

A young child with light hair, wearing a dark jacket, sits in a nest made of sticks in a field of tall, golden-brown grass. The child is smiling and looking towards the camera. In the background, there are rolling hills and mountains under a cloudy sky. The overall scene is peaceful and natural.

the God of small things  
a series in 1 Samuel

*community group studies*

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# THE GOD OF SMALL THINGS

We're very excited to be spending the next twelve week in the book of 1 Samuel with you all. It's a book full of compelling stories, rich and complex characters, and a clear shadow of Jesus Christ—particularly of his power through weakness, and his merciful kingship.

This is particularly clear because 1 Samuel feels just like the Old Testament Luke! Throughout the book, the same themes of reversals of power and honour and fortune are central: of God being at work through the small and weak things who depend on God to shame the big and powerful things who oppose God. Both books have very similar beginnings, focusing in on a humble family who are unexpectedly expecting a child. And throughout 1 Samuel, just like Luke, the narrative shows us that God delights in working through the unexpected people (the small ones, the weak ones, the nobodies), and he rejects the expected people (the tall ones, the powerful ones, the proud ones), to show his power and mercy. The message throughout the book is the same message that God gave the apostle Paul: “My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is perfected in weakness.”

It's our hope and prayer that our time in this book will grow our ability to know God's power through weakness, and his love of working in all the small ways in our lives to bless us and to bless others. And most of all, we hope that we all continue to meet Jesus in these pages, and that we continue to encounter his mercy and world-and-heart-overturning ways, ultimately shown in his cross: God's ultimate display of weakness and foolishness, which was God's ultimate plan of power and wisdom to save the world.

**“The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour.”**

**1 Samuel 2:7-8**

WEEK 1

1 Samuel 1:1-2:11

“

“The LORD makes poor and makes rich; he brings low and he exalts. He raises up the poor from the dust; he lifts the needy from the ash heap to make them sit with princes and inherit a seat of honour.”

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

### **D** ISCOVER **What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

1 Samuel comes right after the stories of Judges and Ruth. Read the last verse of each book. How does each verse set up the scene for the book of 1 Samuel?

This is a book that's all about kings and kingdoms and power. Why do you think it starts in such a humble way?

How might Hannah's situation represent the state of all of Israel?

Based on Hannah's prayer, what would you expect some of the major themes in the book to be?

Read Luke 1:46–55. Can you see any similarities between Mary's prayer and Hannah's?

### **N** URTURE **What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

How does Hannah's prayer encourage you in your own?

Which phrase of Hannah's prayer particularly encourages you today?

Is there anything you do not ask for in prayer because, deep down, you think the Lord cannot or will not give it?

### **A** CT **How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What does Hannah teach us about prayer?

Write a Psalm of your greatest need/s, and like Hannah, allow them to be swallowed in God's greater vision and plan throughout history.

WEEK 2

1 Samuel 2:12-3:21

“

Then I will raise up a faithful priest for myself. He will do whatever is in my heart and mind. I will establish a lasting dynasty for him, and he will walk before my anointed one for all time.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

**DISCOVER**

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

Is Eli a good or a bad leader? Why?

What was the sin of Eli's sons? How does Hannah's prayer in 2:5 shed light on this scene?

What might 3:2 and 3:7 tell us about the spiritual state of Israel?

How is Samuel presented as different from Eli's sons?

How many times can you count the word "family" in 2:27–36? Why do you think this word is used this often here?

**NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Have you learned to look at God's work in quiet ways?

When we contemplate times when God has been silent, it should make us value his Word all the more. Does it still amaze you that the great and holy God actually has something to say to you?

When, and why, are you tempted to lose confidence in the power of God's word?

**ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

How do you need to ask Jesus to intercede for you today?

Some say that God's word "comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable." Which of these describes you more right now, and how can you be letting the word of God speak to you there?

WEEK 3  
1 Samuel 4:1-7:2

“

The glory has departed from Israel,” she said, “because the ark of God has been captured.”

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

**D** ISCOVER  
**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

How was Israel treating the ark of God in 4:3?

After hearing some terrible news, Eli dies. How did he lead his people well? What were some of his weaknesses as a leader?

Thirty-thousand Israelite soldiers could not beat the Philistines (4:10). How were the Philistines defeated? (5:11–12)

**N** URTURE  
**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

How seriously are you taking God?

In the story, Israel kind of treats the ark as if it's a magical talisman for victory. Are there any ways in which we do things or use things superstitiously to try and gain favour in life?

What's the difference between basing a prayer on God's promises and trying to force God's hand?

**A** CT  
**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What's one thing that you can identify (a ritual, a good deed, a way of praying) that you can be tempted to use to manipulate God? How can you be changing your heart towards God in that?

In this story, Samuel seems to be the only person listening to God's word. What might be one small step forward for you in listening to God's word this week?

WEEK 4

1 Samuel 7:3-8:22

“

“Listen to the people and everything they say to you. They have not rejected you; they have rejected me as their king.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

### **D** ISCOVER **What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

You've probably sung the word "Ebenezer" a thousand times in "Come Thou Fount of Every Blessing." This passage is where that word comes from. What is an Ebenezer? (7:12)?

Read Deuteronomy 17:14–17. How does that passage speak into Israel's longing here?

Why was 8:4–9 so offensive?

What kind of king do you think Israel deserved?

### **N** URTURE **What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Can you think of a time when God has said no to your prayers and you have discovered afterwards what a good answer that was?

Do you ever find yourself rejecting God's power over your life, but asking him for help (like Israel does when they ask for Saul)?

Have you ever followed a king in your own life (metaphorically) who looked strong and generous, but they ended up taking far more from you?

### **A** CT **How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What difference will it make to your thoughts and actions today to know that Jesus Christ is the true and generous king who rules all things for the church?

Write out a Psalm of thankfulness for God's work in your life.

WEEK 5  
1 Samuel 9-10

“

Samuel took the flask of oil, poured it out on Saul's head, kissed him, and said, "Hasn't the Lord anointed you ruler over his inheritance?"

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

**DISCOVER**

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

What are your first impressions of Saul (9:1–2)?

What does the writer highlight about Saul's appearance (9:2; 10:23)? Do you think this is significant?

Read 10:17–27. What are some of Saul's weaknesses that are already blossoming?

**NURTURE**

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Can you think of unlikely people in Scripture and your own experience who have been greatly used by God?

Are there any ways that you can see yourself in Saul's passivity and fearfulness? How does Jesus give us courage to act and speak when we should?

**ACT**

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Make a list of all the places or times in your week where you tend not to think about Jesus at all. What could you do in those places and times to be intentional about remembering Jesus as your king?

What will it look like for you to turn back to follow the living God and worship him alone?

WEEK 6  
1 Samuel 11-15

“

Even to the day of his death, Samuel never saw Saul again. Samuel mourned for Saul, and the Lord regretted he had made Saul king over Israel.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Read 14:47–15:35.

**D** ISCOVER  
**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

How do you feel about Saul at this point in the story?

What are some of the more negative signs about Saul at this point in the story (14:52; 15:17; 15:35)?

It will be a while until Saul is killed and David truly becomes king over Israel. But in 15:28 Samuel tells Saul that "the Lord has torn the kingship of Israel away from you today and has given it to your neighbour who is better than you." So who is the true king of Israel?

**N** URTURE  
**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

One of Saul's biggest weaknesses was what the Bible calls "fear of man" (Proverbs 29:25); he cared more about the voices of people around him than the voice of God. Can you see this fear in your own heart and life? Saul was constantly making excuses for disobedience. Can you see this same heart in your own life?

**A** CT  
**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Tim Chester names three signs of true repentance (which Saul didn't show):

**An end to excuses:** We face up to our guilt rather than offering excuses for our sin.

**A movement towards God:** Repentance is more than frustration or shame in oneself; it is a movement towards God. It is a movement to become more God-ward in our orientation.

**A movement that results in action:** True repentance leads to a change of life. When repentance does not lead to action, there isn't true repentance.

How are you going in these?

WEEK 7  
1 Samuel 16

“

Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the presence of his brothers, and the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully on David from that day forward.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Read 16:1–13.

**D**ISCOVER  
**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

What made God choose David as king?

How was David different to Saul?

How does 16:7 help us understand the whole book of Samuel?

Messiah literally means "Anointed One." Read of his anointing in verse 13. What was he anointed for? How is this similar to Jesus' baptism?

**N**URTURE  
**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

God delights in using the weak things of the world to shame the strong. Read 1 Corinthians 1:26–31. How does this reality give you encouragement in Christ?

How does the image of Jesus as your Messiah and Shepherd help you appreciate being part of his people?

**A**CT  
**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

How will you make sure that you see Christ's Shepherding of your life as something to enjoy today, rather than something to endure?

Our humility, and littleness, means that our lives are highlighting the strength and power of God; our lives point to Jesus, not to ourselves.

What would it look like for you to remember this today?

WEEK 8  
1 Samuel 17

“

You come against me with a sword, spear, and javelin, but I come against you in the name of the Lord of Armies.”

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## STUDY QUESTIONS



### DISCOVER

**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

This is a very famous chapter. But the part that everyone knows only takes up two verses: verses 48–49. What's the rest of the chapter about?

How does verse 32 help us understand the chapter?

Do you think Saul's armour would've fit David? (v. 38–39)

What do you think about David's speech in verses 45–47? Which parts of the speech particularly grip your heart?

Read 2:9 again. How might this verse be a prelude to the story of David and Goliath?



### NURTURE

**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Who do you identify with in this story?

Do you live as if you're following the Christ who has crushed the devil and defeated death? How does this affect your thinking and emotions about your life?



### ACT

**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What might it look like for you to respond to temptation and opposition in your life with faith rather than fear?

How would you use the story of David and Goliath to explain the gospel of Jesus Christ to someone who isn't a Christian?

WEEK 9  
1 Samuel 18-20

“

When David had finished speaking with Saul, Jonathan was bound to David in close friendship, and loved him as much as he loved himself.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

Read chapter 18.

**D** ISCOVER  
**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

How do you feel about David and Jonathan's friendship? (v. 1–4)

In verse 8, Saul seems to do a sharp u-turn on his feelings towards David. How did he feel about him before, and how does he feel about him now (and for the rest of the book)?

Read verses 25–30. What was Saul's plan to thwart David, and how did it backfire?

**N** URTURE  
**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Are there any ways in which you are being called to courageously disobey an authority in order to obey God?

Read Psalm 2. If we look carefully, we can see a picture of Saul in verses 1–2, and a picture of Jonathan in verses 10–12. When it comes to our Messiah, king Jesus, are you more like Saul or Jonathan? In which ways?

**A** CT  
**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

What do you have to give up, or risk giving up, in order to make Jesus your first loyalty and love?

The Bible encourages close, trusting, honest friendships between Christians of the same gender. How could you be cultivating that kind of friendship?

WEEK 10  
1 Samuel 21-23

“

Every man who was desperate, in debt, or discontented rallied around him, and he became their leader. About four hundred men were with him.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

### **D** ISCOVER **What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

Many of these sections begin with: "And David fled..." Saul is seeking David's life, and can not settle until David is defeated.

**Read 22:1–6.**

What kind of people were acknowledging David as the true king (22:2)? Read Ruth 1:22, and Ruth 4:13–17. What does this mean for David coming to stay at Moab?

Read 22:20–23. David takes responsibility for great sin, even though he'd done nothing wrong. How does this point us to Jesus Christ?

### **N** URTURE **What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Those four-hundred people (22:2) preferred to live with God's true king in a cave than with Saul in a city. Have you ever had to remain faithful to a church or in a relationship in a way that looked like it didn't make any sense?

"How well then Yahweh times the encouragement of his servants." Can you think of examples from your own experience of God's wonderful timing?

### **A** CT **How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

"A great number of saints have a story to tell about desperation and providence." Do you have a story to tell? Or maybe a story from someone in your family, or a close Christian friend?

David was constantly concerned for his family, while Saul seemed to be constantly threatening his family. In this story, David made sure to care for his elderly parents (22:3–4). Is there a lesson in this for you?

WEEK 11  
1 Samuel 24-26

“

She knelt at his feet and said, “The guilt is mine, my lord, but please let your servant speak to you directly. Listen to the words of your servant.

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## STUDY QUESTIONS

### **D** ISCOVER **What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

Read 1 Samuel 24:1–7. Why did David show mercy here?

What do you think the significance of David tearing Saul's robe here is (hint: 1 Samuel 15:28)?

Read 1 Samuel 25:1–13. David couldn't be less patient or merciful here. What prompts him to show such anger and violence?

Read 1 Samuel 25:18–35. How does Abigail save David here?

In verse 32–33, David says that Abigail was sent from God to restrain him from violence. Who is the true merciful king in this story?

### **N** URTURE **What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

David had done so much good, and this sin seemed to burst from nowhere. Is this feeling familiar in your experience?

Despite his sin and his anger, Abigail's words cause David to immediately repent. Are you as quick to repent when someone confronts you in sin?

Like David, Jesus Christ shows mercy to his enemies, even to the point of dying for us. And like Abigail, Jesus Christ confronts us in our sin to draw us back to the path of life. How does this speak to you where you're at today?

### **A** CT **How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Jesus Christ "comforts the disturbed and disturbs the comfortable." How are you in need of the mercy of Christ today? Who can you be speaking to about that?

How are you in need of a word of repentance from Christ? Who can you be speaking to about that?

WEEK 12  
1 Samuel 27-31

“

So on that day,  
Saul died together  
with his three sons,  
his armor-bearer,  
and all his men.

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# STUDY QUESTIONS

Read chapter 31.

**D**ISCOVER  
**What's interesting here? What do you learn? What don't you understand?**

How does Saul's reaction compare with David's, when David was in seemingly-hopeless situations?

What would you consider to be tragic in this chapter?

How would you sum up the message of 1 Samuel in a single sentence?

**N**URTURE  
**What do you love in this passage? How can we see God's character here?**

Saul didn't call on God, or seek to repent. As he lived most of his life, he died in fear. What would it look like for you to move from fear to calling upon God for help—wherever you're at right now?

Write down some of the main lessons you have learned from 1 Samuel.

**A**CT  
**How should we live differently because of these words? What is one thing in this passage that really stirs you to act?**

Spend some time reflecting on how 1 Samuel has spoken to you, and how your life of faith and repentance have changed because of this story.



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