



LIFE GROUP LEADERS!

Week #9 – It's the last week of Life Groups for the Fall of 2023, and like we sent to you last week, consider the following as you look forward to the month of December:

- (1) enjoy a break!
- (2) get your group together socially – plan a Christmas party? Do another serve project?
- (3) keep in touch – check in on each other's prayer needs, find ways to support those who are need, and celebrate those who have cause!

⇒ ATTENDANCE:

- Please, each week, follow the BLUE button in the reminder email to fill out your attendance!!
- Remember, that we don't have a lot of measuring sticks for the health of this ministry, we rely on your feedback, and upon these attendance records.

⇒ FEEDBACK FORMS:

- During week 9, we'll be sending out Feed Back forms to all our members via a link in an email, looking for insights upon how the season went, and gleaning insights for seasons to come. Please encourage your members to be proactive about filling these out.
- In those forms, we ask each member to let us know their intentions for the coming season, whether they would like to:
 - (1) stay in the same group,
 - (2) try a new group,
 - (3) take a break.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

LEADER NOTE: These are the lowest risk questions! However, as your group gets more and more comfortable with the deeper conversations, limit your time here.

1. Who would you say is your most interesting relative?

LEADER NOTE: Many people have that odd-ball uncle that shares the same story at every gathering, and others have that grandparent who rambles on and on, while others have a sibling that just has the best stories!

2. As this is the last Life Groups study for the Fall of 2023, what stands out to you about your last nine weeks of gathering with your Life Group?

LEADER NOTE: Take a moment with your group to reflect back upon the last nine weeks of your groups activities. If your members need a little help, ask them, "What was your favorite memory?" or "What have you learned about your faith through our time together?"



QUICK REVIEW

LEADER NOTE: These are two questions that have your group reflecting upon last Sunday's message. The first question will always be the same, and the second one is provided from our teaching pastor from the service.

1. Looking back at your notes from this week's teaching, was there anything that particularly caught your attention, challenged, or confused you??

LEADER NOTE: Lead by example of taking notes during the message and modelling the behavior of being prepared for your group time. Encourage your members at this point to grab a sermon guide from the tables by the doors at the auditorium, or to print a copy off from the Livestream, Online Bulletin, page on the church website.

2. Pastor Marcel quoted A.W. Tozer saying, "What comes into our minds when we think about God is the most important thing about us." Spend some time sharing with the group what comes to mind when you think about God?

LEADER NOTE: n/a



SCRIPTURE REVIEW

LEADER NOTE: In these initial weeks of this semester, follow these three questions as scripture is read. Encourage your members to even consider these three questions as they approach scripture on their own time! It's good practice and provides a good and helpful devotional pattern of reflection upon what scripture teaches.

READ 1 Samuel 9:1-17, 10:1, 15:1-11.

LEADER NOTE: This is more text than we usually invite you to read together as a group, but what we're doing this week, is getting a large overview of Saul's rise and fall in leadership, and these texts will lead us through that story.

1. What does this passage say about the character of God?

2. What does this passage say about fallen humanity and the world we are in?

3. Where does this passage specifically expose sin or unbelief in my own life? How does it specifically call me to change my thinking, redirect my affections, replace behaviors, and trust in my Savior?



DIGGING DEEPER

1. READ 1 Samuel 9:1-5. Our first impression of Saul is positive. While we might know that he doesn't live up to this impression, why are we given this positive picture?

LEADER NOTE: Right away we're told that Saul is handsome, and there were not too many people in all of Israel that were better than him. As we read, we see that's he's a great son, in how he's willing to take a big journey looking for the donkeys, and we also see that he's concerned about his father's wellbeing while he's away. We see him treat the women at the well with respect, as well as his servant. As they prepare to meet the prophet, they make sure that they have a gift to offer, as they don't expect something for nothing. The reader begins to see that Saul, might actually fit the call that the Lord has placed upon the potential Israelite King in Deuteronomy 17:14-20. One thing that isn't said about Saul, which becomes important as the Deuteronomy text is examined considering Saul, is that the author here in

Samuel, doesn't tell us about Saul's faith in God. There's no statement there. The positive impression here could be a pointer to the person who the audience, and the nation, is expecting.

2. READ 1 Samuel 9:15-16. 1 Samuel 9 tells of Saul's journey from his father to the town of Zuph. It is revealed that God was working through the missing donkeys to bring Saul to Samuel. Can you think of a sequence of events in your life that led you somewhere you didn't expect?

LEADER NOTE: This is a remarkable story, and the reader can visualize this journey in their minds like they're watching a movie. One can easily imagine shots of the donkey's grazing in a distant land, and Saul and his servant going the completely wrong direction, but while on the way, the main character of the movie meets eye to eye with the love of their life, and the rest is written into history. Perhaps surprisingly, the scene at the well which happened in v.11, paints this movie picture with a little more imagination. In biblical story telling, there's a little motif of the watering well being a place where marriage arrangements are secured (*the personal reflection question reflects more on this motif*). The original reader might easily picture soon a wedding between Saul and one of these women. However, Saul keeps up his quest for the donkey's and looks for prophet who resides in this town – which is ultimately where the Lord was leading him. You might even be able to picture one of these ladies watching in disappointment as Saul and his servant walk away. One commentator suggested that this paints Saul to be the "loser" in the story, and that this moment foreshadows his soon, unsuccessful reign.

Sometimes for us living now might have had similar journeys, where we're looking for something, but find something completely different, and it turns out that what was completely different, was actually the Lord's plan all along! It's a special moment to look back and see the Lord's hand guiding one to Himself!

- **READ Isaiah 55:8-9.** Saul thought all along that this journey was all about the donkeys. But God had other plans, just as "*His thoughts are not [our] thoughts.*" How can we become more aware of His thoughts and plans?

LEADER NOTE: We can get so focused on the donkeys in our lives can't we? Our jobs, hobbies, relationships, desires for the next toy or thing ... and we pursue those things thinking that we're doing good in our lives, but really, the Lord might be using those same moments to draw ourselves ultimately back to Himself. Isaiah points this out as he writes, "*His thoughts are not our thoughts.*" In human terms, this is a vast understatement!

We must be careful to not completely throw Saul under the bus, as there was no way that he could have known that the Lord had him on this journey. We're not told anything to make us believe that he should have had some indication of the Lord's pull. For all he knew, he was chasing donkeys for his father. The challenge for us however, is that while we have pursuits in mind, the Lord might have different thoughts for us. Steer the conversation towards asking how can hear the Lord's voice in our lives more clearly, so that we don't aimlessly chase donkeys, but God's will!

We've talked before about some ways in which the Lord speaks today, here's that list again –

1. Through scripture,
2. Through God working around us,
3. Through our hearts,
4. Through time of silence and solitude,
5. Through community.

3. READ 1 Samuel 9:16-17 & 10:1. Notice that Samuel isn't instructed to anoint Saul as a King, but as a "*ruler,*" "*prince,*" or "*leader.*" God's purpose for Saul was different than the nation's request for a King. Why might this distinction matter?

LEADER NOTE: This is a fascinating moment to take notice of. When you think of a "king" what is it that you think of? Robes of red and purple, a gold crown, a scepter, and is seated on perhaps a large throne. When you think of a "prince,"

in the same imagery, you see the king in the center, and the prince to the right of the king. The prince isn't #1, the king is. The Lord, while fulfilling the Nations request for a King, He still stays true to His stance, that it is God alone, who is to be there King. He then elevates Saul to be a prince! Second in line, second in command – all reflecting Moses' instructions from Deuteronomy 17.

- At the end of 1 Samuel 8, Samuel said *“the Lord will not answer you in that day”* yet here the Lord mentions *“My people”* three times. What is the connection of this repeated phrase to leadership of this nation? What do you see happening?

LEADER NOTE: As if making Saul a prince wasn't clear enough, God reminds our audience that the people are His, and not Saul's. Saul is one of the people that belong first and foremost to the Lord. Saul is to lead the people to the Lord, as the first part of his calling, and then to lead them to victory in battle, but all on the Lord's – the King's – behalf! Furthermore, God says to Samuel, *“This is the man I spoke to you about; he will govern my people.”* In the ESV, the word is “restrain,” while in the NIV its “govern.” It's a different picture than if God was to say of Saul that *“he will reign over my people.”* This word used here, is calling Saul to restrain the nation, *“to hold back the nations determination to become like all other nations.”* The picture becomes clearer that the Lord has not left His people, and still desires that they be unlike any other nation, and that they remain set apart – a Holy nation – for Himself.

4. READ 1 Samuel 10:20-24. Saul has been anointed and God is working through the casting of lots to show the Nation who He has chosen to be their leader. Yet, their selected leader, who knows who he is, is hiding. Why?

LEADER NOTE: This is almost a comical scene. Saul, who knows that he's been anointed to be the leader of this nation, is now present while Samuel is showing the nation through the casting of lots, how Saul will be selected, and is hiding behind luggage. Was he scared? Nervous? Was he second guessing himself? Maybe he was still hoping to find the donkeys! (Which he wasn't, they'd come back all on their own). Perhaps he felt a little like Jonah from the future, who heard the Lord's call, and said, *“I don't want that!”*



TAKING IT HOME

READ 1 Samuel 15:7-11. Saul didn't follow completely the Lord's instructions and acted selfishly as he preserved Agag along with a collection of the best livestock. We live similarly, in that we pick and choose which instructions from God we want to follow, or how far we want to follow. Where do we fall short? What does a life look like that fully follows the Lord? How do we do that?

LEADER NOTE: We jump forward a few chapters, and now we see Saul acting as king, leading the nation into battle, following the Lord's instruction to face the Amalekites, as punishment for that nation. God told Saul to *“totally destroy”* everything about this nation. Including their king, and all people, and their livestock too. Everything. God couldn't have been clearer. Two hundred and ten thousand men go to battle, and ambushed the Amalekites, warning a friendly nation along the way. But Saul preserved the life of King Agag, and the best of the livestock – *“everything that was good.”* He put to the sword all the weak and despised and preserved all the strong. Not what the Lord asked of him. God was watching and pronounced His rejection. Once again, we can see ourselves in the text again, as we know that the Lord has called us to much, and yet, we for some reason or another, decide that we'll only follow where we are comfortable, or where we feel safe. We love for only so long, we share only so much. We don't turn the cheek, we don't give the cloak, we don't walk the extra mile. Saul faced dire consequences for his actions, and the line of his kingship, would start and end with him.

Be sure to close your meeting in a word of prayer holding up each other's joys and sorrows to the Lord.



PERSONAL REFLECTION

LEADER NOTE: This following question is completely optional and is intended for the participants' personal reflection. But do feel free to explore using the question within your groups meeting.

READ 1 Samuel 9:10-13. Saul was on his journey looking for his father's donkeys, and begins to look for the local prophet, and stops at a well, where young women have gathered. Similar scenes have played out with Isaac & Rebekah (Gen 24), Jacob & Rachel (Gen 29), and Moses & Zipporah (Exo 2), which all ended up in marriage arrangements. What is different about this scene in Samuel? What do you think the author is trying to emphasize?

READ also John 4:7-26. We see in the book of Samuel imperfect people all in pursuit of leading God's people. What strikes you about Christ's encounter and His words at this well?