

## Small Group Study Notes

# In The Mess!

### Session 1: What Does God See? 1 Samuel 16

Some questions for discussion:

1. How do you respond to the question: "Are you happy with the way world is?"

As we look at the world it often seems it is in a bit of a mess. We see injustice, corruption, discrimination, mistreatment, dishonesty almost everywhere we look. And it can seem a little depressing! In our own lives we can sometimes feel things are a bit of a mess too, perhaps at work, in the family or when we health problems. As we come to the story of David the nation of Israel is in a bit of a mess. Saul has proved he is not a King who follows God and the nation is struggling. Although He warned the people what would happen if they had a King (1 Sam 8), they wouldn't listen and chose to have a king and now they are facing exactly the problems they were warned about! But the good news is that God is at work in the mess and He has already chosen David to be king after Saul.

2. Read 1 Sam. 16 v 1 – 13
3. What evidence is there here that God is at work in the mess at this point in the life of Israel?
4. How have you seen God at work in the mess – maybe in your own life or as you have helped a friend or member of your family?
5. As you look back and reflect on these times, what have you learnt that you can take into new situations or share with others about God's presence with you?
6. God chose David because of his heart – he was a man after God's won heart. What kind of heart is God looking for?
7. How is God able to work in the mess through people whose hearts are turned towards Him?
8. How might God be able to work through you at this time? What situations do you face into which you might be the one who is able to bring the presence of God?
9. Pray for one another and especially for the situations you might describe as a mess in which you now find yourself.

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### Session 2: Facing Your Giants! 1 Sam 17

Some questions for discussion:

Goliath was a real person and a real enemy for the Israelites and for David. But we have our Goliaths too. They may come in many different forms and sometimes they are the first thought of every morning or the last worry of the evening. They can dominate the day and they can cripple us. David could see Goliath alright, but that wasn't all he saw. And we can learn from David that it is possible to defeat him.

1. What Goliaths have you had to face? How did they block your vision of God and make your Christian life harder?
2. David was able to focus more on God than on Goliath, he saw Goliath from God's perspective. How did this help David and how could it help us face our Goliaths?
3. If we focus on our giants we can easily stumble. What kind of tumbles do you take? What happens to our giants when we focus on God?
4. Read 1 Sam 17
5. How did David's perspective differ from that of the army of Saul?
6. What was the basis of David's confidence? (vs 34-35)
7. What do verses 45-47 tell us about David's heart?
8. Read Isaiah 51 v 12-15
9. What does this teach us about facing our giants?
10. Read Hebrews 12 v 1-3
11. How can we encourage one another not to grow tired and weary but to fix our eyes on Jesus? What happens when we do this?
12. Who has encouraged you in your Christian life? How? How can you do the same for others?
13. Pray for one another that you may face the challenges before you this week looking to God.

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### Session 3: The Waiting Game! 1 Sam 18-20

Some questions for discussion:

David has just accomplished an incredible feat: he has slain Goliath and given Israel victory over on old enemy and one that was destroying the nation. Chuck Swindoll writes: "A young man, not twenty years old, who had never worn the uniform of the Israeli army, never once suited up for battle, never once known what it was to carry a sword, had run out onto the battlefield, faced a giant almost ten feet tall, and killed him with one throw of his sling. As a result David gained instant popularity. He became a national hero."<sup>1</sup> David had been anointed King, become an overnight celebrity, but would have to wait in difficult circumstances before al that had been promised became reality. And in the waiting time he had to find a way through his relationship with Saul.

1. Read 1 Sam 18 v 1-9
2. David had no real idea of what was going to happen after he had killed Goliath, but verse 9 tell us that Saul was watching him. How do you suppose David might have responded if God had told him all that would happen before he became King?
3. How do you respond to an unknown future, even if God has made promises to you?
4. How hard is the lesson to live one day at a time? What are the benefits of living this way? How does it cause us to lives of faith?
5. Read 1 Sam 18 v 10-16. What was it that made Saul jealous and angry with David? What was it that made Saul afraid of David? What actions were caused by Saul's jealousy?
6. Perhaps you meet people like Saul: a boss at work; a controlling parent; a spouse; someone from a relationship that's broken down; a colleague...How do you react and respond to them?
7. How can you get better at keeping your focus in the right place, on God, and not on your Saul?

God's great gift to David in the waiting time was Jonathan. Jonathan as Saul's son was set to inherit the throne from Saul and become King himself. He had very good reason to hate David. He was a good soldier who, while David was feeding the sheep, was fighting the Philistines. He could have despised David. But he chose a different path and God weaves their hearts together in unshakeable loyalty. God gave David a friend who was trustworthy and who loved David as himself. What a gift!

8. Read 1 Sam 20 v 1 -42. How would describe the friendship between David and Jonathan? Who risked more buy this friendship, David or Jonathan?
9. Read 1 Sam 23 v 16. How important is this aspect of friendship in the waiting time?
10. Who is your Jonathan? Who are you called to be Jonathan to?
  - Thank God for those he has given you to hold you through the waiting times in life. Ask God to bless them.
  - Pray for those you are called to be Jonathan to, that you would help them to keep their focus true and in the right place.

1. Swindoll, Charles: "David: A man of Passion and Destiny," Word Publishing, 1997 page 51

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### Session 4: Rock Bottom! 1 Sam 22

Some questions for discussion:

By the time we get to this point in the story of David it all seems to have gone horribly wrong for him. His promising military career is over; his marriage is effectively over; he's no place in court, no priest and nothing to do but run! He survives by lying and feigning madness and he runs to only place he can – the wilderness! He goes to hide in the cave of Adullam (1 Sam 22 v 1).

1. How much can you relate to David's story? Which parts in particular do you relate to? Why?
2. In an effort to land on your feet have you ever felt you have had to resort to the sorts of things David did? Was David justified in his actions? What issues does it raise for us in similar situations?
3. Read Psalm 57.
4. Look at the introduction to it: "Of David. When he fled from Saul into the cave." What was David able to find even in this time in the cave?
5. Refuge is a word David uses time and time again in the Psalms. How was he able to make God his refuge? What did it mean for David in this psalm to make God his refuge? How do you make God your refuge?
6. What needs to change in your life if you are to make God your refuge?
7. Someone once said: "You'll never know That Jesus is all you need until Jesus is all you have." How far can you identify with this statement? Do you think it is true? Why, or why not?
8. Describe a time when you sought refuge in God. How important were the people of God in that time? How have you given comfort to others in when they have experienced tough times?

Max Lucado writes: Those who most need comfort often won't risk asking for it. Put your antennae up, look around for someone who seems to feel disconnected and alone. Invite that person to go to lunch or take a walk with you. Don't go prepared with a talk, but just "be there" for them and ask God to use your efforts to help that person find refuge in Him. (Facing Your Giants page 194)

9. How do you respond to this?
10. Has someone ever done that for you? How did you find it?
  - Pray for one another especially those who are going through tough times and would describe themselves at rock bottom.

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### Session 5: The Test of Grace – 1 Sam 24

Some questions for discussion:

The Bible is a real book, and this unique story is living proof. In the midst of his mad rush for vengeance, Saul must answer the call of nature. So he finds himself crouching in the privacy of a cave-but not just any cave. He tromps right into the mouth of the cave where David and his men were hiding. Bad enough for the King to be seen at that moment, but to be in the very presence of the enemy. Oh, man! If you ever want to test the carnality of a person, ask him (or her) what you should do when your enemy is vulnerable. Unless they are a man or woman of God, they'll tell you to strike every time. (Charles Swindoll: "David a Man of Passion and Destiny," page 84)

1. Read 1 Sam 24
2. What do you think of Charles Swindoll's statement above? Is he right? Why, or why not?
3. It maybe one thing to give grace to our friends, but another thing altogether to give grace to those who cause us pain. What would it take for you to give grace to them?
4. David's men urged David to take his opportunity to kill Saul. How hard is it to, and how do you avoid the natural human tendency to give grief to those who give you grief?
5. Read Romans 12 v 14 – 21. How are Christians supposed to treat their enemies? Instead of seeking revenge what are they supposed to do?
6. What current situations can you think of where to act like this might make dramatic difference to the outcome of a situation?

Max Lucado writes: "Forgiveness is not excusing. Nor is forgiveness pretending. David didn't gloss over or sidestep Saul's sin. He addressed it directly. He didn't avoid the issue, but he did avoid Saul. (Facing Your Giants page 195)

7. Is it OK to forgive someone and still choose to avoid them?
8. One of the best definitions I have heard of what forgiveness is, is that it is taking the sword out of your own stomach. What do you think this means?
9. How much of a part does forgiveness play in the story of David and Saul in the cave that day? What difference did it make to the rest of the story of David do you suppose?
10. Can we ask for God's grace if we refuse to forgive?
11. Read Colossians 3 v 13. Pray that we might be able to do this.

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### Session 6: Disarming Anger! 1 Sam 25

Some questions for discussion:

“Death was still with us – no doubt about that. But we were slowly being freed from its destructive grip..... Selfishness, hatred... and pride were all anti-life. Love.... self-sacrifice.... and faith, on the other hand, were the essence of life ... gifts of God to men... Death no longer had the last word at Chungkai.”<sup>1</sup> Ernest Gordon changed the lives of many in a death camp in WWII because others changed his by sharing rations and caring for the sick.

1. The story of the WWII prisoner of war camp is as challenging as it is remarkable. The camp gains two people filled with hope even in a camp filled with death. This changes lives. How does this story challenge you even if you are in the most difficult of situations and are about ready to give up?
2. Where have you seen the good influence of someone who has changed the atmosphere of a place, workforce, staff room or home by their presence?
3. Where could your presence be the change? How do you respond to the challenge? What can you learn from this story?
4. Read 1 Sam 25. How does Abigail’s hope change the situation?
5. What is the power of gentleness?
6. Read Phil. 4 v5. Gentleness is a fruit of the spirit. How are you growing in gentleness? What challenges does this present for you? How will you respond to them? How do you let your gentleness be evident to all?
7. David was on the war path. He was angry and nothing was going to stop him taking his revenge on Nabal. How does anger nearly destroy David? What might the consequences be for us and those around us if we pursue our anger in the way David did?
8. Abigail stood, or more literally knelt, in David’s way. She stood in the gap. She spoke God back into David’s life when he was consumed with himself. Have you ever had someone stand in the gap for you and speak God back into your life? How grateful are you that someone did that for you?
9. Abigail reminded David of god’s call on his life as she knelt before him in the road. How important is it to speak God’s promises to one another when we have lost sight of them ourselves? How can you do this for one another now?
10. For whom can you be an Abigail?
  - Pray for one another that you may be those who stand in the gap for one another helping each other to hold onto the promises God has given you and walking in the light of your true identity in Christ.

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### Session 7: Slough of Despond! 1 Sam 27 - 30

Some questions for discussion:

In 1952 Florence Chadwick attempted to swim the chilly ocean waters between Catalina Island and the California shore. She swam through foggy weather and choppy seas for 15 hours. Her muscles began to cramp, and her resolve weakened. She begged to be taken out of the water, but her mother, riding in a boat alongside, urged her not to give up. She kept trying but grew exhausted and stopped swimming. Aids lifted her out of the water and into the boat. They paddled for a few more minutes, the mist broke, and she discovered that the shore was less than half a mile away. "All I could see was the fog," she explained at a news conference. "I think if I could have seen the shore, I would have made it." (Quoted in Max Lucado: *Facing Your Giants*, Thomas Nelson 2008 page 70)

1. How much do you identify with the story above: has there ever been a time when you have really felt like giving up in some area of life? Share your experiences.
2. Take time to read 1 Samuel Chapters 27, 29 and 30
3. Where is David's focus in verse 1 of chapter 27? Whose idea is he about to follow? Where will this lead him?
4. How does this contrast with David earlier in the story? Look up these verses: ch. 5 v 19; ch. 5 v 23; ch. 23 v 2; ch. 23 v 4.
5. What has changed for David by the time he gets to chapter 27?
6. When David thinks he will be destroyed he runs and hides with his enemy which brings him temporary relief. In what ways might we do the same kind of thing? Why will this choice only ever bring us temporary relief?
7. Why was the whole of David's thinking based on a lie? (Look again at verse 1 and contrast that with the anointing of David by Samuel in 1 Sam 16)
8. David takes his eyes off the promises of God and looks again to Saul. How are we prone to do the same thing? Why do we do this?
9. When we have lost sight of the shore, or cannot see it for the fog we need to hold on again to the promises of God. List some of the promises has God given us? What promises has God given to you?
10. Share stories you know of people who kept going despite the difficulties and obstacles.
11. Read: Matthew 28 v 20. How does this encourage you to keep going?
12. Read: Mathew 11 v 28. How does this encourage you?
13. How can you encourage one another in your group at this time: write a note, send a card, pray together, read the promises of God together?

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### Session 8: Unspeakable Grief! 2 Sam 1 v 1 - 16

Some questions for discussion:

Death is a subject many of us would prefer to avoid. But the truth is that we are all going to die. This may be a difficult study for some because of the memories it will stir, memories that will range from fond memories to ones we wish we could forget. It may also be that people in your group will not yet have dealt with their issues yet, or are trying to avoid them. Please use these questions as best suits your group. If you would like any further help, or if things come in the course of the study that you would like help with, please ask!

1. Someone once said there are only two things we can be certain of in life; death and taxes! Why do you think we find it so hard to face the reality of death? How do people tend to react when someone they know dies?
2. In the western world we find it very difficult to express grief. How far do you agree with this statement? Why do you think this is so?
3. In what ways do people deal with grief? What effect do you see this has on people?

The giant of grief often lurks in the shadows and jumps out at the most unexpected moments. For those who have lost loved ones it can be the smell of a favourite perfume, a favourite drink, a phrase that someone uses, a place...small things that stir their memories. Perhaps you could share your experiences of losing someone and how you walked the long road of coming to terms with your loss. Share memories of the people you loved.

4. What key issues of life has facing the reality of death forced you to grapple with?
5. Read: 2 Sam 1 v 1 – 16. What does this passage tell us of the friendship between David and Jonathan? Why do think God allowed Jonathan to die at the same time as Saul?
6. Read: 1 Sam 1 v 17 – 27. How does David deal with his grief? What might we learn from this?
7. Read: John 11 v 1 – 16. What do we learn from the way Jesus responded to the death of his good friend Lazarus?

As Christians we have a different perspective on death. What difference does it make to be a Christian facing the reality of death? You might like to read 1 Thes. 4 v 13 – 18. How does this hope help us face our grief? How can we encourage one another with these words as verse 18 says we should?

- Take time to pray for one another and especially those you know who are going through a tough time or a time of bereavement.

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### Session 9: Where Are You Heading? 1 Sam 31

As we come to the end of the first part of the story of David, before he becomes King of Israel, it is a good opportunity to pause and reflect on the life of Saul. There are not so many questions in this study but they are intended to give the opportunity to think about our lives in the light of one that started so well but finished so pitifully. Saul started with God's anointing but finished without it. How will we live our lives?

1. Reflect on the life of Saul. What did he do well? When did his problems begin? What ultimately led to his downfall?
2. When God is looking for people to do special work for him (as when Saul was chosen) what is the most important thing he is looking for? Courage? Ability? Appearance? Character? What does God see in you?
3. Selwyn Hughes suggests that the biggest lesson we can learn from the life of Saul is that of the evil of selfism. Saul refused to obey God, set about having his own way, and as a result, fell from the highest position in the land to finish up as a suicide. It happened one step at a time. In what ways do you wrestle with selfism? What steps do you need to be careful not to take? What changes do you need to put in place to avoid going down the path Saul trod?

What do you think those who survive you will write as your epitath? What would you like your obituary to say? How are you living in the light of those thoughts?

- Pray for one another that you might live in the light of the death of Christ and all that he won for us and that we might live a radical disciples.