



LIFE GROUP LEADERS!

Welcome to the Winter Life Groups season week #1! I'm glad you came.

As we get going, I pray ahead of all your groups studies, times of service, and social gatherings – that the Lord, by His Spirit, would go ahead of each of you, into those moments, and would cause relationships to deepen, our awareness of His Word to grow, and our times in prayer be an encouragement to each of your members. May the Lord grant you all the wisdom to lead your groups, to know when to listen, and when to share the right words for His people to grow in Him.

Here's a few reminders:

⇒ LIFE GROUPS RECORD!

- We've had some incredible growth this season – at the time of writing, we're up to 211 people signed up in 16 groups. Which for us, is a record!! PRAISE THE LORD for that.
- As Pastor Justin was telling us at our lunch on Sunday, was that while these numbers are super encouraging – they're presenting a challenge too. It means that our groups are all pretty much full, and when you are full, you can't grow. So, we are leaning on our leaders to help identify leaders! Over this semester, be watchful of people in your group and see who has some leadership qualities –
 - Who asks good questions?
 - Who leans in and cares?
 - Who are the hospitable ones?
- We'll be asking for your recommendations in March as we wrap up this season and think forward to the Fall.
- Worth nothing here – most of the new sign ups to our groups – have been brand new people to our church, and others who have never been in a group before!

⇒ YOUR FIRST MEETING:

- As you plan your first gathering, as Facilitators and Hosts, be in cahoots with making the plans. If you've got new people, be sure to plan a social time, to get to know those who are new, in a very casual way. Plan a few games? Invite members to bring appies?
- If your group is carrying on the same from last semester, plan what you know your group will appreciate! Jump back into study? Plan a dinner out or potluck?

⇒ THE SERMON GUIDE:

- We offer the guide for everyone every Sunday morning, and encourage our listeners to follow along, and fill in the blanks. As leaders, we always encourage you to lead by example – these are good learning practices! Take notes. Write out your questions. Jot down thoughts that stand out to you. If we ever run out of the guides in the Lobby – we'll see that and print more the following week.
- Know that also, the guides are always online in two places:
 - In the Digital Bulletin on the LIVESTREAM page, &
 - On the LEADERS TOOLS page.

- A reminder that the discussion guide is just that – a guide. We commit to providing this resource each week for you to use with your group. You as leaders have the option of how much you use from week to week. Some can spend time at each question; while others, pick and choose what will work best for their group, and then even add their own touch or flavor.

⇒ ATTENDANCE:

- Please, each week, follow the BLUE button in the reminder email to fill out your attendance!!

⇒ SERVE PROJECTS:

- Early on in your first gatherings, have a look at the serve options we've set up for our groups to lean into. The list has been updated, new dates booked, and even a new ministry for us to try out!
 - 5AND2 Ministries, is a ministry that cares for and provides for the 800+ homeless people in our city. They serve meals and provide care. We've set up two dates, to see how it works. Please consider this opportunity!
- Find the list here: <https://gatewaycrc.org/grow/serve-projects>
- For your new members, be sure to send them to the HUB in the Lobby, to grab a new SERVE shirt!

⇒ BOOK CONTEST:

- A few weeks ago, I put out a contest for a book draw – of two books, “Sticky Church” and “2 Samuel For You.” We had a bunch of submissions with pictures – so thanks everyone for your contributions! THE WINNERS - #1 **Alice Roos** (you get first choice of the two books), #2 **Edith Beerda** (you get the one that Alice doesn't take!). I'll have your books at the HUB on Sunday.
- Fun part here, I bought two of each of those books. So, another attempt here to get more pictures! IN THE NEXT TWO WEEKS (Outside of Alice and Edith), SEND ME PICTURES OF YOUR FIRST MEETING! Then I'll draw the names again – on Jan 30.



GETTING TO KNOW YOU

LEADER NOTE: These are the lowest risk questions! Have fun exploring past experiences of life, and how your members spend their time now! However, as your group gets more and more comfortable with the deeper conversations, limit your time here.

1. Where was your last vacation? What is a highlight from it that you still remember?

LEADER NOTE: This question does a few things as it gets your members talking about their own experiences that were positive. It's not bragging, it's sharing personally – a good practice! Also, it warms your members to work through more difficult questions to come. And on a different level, your whole group gets recommendations for vacation planning!

2. What activity or interest is a huge stress reliever for you?

LEADER NOTE: In the same way, this question has your group members open up about themselves, in relatively safe ways. But also, it opens the doors of vulnerability as stressors can be hard to talk about – as we talk about what relieves the stress, we will say what causes us the stress – maybe without even knowing it.



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. The two main points of Pastor Marcel's message were: "*Keep your eyes focused on God's plan, not yours*" and "*Keep your heart focused on the person and their story.*" Take some time to share how you have seen God's plan work out in your life OR share when you heard a person's story, and it softened your heart towards them?

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 2 Samuel 1:1-12

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 2 Samuel 1:1 & 11-12. Saul's death was a terrible event for the nation of Israel, and yet his death meant that David would be crowned king. What is it that drives David to mourn, rather than celebrate?

LEADER NOTE: No matter what the situation, death – when it happens, is always sad. Even here for the nation of Israel, that while Saul wasn't the king that was needed, he was still the anointed king, serving the Lord. Look at David's respect for him in the cave (1 Samuel 24:10) and in the wilderness (1 Samuel 26:9-11), two times David had the opportunity to take Saul's life and claim the crown to be his own. However, he

doesn't – as he knows the profound place of authority that Saul is in and knows that it is not up to him to dictate God's will and timing.

Also consider the story of Jesus weeping over Lazarus in John 11. Jesus was utterly sad that a good friend had passed, but more so, when it is recorded that "Jesus wept," we take notice that Jesus was disappointed in the lack of understanding within the people present. David mourns more than just the death of Saul, but the misplaced hope that the nation had in their king, and too, that their king did not fill the role as intended.

- Instead of crowning himself, David mourns; he understands that God's will cannot be forced, but that it must be approached with faith and patience. Talk about a time in your life where you saw the Lord working but needed to wait?

LEADER NOTE: David's patience while waiting to be crowned king is honorable and admirable. The Lord told him, overtly, that he would be king one day. After striking down Goliath, surely, he thought that was the time, but no. As he moved into the palace and played the lyre and sang for the king, surely, he thought the timing was close, but no. Then he had the opportunities, and the support of his men to take Saul's life, but no. David knew and trusted that the Lord would open that door and close others, at just the right time.

For your group members, parts of their lives may have come about in the same way – circumstances being quite different of course! Who of your members are kings-in-waiting? Your members might be waiting for relationships, new jobs, healthier circumstances, finished projects, answers to prayers ... the list goes on! Perhaps they're still waiting to see how God's will might play out in their lives? How might your group be able to support and walk this journey alongside them?

And be sure, that while anyone shares anything personal, be grateful – and say, "thanks for sharing."

2. READ 2 Samuel 1:2. For two days there was no king and the future of Israel was uncertain. A similar reference to something happening on the "third day" happens in **Matthew 17:22-23 & 28:1-6**. Why might this parallel be significant??

LEADER NOTE: As we've been learning all along through our study in 1 Samuel, there are many word pictures that point to the coming Messiah in Jesus Christ. It's fascinating to see how the Spirit directed the author of these two books, and how now, we can look backwards and see the connections, where the original author, likely had no idea!

David and Saul were both fighting battles. Saul in the north, as he took on yet again, the Philistines; and David in the south, as he took on the Amalekites. In a time where communication didn't happen instantaneously, David had to wait to hear from a messenger about Saul's battle. From the death of Saul to David's awareness, there were two days of uncertainty. Two days where the state of the leadership of Israel was in question, with no answer. From the death of Christ to the defeat of the grave, there were also two days of uncertainty. And certainly, many asked – will he come back as He said He would?

Where we see David rise on the third day to the throne, we know he still is fallible, and not the perfect king we need. When Christ emerges from the grave, the certainty of God's authority becomes unquestionable, the defeat of death was final, access to the throne of God was unlimited, and the kingdom of God was firmly established on earth!

3. READ 2 Samuel 1:8-10. As the young man's lie about his role in Saul's death was becoming clearer, what do you think were his intentions? What did this young man have to gain in his lie?

LEADER NOTE: In 1 Samuel 31:4 we read that Saul took his own life after being badly wounded by the Philistine archers. This young man, in 2 Samuel 1 must have been on the same hill, looting through the dead bodies, and heard the interaction between Saul and his armor bearer. He saw an opportunity and took it. He comes back to David, down south in Ziklag – which tells us that David's name and place in the kingdom was in fact known.

This young man tells David that he took Saul's life and presents David with evidence (the crown and armband) which David could take, and make claim to be King, and this young man is left with hopes to receive some kind of reward from this new king!

What kind of reward could a king make available to such a young man? Consider the reward that Saul offered to who would kill Goliath? Look up **1 Samuel 17:25** – Saul was offering great riches, and a daughter! Would this young man have known that offer. It's quite possible he was looking for the same idea.

- **READ 2 Samuel 1:8-10.** The young man didn't kill Saul, yet here, he's held accountable. Why is this?

LEADER NOTE: David hasn't heard yet the real circumstances around the death of Saul and hears only this testimony of a braggart trying to advance his own purposes. The young man's sin is deception, not murder; something that we've picked up through the study of 1 Samuel that we know will not end well.

Consider the New Testament story, in **Acts 4:32-5:11**. The early church was growing and thriving, and everyone shared everything with everyone. Then Ananias and Sapphira enter with a great gift, which they lied about. They said that the gift was the sum of the gains from the sale of a property, whereas it was just a portion. Once again, deception is the sin. They weren't being honest with themselves, with the disciples, and ultimately with God. By the end of that account, both have been buried because of their sin.

- **READ James 1:12-15.** In our own patterns of lies and self-deception, what do we try to gain? How do we stop the cycle of self-deception?

LEADER NOTE: Like both this young man, and Ananias and Sapphira in the Acts story, we deceive ourselves as we try to cover up sin, tell half-truths, and try to convince ourselves that our actions will go unnoticed. Is it pride? Is it power? Is it self-control? Is it covering up guilt? Shirking off responsibility? All the above?

As the cycle of self-deception continues, it's harder to break free from; and acknowledging this, is a core element to breaking the pattern. More so we need to be honest with God, understanding that He is first to offer complete forgiveness. Then, we need to be honest with ourselves, and agree to change our behaviors, recognizing that we're more driven by our own desires, as opposed to God's.



TAKING IT HOME

READ 2 Samuel 5:17-25, 2 Chronicles 7:14. Saul's failure was twofold: 1. Not calling upon the Lord, & 2. Not following through with the Lord's instructions. Both the Philistines and Amalekites have been defeated, showing David's obedience. How might God's words to Solomon impact your faith now, as surely, they would have been the same words to both Saul and David? How are you left challenged?

LEADER NOTE: Here we jump ahead several chapters. David has now been crowned king, in both Judah, and Israel. He's faced some significant opposition and has faced more battles. Take note of **2 Samuel 5:10** which says, "*for the Lord, the God of hosts was with [David].*" Then, David faces the Philistines – *yet again*. But before he does, he inquires of the Lord, and God gives him huge thumbs up, with a promise that He'll grant David victory. And not just once – but twice – before the chapter closes.

Much later, Solomon builds the temple, and dedicates it to the Lord, and the Lord says to the nation the words of **2 Chronicles 7:14**. These words reflect the main theme of the books of 1 & 2 Samuel, that God opposes the proud, and exalts the humble. A key theme that we've seen in this current passage.

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 2 Samuel 1:19-27, Psalm 121. In Samuel, David laments about Saul's death that took place in this "*high place,*" referring to both Mount Gilboa, and the high places of worship in Psalm 121. Suggesting that Saul, the Lord's anointed, was not ultimate King who would reign over this nation, and like the Israelites, they've placed hope and trust in the wrong places. Where you might have misplaced your trust?