other peoples. He wanted his Philistine sponsors to think that he had completely switched sides. He wanted to be sure that no one survived from the plundered villages to tell King Achish the truth (27:8-12). Much of what David did at this time—his flight to the Philistines, his deception, and of course his slaughter of whole villages—is morally dubious. Acknowledging that David was God’s anointed does not mean that we should treat him as flawless. Clearly he was not, as later events would show.

After some time, the Philistines and the Israelites prepared for a major battle at Mount Gilboa. This was far from Ziklag. Gilboa was in the middle of Israel, in the Jezreel Valley and not too far west of the Jordan River. David marched out with the Philistine army, but before arriving at Gilboa, he and his men were dismissed because the Philistine lords did not trust him (29:1-11).

Meanwhile, in one of the most unusual episodes of the Bible, Saul consulted the dead Samuel by going to a medium (28:5-25). In analyzing a passage such as this, we should be careful about drawing general conclusions. Exceptional texts are just that—exceptional—and we should not use them for deducing biblical principles for life.

While this was happening, David and company made the long trek back south to the Philistine territory and to Ziklag. There, they found that they had been away too long. In his absence, the Amalekites had turned the tables on David and had raided his village.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

DECISION TIME (1 SAM. 30:6-8)

VERSE 6

We can imagine the dismay of David’s company as they approached their town and saw smoke rising into the sky. Arriving at the burned-out ruin, they saw that their wives, children, and all their possessions had been taken away. It may seem odd to us that the men sat down and wept. Men in the ancient world were perhaps more willing to show their emotions than many men are today, and they had reason to weep. Experienced raiders themselves, they understood that their chances of ever seeing their families again were remote. They were so despondent that they were all but paralyzed, unable to get moving and try to find their families.

1 SAMUEL 30:6

⁶ David was in a difficult position because the troops talked about stoning him, for they were all very bitter over the loss of their sons and daughters. But David found strength in the LORD his God.

They did, however, have the energy to think of doing one thing: some of them wanted to stone David. The situation went from deep sorrow to a high level of tension and recrimination. David soon looked around and saw some very angry faces. The men believed, and not altogether unjustly, that David had made decisions that had brought them to this point.

But David found strength in the LORD his God. This is a key turning point. David could have gotten into an argument with the men, made excuses for his decisions, or simply tried to bring the men to heel by force of will. Julius Caesar used the latter tactic, and quite successfully, when his men became mutinous. David, however, turned to God.

There was both a public and a private aspect to this. Privately, David sought strength from God. Publicly, he sought direction from God (vv. 7-8). The latter was not a cynical move meant to distract the men with religious talk, but it did have the effect of settling them down, focusing them on the problem at hand in a constructive manner, getting them to join David in his appeal to God, and giving them hope that the situation might yet be saved.

(In PSG, p. 136) **How does a crisis reveal a person's character? How does a crisis reveal who or what a person trusts and values?**

1 SAMUEL 30:7-8

⁷ David said to Abiathar the priest, son of Ahimelech, "Bring me the ephod." So Abiathar brought it to him, ⁸ and David asked the LORD: "Should I pursue these raiders? Will I overtake them?" The LORD replied to him, "Pursue them, for you will certainly overtake them and rescue the people."

VERSES 7-8

David asked **•Abiathar the priest** to bring out the **•ephod**. This was a holy vestment worn by the priest; it seems to have been something like a vest. It may be that he called for the ephod because attached to it was the breastpiece that contained the Urim and Thummim. These were objects that were used to seek an answer from God. Urim and Thummim are mentioned in only a few places in the Bible (Ex. 28:30; Lev. 8:8; Num. 27:21; Deut. 33:8; 1 Sam. 28:6; Ezra 2:63; Neh. 7:65), and no one knows what they looked like or how they worked. Some have suggested that they were like two coins with what we would call heads and tails. One would ask a yes-or-no question and toss the two coins at the same time. If there were two heads, the answer was yes. Two tails meant no. One head and one tail meant that God would not answer.

The Urim and Thummim were the means of seeking an omen from God in ancient Israel. Pagans took omens in many forms. Common examples included: observing the flights of birds, looking at the liver of a sacrificed animal, tossing arrows into the air, and interpreting a message from unexpected events, such as an eclipse or an eagle landing on one's roof. Compared to its environment, the Old Testament is very restrained about omens. We only know of a handful of occasions when the Urim and Thummim were consulted. But we must remember that the religious life of the ancient Israelite was quite different from ours. Proverbs 16:33 says, "The lot is cast into the lap, but its every decision is from the LORD." This does not say that we ought to cast lots, but it does imply that the practice was fairly common among Israelites.

David asked two yes-or-no questions: ***“Should I pursue these raiders? Will I overtake them?”*** Probably the priest Abiathar handled the Urim and Thummim (or whatever he used), saw that the answers were yes and yes, and then interpreted the answer in God’s name with the words, ***“Pursue them, for you will certainly overtake them and rescue the people.”*** We should notice that just asking the questions was an act of faith on David’s part. God could have said nothing, or He could have answered with a no.

If David did use the Urim and Thummim, there must have been more than one set of them, because Saul, far to the north, also used the Urim and Thummim at about the same time (1 Sam. 28:6). God answered David; He did not answer Saul. Both men were in desperate situations, with their lives hanging in the balance. But God favored David, whereas He had abandoned Saul. In this, King Saul lost his last opportunity to accept God’s judgment with grace. He could have acknowledged that his time had passed. Instead, he turned in desperation to the medium of Endor, a necromancer, hoping she could contact the dead Samuel.

When a Christian congregation is facing a hard decision and tensions are running high, how could turning to God help to lower the level of anger and help people to focus? Lacking Urim and Thummim, how would they go about doing this?

RECOVERED (1 SAM. 30:18-20)

VERSES 18-20

David and his 600 men set out after the Amalekites. But David’s troops had already been on a long march. They had embarked with the Philistines on their journey to the battle at Mount Gilboa, had marched back after being dismissed by the Philistines, and were now marching south as fast as they could, chasing down the Amalekites in the harsh terrain of the Negev. We should note that the men were on foot; it is almost certain that they had no horses. That being the case, a third of David’s force was too exhausted to proceed and needed to stop and recover. Stragglers would have slowed down the rest of the soldiers, and they would have been worse than useless in a fight. David continued his pursuit with just 400 men.

They encountered an Egyptian man who had been left for dead, a slave of the Amalekites, and were able to obtain vital intelligence from him. Based on the man’s answers, it appears that the Amalekites were no longer on the run but had gone to a hideout or temporary base that they often used. The Egyptian could lead David’s men right to it. They no longer had to rush about trying to find the enemy but could move at a deliberate pace, restoring their strength and planning their assault. When they came upon the encampment, they found the Amalekites carousing, drunk, or sleeping.

1 SAMUEL 30:18-20

¹⁸ David recovered everything the Amalekites had taken; he also rescued his two wives. ¹⁹ Nothing of theirs was missing from the youngest to the oldest, including the sons and daughters, of all the plunder the Amalekites had taken. David got everything back. ²⁰ He took all the sheep and cattle, which were driven ahead of the other livestock, and the people shouted, “This is David’s plunder!”

BIBLE SKILL

Use other Scripture to illustrate a Bible passage.

Read 1 Corinthians 12:14-26 and summarize the principles Paul presented. In what ways do David's actions in 1 Samuel 30 serve as an illustration of what Paul was teaching in 1 Corinthians?

1 SAMUEL 30:21

²¹ When David came to the 200 men who had been too exhausted to go with him and had been left at the Wadi Besor, they came out to meet him and to meet the troops with him. When David approached the men, he greeted them,

Verse 17 says, "David slaughtered them from twilight until the evening of the next day." This makes it sound as though they were engaged in a nonstop, pitched battle for over 24 hours, but that is unlikely for several reasons. First, battles in the ancient world were generally quite short; they only lasted until one side or the other fled. Second, the Amalekites seriously outnumbered David's men. The 400 Amalekites who escaped were as many as David's entire force. In a surprise attack and battle of short duration, the superior numbers of the Amalekites would not matter. But if open battle had dragged on for hours, the numbers would begin to tell in favor of the Amalekites. Third, it would take enormous stamina for anyone to endure 24 hours of nonstop combat, and David's men had already been on the march for several days.

Perhaps the key detail is that the Amalekites were "spread out over the entire area" (v. 16) in small groups, most of whom were drunk or asleep. It may be that David's men spent most of the night quietly moving from one small group to the next, killing each one in turn. At dawn, when the surviving Amalekites awoke to discover the disaster, a group of 400 managed to break out and fled in panic. After that, David's men spent the rest of the day in a mopping-up operation.

However the battle was fought, it ended in spectacular victory for David. They **recovered everything**, including most importantly their wives and children. What had been a disaster turned into a celebration. Instead of calling for David to be stoned to death, the now wealthy army shouted, "**This is David's plunder!**"

As leader of the group, David was credited with the victory. But because David knew the source of true and lasting victory, he deflected the people's praise and directed it where it belonged. In verse 23, David would give God the glory for the victory.

(In PSG, p. 137) **What causes people to take the credit that God deserves? What could have been the result if David had taken the credit? Point to other biblical leaders to support your response.**

David was now quite wealthy. When he got back to Ziklag, he sent a portion of the booty to various towns and villages of southern Judah, where he had lived while on the run from Saul (vv. 26-31). This served several purposes. First, it expressed gratitude to people who had supported him while he was on the run from Saul. Second, it solidified his power base, guaranteeing that they would back him in a future struggle to gain control of Israel. Third, it marked him as a victorious king or general. In the ancient world, great commanders typically distributed some of their plunder to the home cities. And while David was bringing back riches to his country, the defeated Saul was lying dead on the slopes of Mount Gilboa (31:1-6).

VICTORY FOR ALL (1 SAM. 30:21-25)

VERSES 21-25

While the men who went with David on the pursuit had possessed great stamina, they did not all possess good character. Some were not generous with the joy and wealth they had received. They were greedy not only for the plunder but also for the bragging rights. They wanted it to be known that they were better than the men who had been overcome by fatigue. They thought they could shove aside **the 200 men who had been too exhausted to go** as unworthy to be part of David's army. They were ready to let those men take back their own wives and children and then to discharge them from the army.

David's attitude was completely different. First, **he greeted them** when he got back to them. This means more than that he said hello. Verse 21 literally says that he asked about their well-being. He regarded them as still his own men and showed them loyalty, concern, and comradeship. We can imagine that David knew how badly they must have felt for having failed him, and he conveyed the message that he had made extraordinary demands of his men and did not think the less of those who, on this occasion, were not up to the challenge.

Second, he pointed out that the whole victory had been from **the LORD**. God had told the men that they should pursue the Amalekites, and He had provided the Egyptian slave who guided them right to the enemy camp. God had given the Amalekites over to indulge themselves, to set no watch, and to drink themselves into stupor. God had seen to it that the Amalekites kept the wives, children, and property of the Israelites alive and together long enough for them to be rescued. Since God had done all this, how could they claim that all the booty was their own?

Third, David gently rebuked the men of the 400, telling them that their proposal was unworthy and that no good person would listen to it. In so saying, David established the rule for the Israelite army that soldiers who stayed back to guard the supplies had the same share in plunder as everyone else.

It's not uncommon for people to value their contribution as greater than the contribution of someone else. That type of comparison leads to division. When each person does what he or she is supposed to do, the whole group succeeds. This principle is clearly presented in the New Testament. Paul taught that every member of the body of Christ is uniquely gifted for service, and each individual part is necessary to the functioning of the church as a whole (1 Cor. 12).

David was soon to become king. In his nation, he would have all kinds of people to govern. Some would be rich and others poor. Some would be valiant and others weak. Some would be sages and others would be illiterate. David would have to bring them all together into a single nation. In this episode, he showed that he was ready.

1 SAMUEL 30:22-25

²² but all the corrupt and worthless men among those who had gone with David argued, "Because they didn't go with us, we will not give any of the plunder we recovered to them except for each man's wife and children. They may take them and go."²³ But David said, "My brothers, you must not do this with what the LORD has given us. He protected us and handed over to us the raiders who came against us."²⁴ Who can agree to your proposal? The share of the one who goes into battle is to be the same as the share of the one who remains with the supplies. They will share equally."²⁵ And it has been so from that day forward. David established this policy as a law and an ordinance for Israel and it continues to this very day.

LEAD GROUP BIBLE STUDY

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

BEGIN: Before the session, display the session summary somewhere prominent in the room: *Only God supplies a true and lasting victory* (PSG, p. 131). As the group arrives, give them paper and markers. Direct them to work together to create a motivational statement based on Scripture. (Ex.: “Walk by faith and forgiveness.” “Let go, and let God guide.”) Appoint a volunteer to present the statement with an explanation of how it could be an encouragement to believers who are facing a crisis.

DISPLAY: Write on your focal wall: *Where do you begin when it seems like everything is lost?*

TRANSITION: Draw attention to today’s session summary: *Only God supplies a true and lasting victory*.

EXPLORE THE TEXT

REVIEW: Use **Pack Item 2** (*Outline of 1 Samuel*) to review the major events of 1 Samuel, explaining that today wraps up our study of this book.

EXPLAIN: Use your study of Explore the Text (pp. 135-137) to summarize the events leading up to David and his men returning to Ziklag to find their city burned to the ground.

READ: Direct the group to read silently 1 Samuel 30:6-8, circling words that show David’s reliance on God.

DISCUSS: Display **Pack Item 15** (*Poster: 1 Samuel 30:6*) to emphasize where David found his strength. Lead the group to discuss other sources of strength and their shortcomings when compared to drawing one’s strength from God.

STUDY: Direct everyone to review page 135 of the PSG to explain the meaning of Urim and Thummim. Instruct a volunteer to look up and read the meaning in the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Then, ask: *What similar objects are used in modern times to seek God’s guidance? Should a believer affirm or not affirm such objects for seeking guidance? Explain.*

ASK: *How does a crisis reveal a person’s character? How does a crisis reveal who or what a person trusts and values?* (PSG, p. 136)

READ: Direct a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 30:18-20. Highlight David’s determination to recover what was taken.

DISPLAY: Use **Pack Item 10** (*Israel’s Counterparts in 1 Samuel*) to demonstrate the Israelites’ history with the Amalekites and Saul’s failure to follow God’s command in 1 Samuel 15:1-9.

CLARIFY: *David trusted even in the midst of a crisis. It was providential, not coincidental, that an Egyptian man led David to the Amalekite camp.*

EXPLAIN: Present a mini-lecture on trusting God for direction using the following verses: Psalm 31:3; Proverbs 3:5-6; Isaiah 43:2; Matthew 6:26; and Romans 12:1-2.

ASK: *What causes people to take the credit that God deserves? What could have been the result if David had taken the credit? Point to other biblical leaders to support your response.* (PSG, p. 137)

READ: Direct a volunteer to read 1 Samuel 30:21-25. Point out that each group had responsibilities assigned to them.

DISCUSS: Lead the group to contrast the immediate reaction of David's men to possible reactions when a believer faces a similar crisis. Ask: *To what extent do we blame others for a crisis in our life?* Caution them to refrain from participating in a blame game, but rather to seek God's direction regardless of the crisis.

ASK: *What analogy could you use to illustrate the actions taken by David in this passage? On what key point would you focus?* (PSG, p. 139)

EMPHASIZE: Highlight the Key Doctrine (*Church*) on page 137 of the PSG, and then say the following: *The body of Christ has many members. Every person is equally important.*

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

DISCUSS: *What biblical truths did you glean from the study of David's experiences related to his battle with the Amalekites? Understand that God directed David's steps, and in doing so, David was victorious in battle.*

REVIEW: *Be mindful that only God supplies a true and lasting victory. Knowing this will make a difference in the way believers handle struggles and crises.*

CHALLENGE: Lead the group to complete the first question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 140): *Identify areas in your life where you need God's direction. How is God asking you to trust Him? Write a prayer asking for God to show you what to do, promising to follow His direction.*

REVIEW: Guide the group to review the quarter using the session titles on the contents page in the PSG (p. 3). Discuss the key truths you discovered or that have become meaningful during the study of 1 Samuel.

PRAY: Invite the group to ponder the session title (*Victory*) and theme (*Only God supplies a true and lasting victory*). Pray accordingly for the group to seek the Lord's direction for every decision they will make during the week.



PRACTICE

- Contact your group using a variety of social media sources. Reinforce the truth that when faced with a crisis, individuals should focus on the assurance that God is in control and faithful to accomplish His will for our good and His glory.
- Group members, friends, and other loved ones need to hear your testimony of how the Lord makes a difference. Spend time writing out your own testimony, focusing on how God brought victory from a crisis in your life.

MORE IDEAS

FOCUS ATTENTION (FIRST THOUGHTS)

As the group arrives, use the PSG's First Thoughts section (pp. 132-133) to introduce today's study. Then ask: *How would you define success for any sports teams or players for whom you cheer? Are winning and victory the same thing? Explain.*

EXPLORE THE TEXT

- To supplement the discussion on 1 Samuel 30:6-8, remind the group that God moves in our lifetime to accomplish His will. Guide them to contrast God's instructions in 1 Samuel 30:8 with their personal experiences. Confirm that God does not deviate from Scripture.
- To supplement the sequence of events surrounding David's crisis and eventual victory, review the storyline. Remind the group that, although there is a myriad of emotions surrounding a crisis, a few reminders can demonstrate how God can bring victory to any experience. On slips of paper, write the following reminders and put them into a hat or jar: (1) *It is acceptable to cry to the Lord.* (2) *God is faithful and trustworthy.* (3) *Jesus bore our troubles.* (4) *Other believers have traveled the same road.* (5) *Renew your fidelity to Christ.* (6) *Discover encouragement reading God's Word.* Encourage volunteers to choose one reminder from the container and to share when they have experienced this reassurance from God.

SUMMARIZE AND CHALLENGE (IN MY CONTEXT)

Lead the group to complete the third question set under In My Context (PSG, p. 140): *As a group, identify the different ways group members serve in and through your church. How does each type of service contribute to the success of your church? Discuss as a group different ways each type of service can be celebrated and affirmed.*

SUGGESTED MUSIC IDEA

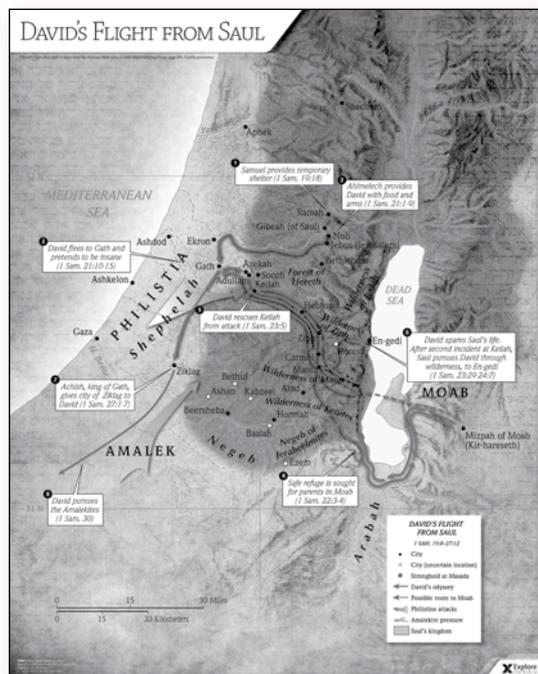
To close the session lead the group in singing "Victory in Jesus," by E. M. Bartlett.

LEADER PACK IDEAS

»» PACK ITEM 1

Map: David's Flight from Saul
Sessions 1-13

Locate a map in a Bible atlas that shows the location of Gibeah, Ramah, Nob, Moab, the Wilderness of Ziph, the Wilderness of Maon, and En-gedi.



Pack Item 1 example from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* (The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)

»» PACK ITEM 2

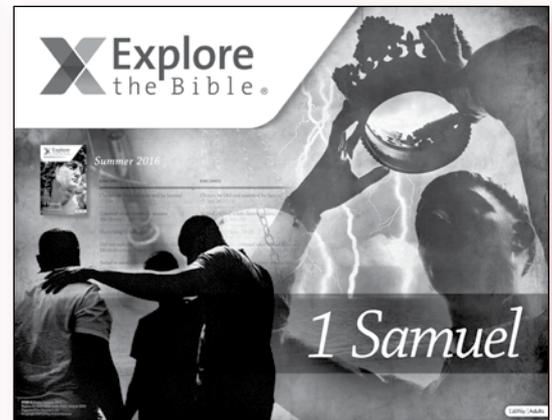
Outline of 1 Samuel
Sessions 1-13

Refer to the outline printed on page 12.

»» PACK ITEM 3

Poster: Summer 2016
Sessions 1-13

Create a sign to post on the door where your group meets to welcome them to the new study of 1 Samuel.



Pack Item 3 example from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack* (The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)

»» PACK ITEM 4

Time Line of 1 Samuel
Sessions 1-13

Locate a study Bible with a time line of the major people and events from the time of Samson and Samuel (1200 B.C.) to the time of Jeroboam (900 B.C.). Use it as a reference during this quarter's study.

PACK ITEM 5

Bookmark: Memory Verses
Sessions 1-13

Make a list of these suggested memory verses to distribute to your group:

- 1 Samuel 2:1
- 1 Samuel 3:10
- 1 Samuel 6:20
- 1 Samuel 8:7
- 1 Samuel 12:20
- 1 Samuel 15:22
- 1 Samuel 16:7
- 1 Samuel 17:46
- 1 Samuel 18:3
- Psalm 31:7
- 1 Samuel 25:32-33
- 1 Samuel 26:9
- 1 Samuel 30:6

PACK ITEM 6

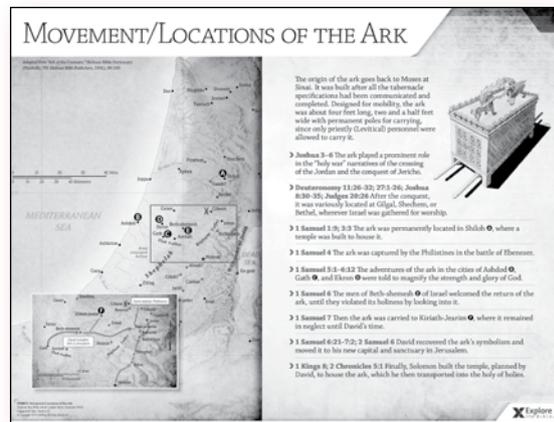
Map: The Kingdom of Saul
Sessions 6, 8, 9, 10

Locate a Bible atlas or other source for a map of King Saul's kingdom, paying attention to the surrounding countries, such as Moab, Ammon, Edom, Philistia, and Amalek.

PACK ITEM 7

Movement/Locations of the Ark
Session 3

Locate a copy of the *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* and review the information under "Ark of the Covenant." Use the following Scriptures as a guide to your study of the movement of the ark: Deuteronomy 11:26-32; 27:1-26; Joshua 3-6; 8:30-35; Judges 20:26; 1 Samuel 1-7; 2 Samuel 6; 1 Kings 8; and 2 Chronicles 5:1.

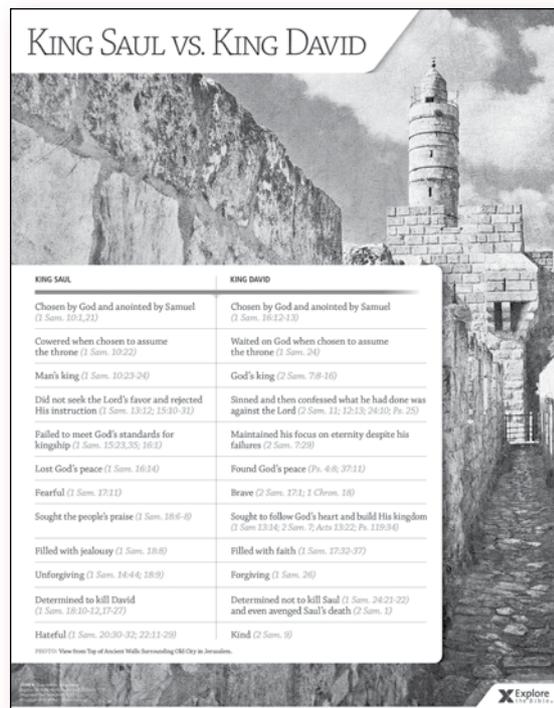


Pack Item 7 example from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*
(The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)

PACK ITEM 8

King Saul vs. King David
Sessions 7, 9, 10

Create a comparison chart that lists the characteristics of King Saul in 1 Samuel 10-22 and King David in 1 Samuel 13-31 and 2 Samuel 1-24.



Pack Item 8 example from *Explore the Bible Leader Pack*
(The Pack is available for purchase at LifeWay.com/ExploreTheBible.)

➤➤ PACK ITEM 9

The Roles of Prophets, Priests, and Kings
Sessions 4, 8

Research each role in 1 Samuel. Use the following information as a guide:

- Prophets were called from God to speak about the future. They received a word from God through various means—declarations from God, visions, dreams, and so forth. They were primarily spokespersons who called God’s people to obedience by appealing to Israel’s past and future. Examples include Moses and Deborah.
- The priests were responsible for maintaining the religious shrines, whether the tabernacle in the wilderness or the temple in Jerusalem. The priests also had to educate the covenant people in the instruction Moses received on Mount Sinai (called “the Torah”). Historically the priesthood became an establishment answerable to the king.
- From the time Samuel anointed Saul as their first king (1 Sam. 10) until the time the Babylonians blinded Zedekiah, Judah’s last king, and took him into exile (2 Kings 25), the covenant people lived under a total of 43 different kings, including Saul, David, and Solomon.

➤➤ PACK ITEM 10

Israel’s Counterparts in 1 Samuel
Sessions 3, 6, 13

Search online or use a Bible concordance to create a list of the leaders, locations, and main battles (recorded in 1 Samuel) for Israel’s neighbors: Moabites, Ammonites, Edomites, Kings of Zobah, Philistines, and Amalekites.

➤➤ PACK ITEM 11

Giants in the Bible
Session 8

Search online or in a Bible dictionary for information on the following giants listed in Scripture:

- *Nephilim* (see Gen. 6:1-4; Num. 13:33)
- *Rephaim* (see Deut. 2:11,19-20; 3:11,13; Josh. 15:8; 17:15; 18:16)
- *Individual Giants* (1 Sam. 17; 2 Sam. 21:16-22; 1 Chron. 20:4-8)

➤➤ PACK ITEM 12

Poster: 1 Samuel 3:10
Session 2

Display 1 Samuel 3:10 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.

➤➤ PACK ITEM 13

Poster: 1 Samuel 15:22
Session 6

Display 1 Samuel 15:22 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.

➤➤ PACK ITEM 14

Poster: 1 Samuel 16:7
Sessions 7, 11

Display 1 Samuel 16:7 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.

➤➤ PACK ITEM 15

Poster: 1 Samuel 30:6
Session 13

Display 1 Samuel 30:6 on a whiteboard or large sheet of paper.



THREE WAYS TO GET YOUR GROUP TALKING

By Ken Braddy



In the book *3 Roles For Guiding Groups*, David Francis and I encourage group leaders to think about how they guide their people through a Bible study. We say, “For that to happen, they (group members) probably need to talk at least as much as you (the group leader) does” (p. 12). That’s a foreign concept to some group leaders who believe their job is to study, prepare, and deliver an interesting monologue to the group, peppered with a few questions.

If you are a group leader who believes there is opportunity for spiritual transformation as people share their stories, ask questions, and engage in dialogue about the biblical text being studied, then I want you to put a few more tools in your “teacher toolbox.” These three tools can be used to help get your group members to speak up when they aren’t really responding to the questions you’re asking.

OPTION 1: BREAK YOUR GROUP INTO SMALLER QUADS OR TRIADS.

If you toss out a question to your group members and no one bites, a good practice is to be ready to have them circle up into smaller groups to discuss the question at hand. People in a larger group may have grown too dependent upon a few individuals answering questions, so they remain silent. But when you group up your people into smaller circles, discussion normally takes off. People will talk in smaller groups when they wouldn’t speak up in the larger setting.

OPTION 2: TAKE A STAND.

If you ask a question and people are slow to respond, try what I call a “take a stand” game. Reform the question into a statement, and ask people to stand up and move to one of two opposite corners in the room—one corner is the “agree” corner, the other corner is the “disagree” one. Once there, ask group members to verbalize why they either agree or disagree with the statement you’ve made. For example, if you originally asked



“How have you seen God working in your life during difficult circumstances?” and no one responds, after waiting an appropriate amount of time, shift gears and reform the question into a statement with which the group can agree or disagree: “Difficult circumstances sometimes help us grow in relationship to God.” Once people move to their agree/disagree corners, invite them to share why they chose that response. Normally people begin sharing and talking and discussion takes off.

OPTION 3: OUT-WAIT YOUR GROUP MEMBERS.

Pazmino’s research on the optimal amount of time between asking a question and waiting for a response has demonstrated that 20 seconds of silence is often necessary. If you, the group leader, ask a question and then answer it before 20 seconds have passed (because you are uncomfortable with the silence), it will train your group members to simply wait for you to answer your own question—so don’t! Get comfortable with 20 seconds of silence. Trust me, someone else will be more uncomfortable and will answer the question. Sometimes people are processing their answers and we shortcut them by answering the question just before they are ready to speak up.

This article is adapted from an article that originally appeared on LifeWay’s Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry). Ken Braddy is Manager of LifeWay’s Adult Ongoing Bible Studies and has served as an education pastor and executive pastor for 18 years, prior to his role at LifeWay. He leads a weekly Bible study at his church, blogs regularly on the topic of Sunday School and small groups, and co-authored the book *3 Roles For Guiding Groups*. He has written hundreds of leadership articles and trained group leaders across the country.



IS PRAYER USEFUL IN YOUR GROUP?

By *Jeremy Maxfield*



Prayer is essential. Amen? Everyone will quickly agree that prayer is vital to the Christian life. We'd agree that it is important for the individual and for the church. We'd even agree that it should be a part of our group time.

But too often, prayer easily becomes routine, mindless, or functional in all areas of the Christian life. My former pastor would say: "If you can say Amen, say Ouch."

Prayer, perhaps more so than other disciplines, seems to need regular tune-ups. After putting enough miles through daily routines—the back and forth of life—prayer gets out of alignment. It's not smooth and natural. It's noticeably shaky.

Honestly, does prayer for your group feel forced? Does it feel like an obligatory add-on? Is it something you do because everyone knows we're supposed to?

Here are four ways I've experienced group prayer time get out of whack and veer off track:

- **Transition Time:** Prayer is used almost purely as a way to interrupt the murmuring conversation in the room to signal the start of spiritual things. It is also the way to have the opposite effect at the close of your spiritual time. It's the church equivalent of the school bell ringing to tell everyone to settle down or to pack up and move on.
- **Gossip Time:** Prayer requests are thinly disguised gossip. Concern is really criticism. If any actual request is made, it's often little more than "pray for them."
- **Deflection Time:** Prayer requests quickly snowball down family trees and seven degrees of separation as we announce that we know somebody related to somebody who has a physical malady. Other members often pile on to this, adding that they too know somebody with something similar. Nothing personal is shared. Again, if any actual request is made, it's often little more than "pray for them."
- **Speaking into a Vacuum Time:** Prayer requests are voiced by members of the group, yet nobody makes note of them, they're not prayed for after they are mentioned, and they are not followed up on during the week or at later group meetings.

To be fair, each of these four misalignments of prayer probably started on the right track and sort of wore out without anyone noticing until they became powerless. But once we notice the lack of power coming from this type of “prayer time,” it’s easy enough to adjust our focus and steer our groups back into the way prayer is a true source of power and encouragement.

Let’s revisit where we miss the point above and pull the mindless routines out of the ditches:

- **Intentional Focus Time:** Prayer can be a wonderful start and finish to your time together—arguably the best way to focus attention on God’s Word, will, and work in the lives of everyone in that moment. Yes, it can serve a practical purpose, but in order to truly have spiritual power, everyone needs to join in agreement with the prayer to focus hearts and minds on receiving and responding to God’s Word. Use this time to draw attention to our dependence on God’s Spirit to reveal truth and empower obedience. Be specific about the day’s focus, needs, and desires.
- **Personal Request Time:** Intercession is important. This is clear in Scripture. As a way to avoid gossip, deflection, or inaction, it’s helpful to focus this time together on ways the group can immediately intercede for members. It’s also beneficial to pray not only for specific needs but also for specific steps of faith and obedience members feel God is impressing on their hearts, possibly in response to the biblical truth just studied as a group. Even if praying for a close relationship to someone in the group, encourage elaboration on how the group member is feeling and what they can do to minister to the needs being prayed for. Other important needs outside of the group are still welcomed but may be better to email or add to the social media group.
- **Active Response Time:** Encourage someone to take note of the prayer requests, sharing them with group members through an email or private social media group. Pray specifically in the moment—especially if it is an obviously painful or overwhelming need for an emotional group member. Finally, be sure to not only pray for group members and their needs during the week but also to connect with them through calls, messages, or in person to check on them. Follow up in the next group time for any updates or praises in how God may be working in the situation or even in their own lives through group members actively ministering to others.

The key to all of these is being intentional, focused, personal, and specific.

Three primary benefits should result when prayer is regularly fueling our time together as a group:

- **Learning:** A true and meaningful experience with God’s Word.
- **Application:** Clarity, motivation, and accountability for personal obedience and therefore personal growth.
- **Relationships:** Deeper community develops as people are genuinely cared about, cared for, experience a greater understanding of God’s Word, and are encouraged to walk by faith.

This article is adapted from an article that originally appeared on LifeWay’s Groups Ministry blog (LifeWay.com/GroupMinistry). Jeremy Maxfield is a writer and editor for the adult discipleship team in the LifeWay Groups Ministry division. For over 10 years, he has been serving churches through publishing, freelance writing, and pastoral staff positions. Jeremy and his family are actively involved at Fairview Church in Lebanon, Tennessee.



GOLIATH: ONE-ON-ONE

By Janice Meier



“A champion named Goliath” (1 Sam. 17:4) struck fear into the ranks of Israel’s army in the valley of Elah. We remember the name Goliath because of David’s significant role in the champion’s defeat. David alone had the courage and faith to confront this Philistine who dared to defy the armies of the living God.

The biblical writer noted the power of David’s opponent in three ways. First, he presented the reader with an impressive description of Goliath’s height. Goliath stood six cubits and a span tall. In ancient Israel, a cubit was the distance from the elbow to the tip of the middle finger. A span was the distance from the end of the thumb to the tip of the little finger when the thumb and fingers were spread. Although the exact measurement would vary with the size of the person, a cubit equaled approximately 18 inches while a span was about eight or nine inches.

According to the description, Goliath was over nine feet tall. In 2 Samuel 21:18-22 Goliath was identified as one of the giants of Gath. Perhaps these unusually tall people descended from the Anakim (see Deut. 1:28; Josh. 11:21-22). Goliath’s height terrified the Israelites. Apparently they had failed to learn from the example of Saul not to be overly impressed by an individual’s height (see 1 Sam. 9:2).

Coupled with Goliath’s excessive height was his impressive armor. The armor is described in detail for the reader in 1 Samuel 17:5-7. Goliath wore a bronze helmet on his head, a bronze coat of scale armor on his body, and bronze greaves on his legs. He carried a javelin of bronze and a spear with a head of iron. The coat of armor weighed about 125 pounds while the iron point of the spear weighed about 15 pounds. The shaft of Goliath’s spear was like a weaver’s beam. (A weaver’s beam was a large bar on a loom that kept the threads separated so the shuttle could pass through them.) Finally, a shield

bearer preceded Goliath to lend further protection. This impressive array of armor and weaponry fits well with our knowledge of the Philistines as skilled craftsmen in metal (see 1 Sam. 13:19-21).

The purpose of the detailed description is to impress the reader with the power of the enemy whom the unprotected David confronted with only a shepherd's sling and faith in the Lord. Ironically, the description of the giant begins with the head, which proved to be his weakest point.

Goliath also struck terror into the troops of Israel with his powerful bombast (1 Sam. 17:8-11). The utter assurance his voice conveyed intimidated and immobilized Israel. Goliath utilized a psychological weapon in his speech. The effect of Goliath's rant on Israel may have been similar to the effect of Israel's loud noise on the people of Jericho in Joshua 6. The effect of Goliath's challenge was amplified by the giant's appearing twice a day for 40 days to issue his appeal (1 Sam. 17:16).

Goliath challenged Israel to produce a man who would wage war by one-on-one or representative combat with him (1 Sam. 17:8-10). The concept of one-on-one, single, or representative combat occurs elsewhere in the Old Testament as well as in other literature of the ancient Near East. In 2 Samuel 23:20-23, the exploits of Benaiah, one of David's mighty men, are heralded. Possibly Benaiah's defeat of two of Moab's best warriors is an example of representative combat (2 Sam. 23:20). Most likely, a clear example of representative combat follows in 2 Samuel 23:21, where Benaiah, with a staff (a club about two feet long), confronted an Egyptian with a spear. Benaiah snatched the Egyptian's spear from his hands and killed him with it. Parallels exist here with the story of David and Goliath. After striking the Philistine with a stone, David took the giant's sword and killed him with it (1 Sam. 17:50-51).

In 2 Samuel 21:15-22 are other stories of the exploits between David's mighty men and the Philistines. In each of the four cases recorded in this passage, single or representative combat appears to be described. In 2 Samuel 2 the procedure of representative combat involved 12 men on each side instead of a single man. The goal was to avoid a general



engagement of the entire armies of David and Saul in war. A contest between two teams of champions would be less damaging to either side (2 Sam. 2:12-17). Unfortunately, the contest ended in a draw so that a full-scale battle followed anyway (2 Sam. 2:17).

Among the Hebrews as well as among other ancient people, the belief appears evident that divine judgment could be revealed by single combat. Furthermore, the consensus was that the victorious people in battle possessed the most powerful gods. The text of 1 Samuel 17 clearly indicates the religious nature of the confrontation between David and Goliath. David's words recorded in 1 Samuel 17:45-47 emphasize that he confronted Goliath in the name of the Lord, whom the Philistine had defied. In similar fashion, Goliath "cursed David by his gods" (1 Sam. 17:43).

David viewed the giant's taunt as an affront to the living God. David acted on faith so that all who witnessed the event would know that there was a God in Israel. Evidence of David's faith also is recorded in 1 Samuel 17:37, where he affirmed that the Lord who delivered him from the lion and the bear would deliver him from the Philistine. The fact that Goliath's sword was placed in the sanctuary at Nob also supports the religious nature of the combat (1 Sam. 21:1-9).

While the motive behind one-on-one or representative combat apparently was to avert further bloodshed and end the war, evidence indicates that in many instances war continued between the two enemies. This certainly was true of Israel and Philistia. After David defeated the giant, war continued between the two nations (for example, see 1 Sam. 31). Likewise, after the single combat between Alexandros and Menelaos, the Trojan war continued. Not until David assumed the throne of a united Israel was he able to defeat the Philistines. The story of David and Goliath, while providing an example of the one-on-one method of solving disputes in the ancient Near East, is at the same time an affirmation of the power of the Lord (1 Sam. 17:37,45-47,50). Just as at the sea in the account of the exodus from Egypt (Ex. 13-15) and at Jericho in the story of its fall (Josh. 6), the emphasis in the story of David and Goliath falls on the Lord as the giver of victory to His people. David did not approach the champion in the strength of military equipment, but rather in the strength of faith in the Lord (see 1 Sam. 17:38-39).

In the view of the biblical narrator, the event was not essentially a contest between David and Goliath, but between Goliath and God or between the gods of the Philistines and the living Lord of Israel. The battle was under the Lord's control, and He would determine its outcome according to His purposes. Not only did the Lord demonstrate His power over the gods of the Philistines, but He affirmed the bold faith of David over the timidity of Saul and his troops (see 1 Sam. 17:46-47).

This article is adapted from an article that appeared in the Summer 1992 issue of *Biblical Illustrator*. At the time of writing, Janice Meier was a research assistant at New Orleans Baptist Theological Seminary, New Orleans, Louisiana. She later became a content editor at LifeWay Christian Resources and is now retired.



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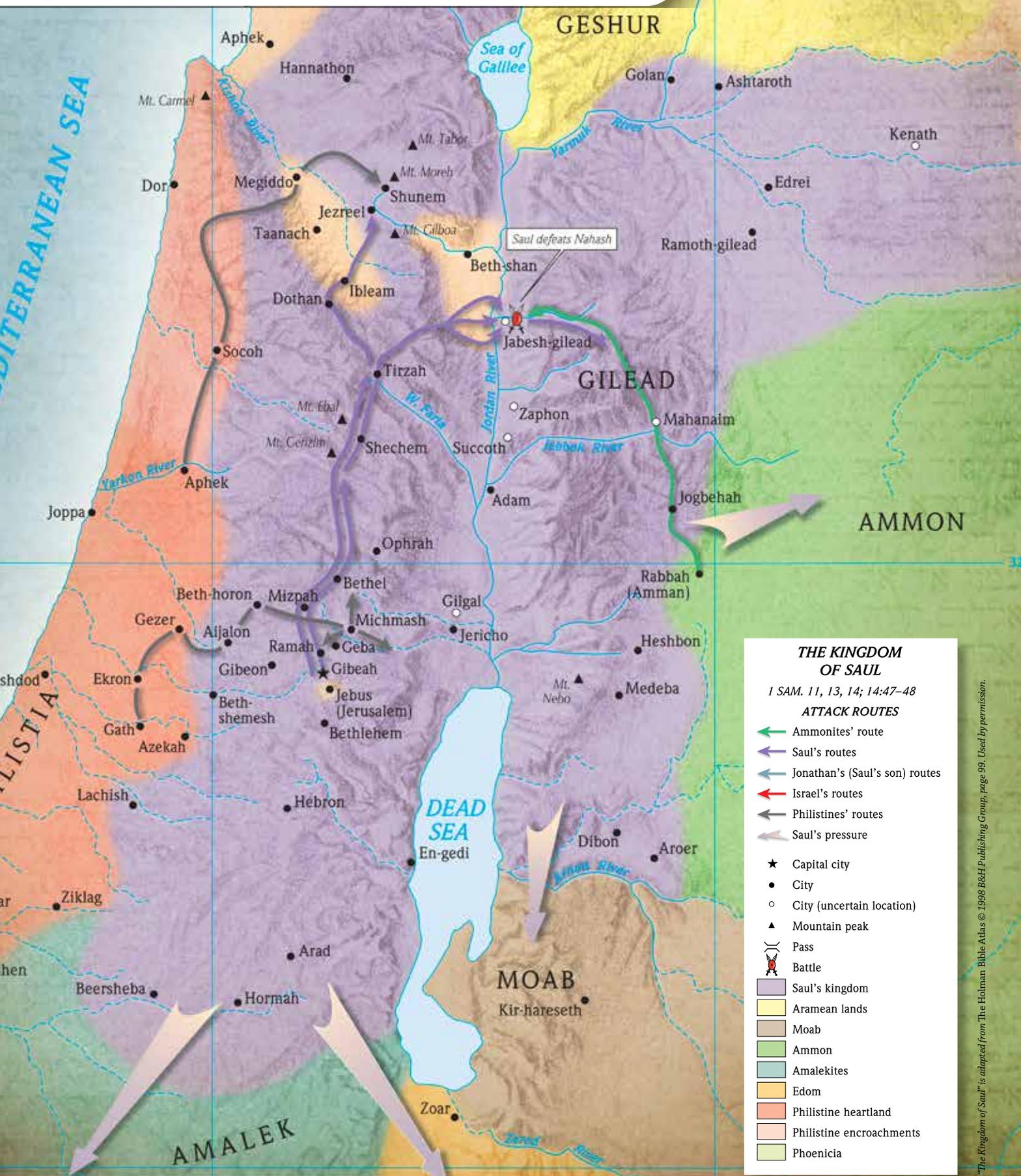
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