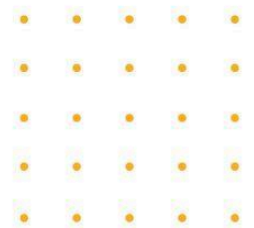


1 SAMUEL 1-16

THE FOLLY OF MAN

GOD'S BETTER PLAN





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Contributors: Thanks to Cathy Atkinson, Stuart Atkinson, Oliver Crosato, Chris Meadows, Anthony Moman, Emily Moman, Scott Muir and James Nodder who contributed to this discussion guide.

Thanks for Being Part of a Homegroup

At Central, we believe that disciples grow in circles, not rows. By that we mean that we grow most as believers when we sit together around God's word, discussing the real issues of life as a follower of Jesus.

Central homegroups are part of the DNA of our church. Sunday services are important, but in homegroups there is greater opportunity for learning together, serving together, caring together, praying together and doing life together. God's people are not saved into isolation, but into a community and a great expression of that community is in homegroups.

Making the Most of Your Homegroup Time

Anything worth doing is worth doing well. That's why we ask that you treat your homegroup as an important part of the rhythm of your weekly life. There are a few things you can do so that you get the most benefit out of the group and so that you are a benefit and a blessing to the group.

Be There: Your presence encourages others. It means you are not only committed to the group, but to the other members of the group. Being inconsistent sends a negative message to everyone else.

Prayer: Pray for the people in your group, especially your group leader.

Prepare: Read any parts of the Bible that your leader suggests, do any homework that comes out of the study. It will not be onerous and you will benefit from it.

Care: Be willing to give of yourself to the others in your group. The Bible says, "Love one another for love is from God and whoever loves has been born of God and knows God" (1 John 4:7).

Why Do the Same Study?

At Central Church all homegroups study the same passage or topic that was preached at the Sunday church service. What are the advantages of doing studies this way?

- Unity: Doing the same study means all across the church we are learning the same things at the same time. It can provide topics of conversation across the whole church.
- Growth: People learn better when they hear things more than once. People learn better when they hear things more than once. Marketing people know this. That is why you see the same commercials on TV over and over again. But it is true. Most people will only remember one or two points from a Sunday sermon (and they are usually the stories that are told as illustrations). People learn best when given the opportunity to talk over the subject matter. By hearing the sermon on Sunday and then being involved in a homegroup discussion during the week, you will find the message of God's Word is sown more deeply into your heart and mind.
- Relevance: By preparing our own studies, we can be specific about issues that impact all of us in our time and place. Most group study materials are from America or were written 10 or 20 years ago and speak to issues of another place or time. You will find that the studies we prepare will be practical and relevant in Ipswich, today.

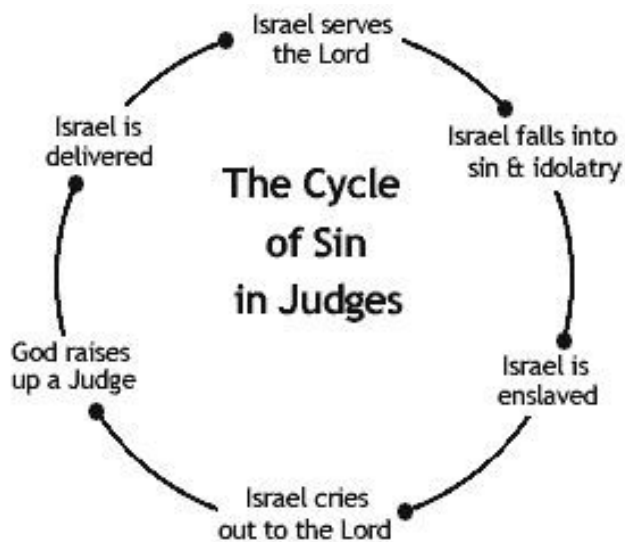


Poor Made Rich

1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

About 1 Samuel

The books of Samuel mark a transition point for the people of Israel. A quick flick back chronologically takes us to the back end of the time of the Judges (note that the events in the book of Ruth took place during the time of the judges, not afterward). The period of the Judges was marked by a recurring cycle of sin, things going bad because of this, calling out to God for help, God raising up a deliverer, improvement during the time of that Judge before a new failure and turning to sin (see diagram below).



The author of Judges diagnoses the problem as a failure to have the godly leadership that a godly king would bring. The book ends on the solemn note, “In those days, there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes” (Judges 21:25).

Samuel is the king-maker. He is the last Judge of Israel and under his leadership, kings are appointed, first the failed King Saul and then the man after God’s heart, David. The contrast between the two could not be greater and this all serves to help Israel see the kind of king they most need. In redemptive history, it helps us see how God will provide the true and better king who will lead in righteousness and justice and who will deliver his people from our greatest enemy.

Quick Tips for Reading OT Narrative

As we jump into an Old Testament narrative book, here are some rules of engagement.

RULE NUMBER 1: Don't Be a Hero

Think of yourself as a regular Israelite, not the hero. Too often we read about great heroes of the faith such as Samuel or David and think that God wants us to be more like them. Yes, there are lessons we can learn from their faith, prayer life, willingness to repent, moral courage etc.... . But over and over again, heroes fail. So we need to be cautious in simply applying lessons from their lives. God is always the main focus, not individuals, and He wants us to learn how he has acted in calling people to himself that they would love and honour him in relationship with him.

If you are a Christian, you are one of the household of God. In the Old Testament, the household of God was the people of Israel. Our identification should be with them.

From time to time, God raised up heroes who would save these people from disaster (eg. David in fighting Goliath, Moses in securing the release of Israel from the Egyptians). You and I are not the saviours of God's people. In this case, these heroes point us to the final work of salvation that would happen when Jesus came. So be careful you don't put yourself in the place of Jesus. You're good, but you're not that good!

RULE NUMBER 2: Be Careful with Historical Events

Ask yourself whether the passage is *describing* an event that happened or *prescribing* something for us to do. A lot of things are mentioned in the Bible without the Biblical writers condoning them. We will see Eli's wicked sons and how they abuse their positions as priests. This is not an example for today's Christian leaders to follow.

RULE NUMBER 3: Stand Back

Stand back and look at what God is doing. Often his actions are not explicit, but he is always there. Ask yourself, what does it teach us about:

- God's character,
- God's involvement in the world,
- God's love for his people,
- God's attitude to sin,
- how God intervenes for, and saves his people.

RULE NUMBER 4: Don't be a Rabbi

Where is Jesus? You will find that all passages either speak of a Saviour or cry out for one. Don't forget to make your study a Christian study. If what you've said could have been said by a Jewish Rabbi, then you haven't done your job as a student of the Bible. When Jesus ran a homegroup study about the Old Testament with some of his followers we're told this is how he did it, "And beginning with Moses and all the Prophets, he explained to them what was said in all the Scriptures concerning himself" (Luke 24:27). All the Scriptures speak to us of the unfolding plan of God to save his people through Jesus. If we miss that point, we miss the big thing God is trying to tell us. Somebody once summarised it well: "The New Testament is in the Old concealed, the Old is in the New revealed."

For Starters

When was the time in your life that you prayed the hardest?

Today we meet a woman in deep anguish and who brings her pain to God in prayer. It is interesting that the people we focus on at the start of this important book are from a fairly insignificant family. But God is going to do something very significant through them.

From the Word

1. Australian Bible teacher Graeme Goldsworthy gives three handles that help us understand the Bible: God's people, in God's place, living under God's rule. That's the goal, but seldom do we see it firing on all 'three' cylinders. As we open up Samuel ...
 - a. who are God's people?
 - b. where are they living?
 - c. how is God's rule evident in their lives? Are they enjoying His rule?

Read 1 Samuel 1:1-20

2. Retell the story by observing what we learn about the characters (perhaps even have one person take each character and explain to the group who they are and what their place in the story is).
 - Elkanah?
 - Hannah?
 - Peninnah?
 - Eli?
 - Samuel?

3. The Bible teaches us truth through the personal circumstances of the lives of real people. Find the words that describe Hannah's circumstances and emotional state. Can you relate?
4. Verse 19 says "the Lord remembered her." Does God forget, or is something else being expressed here? Exodus 2:24 might help.
5. Read 1 Samuel 1:24-28 where we see Hannah fulfilling her vow. What is her attitude at the time of giving Samuel to the service of God (a quick glance into the beginning of chapter 2 might help)?

For Discussion

6. The Bible shows us God at work in both the macro issues of redemptive history and the micro concerns of our personal lives. How are both of these at play in today's passage and why is this a comfort to us?
7. What does Hannah teach us about prayer?
8. Consider your own prayer life. How could it improve or be more consistent?
9. True or False? The lesson is, "When you want something, pray really hard like Hannah and God will make it happen."
10. So what is the lesson God has for us?

For extra credit!

11. Can the argument be made from this passage that the Bible is positive towards polygamy?

For Prayer

Give thanks to God for his sovereign power and goodness at the micro and macro levels.

Spend time sharing about and praying for the hard things in your lives that you are pouring your soul out to God over.

Ask God to help you be patient and see the bigger picture when things are not working out perfectly for us.

2

Worthless Men

1 Samuel 2:12-36

For Starters

And now to the leadership. The book of 1 Samuel kicks off with the story of God's grace to Hannah, and her responsive song. Her prophetic prayer echoes throughout not only the rest of this book, but the rest of the Scriptures. From the get go, as we turn to the sorry state of affairs of Israel's poor leadership, keep an eye out for so many fulfillments of Hannah's song. The first verse of this section starts with an ominous tone -

¹² Now the sons of Eli were worthless men. They did not know the LORD.

Uh oh! That's not good. Before we get into the details, let's think about some of the spectacularly bad leaders of our world. Take one minute to list as many leadership scandals as you can bring to mind and talk about what was driving them to do what they did.



According to Wikipedia, Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos hold the Guinness World Record for the "Greatest Robbery of a Government", putting Suharto of neighbouring Indonesia at second. Now that's saying something! Read about it here https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Imelda_Marcos

From the Word

Unfortunately, God's people are not immune to having leaders who aren't exactly there for the right reasons.

Read 1 Samuel 1:12–17

1. Is it so bad? Before we get into the nitty gritty of the Levitical codes of conduct – what's the vibe here? What labels would you give to the kinds of things the sons of Eli are doing?
2. The image of a “three-pronged fork” being thrust into the pot by the priest's servant (aka: priest's thug) is quite evocative. What do you make of this little detail?
3. It's tricky to reconstruct exactly what the sons of Eli were doing, and how their “custom” contravenes the Levitical code given to Moses, but let's have a look. Read Leviticus 3.1-5 and Leviticus 7.22-34 to get the idea. Look for some key things and complete the table below.

Priestly cheat sheet. This is how we do it (and don't do it)

What's the process or order of how things happen?	
Who gets what?	
What should you not do ?	

4. Now compare this against what Eli and his sons are doing. Why do you think it's described as a “very great” sin in the sight of the Lord?

A little ray of sunshine

Like the sun poking its head out between the clouds on a rainy day, the story of little mini me prophet, Samuel (verses 18-21, 26) shines a different light on the subject.

Read 1 Samuel 2:18-21

5. How is little Samuel described?

Eli's response

Read 1 Samuel 2:22-25

6. When Eli sees Hannah's lips moving in prayer and mistakes it for the murmurings of a drunken woman, he's pretty direct:

¹⁴ And Eli said to her, "How long will you go on being drunk? Put your wine away from you."

Contrast that against the sins of his sons (which he is sure about) and his approach to them. How would you describe his attempt to curb the evil of his sons?

****Interestingly, Hannah's protest - "Do not regard your servant as a worthless woman (1 Sam 1:16)" makes a direct link between Eli's mistaken view of her and the reality of his own sons' worthless behaviour, thus highlighting the difference in his treatment of his own sons.**

Succession plans

Read 1 Samuel 2:26-36

7. What's God's punishment for Eli and his household and why? What fulfillments do you see here from Hannah's prayer (1 Samuel 2:1-10)?

For Discussion

"those who honor me I will honor, and those who despise me shall be lightly esteemed." 1 Sam 2:31

8. Does the 21st century church need to hear and heed this ancient message? Why or why not?

Read Titus 2:1-14

9. In contrast to the behaviour of the worthless sons of Eli, how are God's people called to live and why? Specifically:

- a) Elders and Overseers
- b) Older men and women
- c) Younger men and women
- d) Workers
- e) Everyone (verses 5,7)

***Hint – Peter, (like Paul) typically outlines his gospel and rationale at the beginning of his letter, then the implications. To dig more into the why – check out 1 Peter 1 (esp. vs 13-15). Note the parallel between the great privilege the sons of Eli were given and the even greater privilege we've been given in Christ.**

11. In Romans 1, Paul gives a list of behaviours resulting from our foolish disassociation with him. He concludes with a comment about those who not only do them but who “give approval to those who practice them.” What do we learn from the (in)action of Eli along those lines?

12. What are some situations where you find it hard to call out sin in others? When is it appropriate/not appropriate to “shirt front” sin? ** Shirt fronting is a term made famous by Tony Abbott who wanted to show Australia that he wouldn’t be bullied by Vladimir Putin and Russia.

- At work
- In the home
- With friends
- Other

For Prayer

Pray that we’d appreciate our privilege in Christ and associate with him.

Pray that we’d be wise and not foolish.

Ask for courage and wisdom when it comes to confronting the sin of others.

3

The God Who Speaks

1 Samuel 3:1 - 4:1a

For Starters

What kind of things are important enough to be woken up for in the middle of the night? A medical emergency? A child having a night terror? How about a lost shoe? Where's the line?

In today's Bible passage, Hannah's son Samuel is woken up in the middle of the night by the call of a voice he doesn't recognise. The message he's given turns out to be life-changing not just for him, but his whole nation.

From the Word

Let's bring **1 Samuel 3:1-4:1a** to life. Choose people to read the roles of the narrator, Samuel, Eli and the Lord.

1. What clues are we given about the spiritual state of Israel at this time (verses 1-3)?

2. Why do you think the 'word of the Lord' was rare? (Hint: Amos 8:1-3, 11-12)

3. In verses 4-10, the silence is broken and there's a series of voices in the night. Who's calling whom and how do they react?

4. The Lord's message through Samuel is ear-tingling (verse 11)! Who does the Lord intend to punish and why?

5. How do Samuel and Eli respond to this message of doom?

For Discussion

6. In what sense did Samuel not know the Lord (verse 7)? How does this compare with Eli's sons who are described in the same way in 2:12?

7. Why can't the iniquity of Eli's family be atoned for (verse 14)? (Hint: compare Leviticus 4:2-3 with Numbers 15:30-31).

8. In the previous chapter, Hannah reminded us that the Lord brings about radical reversals. What reversals occur between the beginning and end of this chapter? How would you describe their significance?
9. While the Lord previously spoke to his people through prophets like Samuel, his final and best word to us is through his son Jesus (Hebrews 1:1-3). He is *the* Word who makes the Father known (John 1:1,18). How does that happen? Should we expect to hear Jesus talking or appearing to us in the middle of the night too?
10. God's people today are given their own ear-tingling message in Hebrews 10:26-31. How does it echo the one given through Samuel? How can we end up in that dangerous place? What are we urged to do instead (Hebrews 10:19-25)?

**** Note that next week's study is a bit longer - 4 chapters. That's only about 4 pages of printed text, but it might be easier if we all came having read the passage, then we'll have more time for discussion. Maybe your group could agree to pre-read?*

For Prayer

Give thanks for the Lord's tender mercy in giving us Jesus, his word to us, who has brought the light of salvation to us when we were sitting in darkness and the shadow of death (Luke 1:76-79).

Pray that we might not take for granted the privilege of hearing the Lord speak as we read the Bible. Ask that those who do not yet have access to a Bible, particularly in their own language, might have that blessing.

Ask the Lord to keep our hearts soft and repentant, that we might hold unswervingly to the hope we profess in Jesus, and heed the warning not to treat his sacrifice for us with contempt.



Stronger

1 Samuel 4:1b - 7:17

For Starters

Dangers without, and dangers within. This seems to be how it is with God's people. We've just seen a snapshot of how God is dealing with the problem of a corrupt leadership in the nation. Now we turn to the Philistines, the big brutes living next door who the Israelites will do battle with for a long time.

Where do you reckon your biggest battles are? In the home? With your health? Being busy?

From the Word

Read 1 Samuel 4:1-22

Shocked by the (lack of) power

1. In the face of Philistine thrashing, the Israelites ask – what happened? (verse 3) What is their cunning but foolish plan to turn this defeat around?

2. Come up with one or two words to describe the response of the **Israelites** and the **Philistines** when the ark enters the camp of Israel (1 Samuel 4.5-8) and put them in the table below. What is the shock result of the second battle?

	Israelites	Philistines
Response		

3. What do you think the Philistines' action in carrying the ark of the covenant into the temple of their god Dagon shows about their attitude toward the God of Israel?

Too hot to handle

Read 1 Samuel 5:1 - 6:12

4. What happens as the Ark of the Covenant does the tour of Philistine? Complete the table below.

Tour de tumour – #phillysruleBC

Place	What happens there?
Ashdod	
Gath	
Ekron	

5. By the time the Ark heads down the road toward Ekron, the writing's on the wall. Sure the folly of man has been on display so far, but there's some wisdom in the thinking of the men of Ekron who know this thing is too hot to handle. It's time to call in the god squad – the priests who are the spiritual heavies. Hopefully they'll be able to deal with this problem! What do they do with the Ark and why do you think they take this approach?

6. According to 1 Samuel 6:6 they seem keen not to make the same mistake as Pharaoh from Egypt when it comes to the God of Israel. How does their response differ?

7. Perhaps it's hard to get that cracking victory out of their minds, but the Philistines don't seem completely convinced about whether they've just experienced a judgment of God, or an exceptional run of coincidences. They will watch which way this driverless kart takes with great interest (verse 9). Where do the cows go?

Raiders of the Lost Ark

Read 1 Samuel 6:13 – 7:17

8. While initially rejoicing at the return of the ark of the covenant, the joy is short lived, as some of the Beth-Shemeshites decide it would be a good idea to take a sneaky peek inside – and he who lifts the lid up, gets struck down. What's the dilemma the people of Israel now face (verse 20) and what do they do?
9. The decision to park the ark to the house of Abinadab on the hill ends up being a long time rather than just a part-time solution. What ends up breaking the 20 year dilemma? (1 Samuel 7:2).
10. It's not clear whether the house of Israel comes to their own senses, or if Samuel is somehow involved, but he's back in the action, and now it's time for him to suit up. What does Samuel instruct the people to do and what is the surprising and unexpected result?

For Discussion

11. Sure there's no epic battles these days like we've seen in ancient Israel, but the war is definitely still not over. What kind of battles do Christians face today? Are there any ways you can think of that we foolishly presume upon God or treat him like a good luck charm rather than relying in humble obedience?
12. Read Colossians 2:8-15 and Ephesians 1:11-23. How is Jesus' power described and how does it work through and in us?

13. Just like the leadership regime of Eli, the corrupt leadership of Jesus' day, fleece and abuse the sheep, rather than care for them. Jesus starts his ministry with the same call as Samuel – repent! What is the role of repentance in the life of the believer, for:

- a) Initial faith

- b) Lifelong faith

For Prayer

Pray for Christians facing persecution in countries where the opposition is fierce.

Ask God to remind us about the power that is at work in us and the purpose for which it's intended.

Confess the fact that we can presume upon God or try to manipulate him in various ways.

Give thanks that God is the hero of the story and will protect us from the attacks of the evil one.



Rejected

1 Samuel 8:1-22

For Starters

How do you feel when children/adolescents/adults make bad choices in their lives even after you have rationally explained to them the consequences of those bad choices?

Against the backdrop of Chapter 7's description of the LORD's deliverance from the enemies of Israel, Chapter 8 marks a transition. Despite experiencing God's rescue, this study will demonstrate what choice the people make for their ultimate security.

From the Word

Prelude: Samuel has judged Israel well. The people have enjoyed rest from the attacks of their enemies. Those attacks were a perennial problem ever since they occupied the promised land. There had been something of a civil society. (Compare with Judges 18:1, 19:1, 21:25) But now Samuel is old. So what happens next when he dies? That's the problem addressed in Chapter 8.

Read 1 Samuel 8:1-22

1. What was Samuel's solution to this problem as he neared the end of his life? What was wrong with his solution? (See also Judges 8:23, 33)

8. Does the LORD “give in” to the demand of the people? What is God doing here? (verses 21-22)

For Discussion

9. This chapter has focussed on appointing a king for Israel. Having a king assumes he will have a kingdom. So what was the “kingdom of God” in chapter 8 as the LORD intended? Did Israel need a king? (See Deuteronomy 17:14-20)

10. What was the “Number 1” problem of the people of Israel? Why? Had the people given up on being a “light to the nations”?

11. Was God’s better plan being thwarted at this point in history?

12. What is the “kingdom of God” in our time? If you are a Christian leader, how does this concept apply to you today?

13. Can we learn how to live today by studying texts which are at least 3000 years old?

14. How are you tempted to “fit in” with the world in ways that contradict the gospel and fail to acknowledge the kingship of Jesus? Are there any New Testament verses which can help us to stand firmly against this temptation?

For Prayer

Ask God to help us to understand what he has revealed in the scriptures.

Pray that we never say NO to God. Pray that we might not be “foolish” but rather that we would be wise unto salvation.

Pray for the leaders in our church and denomination that they would be people who model their leadership on that of the Lord Jesus.

Pray that God would give us courage not to feel the need to “fit in” with the world but instead to stand apart for Jesus.

Pray that we might know Jesus better, that we love him more and that we follow him closely.



Let Them Fail

1 Samuel 9:1 – 10:27

For Starters

Have you ever had someone interject into a conversation with an anecdote that seems completely unrelated to what has come before? After the significant events of chapter 8, the story pivots to a mundane search for livestock in the life of a local farmer. It is soon clear though that things are far more important than they first appear.

Recap:

What request did the Israelites make in chapter 8? Was this a pious request or sinful request?

What kind of ruler did the people want?

What was God's response to the request?

Read 1 Samuel 9:1-14

1. How is Saul described?

2. In your own words, summarise the events that lead to Saul meeting Samuel.

Read 1 Samuel 9:15 - 10:1

3. What is revealed about the ordinary events that lead Saul to Samuel?

4. What purpose does God have for appointing Saul, and what does this show about God's character?

Read 1 Samuel 10:2-16

5. What signs does God give Saul that the anointing is from God and valid?

6. How is it clear that despite the sinfulness of the people's request, God has not 'short-changed' Saul?

Read 1 Samuel 10:17-26

7. How is Saul chosen publicly to be King? What does this demonstrate? (Read Proverbs 16:33)

8. What kind of person is Saul shown to be in the events of Chapters 9-10? How do we see the foolishness of the people in their response?

For Discussion

The transition from Chapter 8 to 9 is somewhat abrupt. 'Major' developments in Israel's history transitions to a 'minor' event about some lost donkeys.

9. What does the story of Saul's search for the donkeys show us about how God works in the world?

10. How do you tend to think about what it looks like for God to be at work in your life?

11. Despite Saul's inadequacies, God gave him his Spirit to do the task he had called him to.

Read John 14:15-17 and 25-26

Discuss how we can be encouraged because Jesus has sent us the Spirit.

For Prayer

Pray for a greater sense of confidence that God's Spirit works through us to bring about his purposes, even in our inadequacies.

Repent of times when we in our foolishness celebrate what God has clearly said is wrong.

Praise God for his work in the ordinary parts of our lives to bring about his purposes - to glorify Jesus and make us like Him.



Empty Things

1 Samuel 11:1 – 12:25

For Starters

Have you ever had a great “mic drop” moment?

In this section of Samuel we see Israel once again in trouble, but this time instead of turning to God, they turn to....their King! In Chapter 12, Samuel has his final “mic drop” moment when he sets up a prophetic cosmic courtroom to highlight Israel’s sin and God’s faithfulness.

From the Word

Read 1 Samuel 11:1-11

1. In pairs, in your own words - describe the events unfolding in verses 1-11.

2. What’s the significance of “the Spirit of God rushed upon Saul”?

Read 1 Samuel 11:12-15

3. How does Saul react to the people's request to put his detractors to death? (See 1 Samuel 10:27)

4. How does Israel react to the victorious battle?

Read 1 Samuel 12

5. What pattern can you see in Samuel's recounting of Israel's history?

6. What's the distinct change to the pattern in verse 12?

7. Is there a change in how God acts towards his people?

8. How does Samuel qualify his argument?

9. How do the Israelites respond?

For Discussion

10. Is God someone we should dread?

11. It would be fair to presume Samuel might be feeling a little frustrated at this point - his warnings seem to continue to fall on deaf ears - surely the temptation would be to give up and walk away because no one is listening, yet he remains faithful to God. Are there times in your life where you aren't seeing fruit in those you minister to and are tempted to give up? What encourages you to keep going?

12. What 'empty things' do we turn to, to fix our problems instead of or prior to turning to God?

13. Do you ever feel like your sinfulness disqualifies you from God's faithfulness? Why or why not?

For Prayer

Confess the “empty things” you turn to instead of God.

Thank God for his unending faithfulness in the face of our sin and forgetfulness.

Pray God would encourage you to faithfully proclaim His word in your world even when you feel discouraged.

Pray God would give you a fuller picture of himself - how awesome and powerful he is.



What Have You Done?

1 Samuel 13:1 – 15:35

For Starters

Can you remember a time where your disobedience as a child had some drastic implications? Or perhaps when you successfully shifted the blame to a sibling or a classmate?

In 1 Samuel 13-15, we are shown two examples of Saul's disobedience with some pretty drastic consequences - though, every time he fails, he seems to have an excuse or someone else to blame! He might fool himself but does he fool God? Do we?

From the Word

Read 1 Samuel 13:5-14

1. Describe the situation Saul and the Israelites found themselves in. (Note 1 Samuel 10:8 for the instructions Samuel gave Saul)

2. What did Saul do? Why was it a foolish move?

3. What were the consequences of this move?

4. BONUS: How does the attitude of Jonathan compare in 1 Samuel 14:6-14?

Read 1 Samuel 15:1-9

5. Does Saul do what he was commanded this time? How was he obedient? How was he disobedient?

Read 1 Samuel 15:10-23

6. Who does Saul blame his disobedience on? What or who is Saul most focused on in shifting the blame?

7. How is obedience better than sacrifice?

8. How is rebellion like idolatry?

For Discussion

9. How might we be tempted to reframe our disobedience or justify our own sinfulness before God? Can you think of specific examples? Is this acceptable?

10. Do we take the sinfulness of disobedience seriously in our lives? What does Jesus himself require of us? (Matthew 28:19,20 and John 14:15)

11. How does this passage reveal our desperate need for a “better” king? (1 Samuel 15:28)

12. How does Jesus fulfill this need? (Hebrews 10:5-10 and 2 Corinthians 5:21) What does this mean for us today?

For Prayer

Praise God for the better king we have in Jesus.

Confess any areas of your life where you're not taking Jesus' commands seriously.

Ask him for help by the Spirit to live a life of joyful obedience.



Chosen

1 Samuel 16:1-13

For Starters

In what ways are appearances important?

In what ways can relying on appearances be misguided?

From the Word

Context

The people have asked for a king so that they could have a leadership system like the surrounding pagan nations (1 Samuel 8:5). This amounted to a rejection of God as their king. They wanted a human king to save them from their enemies rather than trusting God to do so (1 Samuel 8:7, 10:19). Consequently God had granted their request for a king of their choosing in the appointment of King Saul.

On the outside, Saul had looked like a promising candidate. He was tall and handsome (1 Samuel 9:2). Yet all had not gone well.

1. In what ways had Saul proven to be a poor choice of king (1 Samuel 15:24)?

David's reign and kingdom proved to be the highpoint in Israel's history. Yet whilst David was a good king he was not a perfect king. Eventually his reign faltered and his successors (with a few exceptions) had wayward hearts which didn't humbly trust and obey God. Consequently, the kingdom of Israel went into decline leading in due course to exile.

7. What therefore is the significance of the promise God made to David during his reign? (2 Samuel 7:12-13)

8. What do we learn about this promised future king's heart through the prophet Isaiah? (Isaiah 11:1-5)

For Discussion

9. If Jesus is the king who will judge people by their hearts and not their outward appearances, according to the following passages, what hope does anyone have of being accepted into his kingdom based on their own efforts? (Jeremiah 17:9-10; Mark 7:20-23)

10. In the light of this, how can our hearts be cleansed so that we can enter Jesus' kingdom? (1 John 1:7-9)

11. As people forgiven by God through trusting in Christ's cleansing death ("blood") for us, how should God looking on the heart and not external appearances influence the following:

- a) Our daily conduct as followers of Jesus (Matthew 5:20-22 and 27-28)? What sort of heart does God desire in his people?

- b) How do we personally engage with Sunday services?

- c) Our assessment of those suitable for taking on roles of responsibility in church life? (Titus 1:5-9)

- d) The attitude with which we serve others?

- e) Our tendency to assess and judge others by external appearance? (James 2:1-4)

12. Where do we look for the power to live like this? Is it just a product of our own effort?

For Prayer

Praise God for sending the perfect king in Jesus who will unendingly rule and reign with a perfect heart in all righteousness and justice.

Confess the waywardness of our hearts and our need to continually depend on Jesus' cleansing blood.

Ask God for help by the Spirit to live a life of joyful obedience in both outer action and inner disposition.