

SMALL GROUP GUIDE: BROKEN KINGDOMS

Week 1 - King Saul

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Can you remember a time in your life when your parents, or someone, told you what would happen if you did or did not do something, but you were convinced they were wrong? This would have let me have an, "I told you so" moment. Or maybe it was something you tried to advise someone else on. Share if you remember.

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: 1 Samuel 8:4-18, 9:1-2, 10:24, 13:5-14, 15:12-26, 18:6-5

Pay attention to Saul's journey from chosen by the people, to self-proclaimed prophet.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. Do you think Samuel was surprised at God's response to the people's request in verse 7? How does Samuel NOT take the people's rejection personally?
3. Why do you think God allows them to have a king even though he knows what will happen?
4. Knowing that the description of what a king will do is really a list of how we, as fallen human beings, act, what are some of the characteristics of us given in 1 Samuel 8?
5. By all appearances, Saul definitely fit the bill of someone who could lead. Why do you think we're so drawn to appearances and what's outside, instead of what's inside?
6. What was Saul's sin (or rejection of God)?
7. Do you think Samuel felt that Saul's rejection was his fault? Explain.

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Make a list of some of the ways you think God's kingdom is different from man's kingdom. How God, as a leader, is different from a human as a leader.
2. When you read through the story of Saul, what characteristics of Jesus was Saul in need of to lead better?
3. We often struggle much with patience and trust in God. In our fast-paced society, we want to keep moving, instead of waiting on God and his timing. What are some ways we could help each other be more patient? What are some ways we could practice increasing our trust in God and going at his pace, instead of our own?
4. Did God reject Saul as a person, or a leader? Is there a difference?
5. To let God lead, means learning to walk humbly behind him. What do you think this looks like and how do we help each other, as brothers and sisters in Christ, keep Jesus in the lead versus jumping ahead?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: Learning to Trust

- In what ways, with what things, do you need to grow in your trust with God? Make a list of things that you worry about, things you struggle with.
- Over the next several days, ask God to reveal any other areas in your life that you haven't fully trusted God with (your marriage, your kids, your finances, your career...).
- Then, commit to asking God to help you release your worries and concerns in these areas, to trust in Him more. Commit the words from Proverbs to memory, "Trust in the Lord your God with all your heart; and lean not on your own understanding. In all your ways, acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." (Proverbs 3:5-6)

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

FINISH WELL: Bring It Home

1. What is one area in your life that you know you want to release control over, and let God lead?
2. What is one thing you could pray over for your church this week, that you know needs a God-like miracle or blessing?

CLOSING PRAYER (Leader or Participant Reads)

Abba, Father,

We confess that there are areas in our lives that we struggle to let go of control.

We struggle to fully trust in you and your timing.

We repent and ask you to help us trust you more.

Help us let go.

Help us rest in you.

Who knows, maybe that which we thought was so important, will fade away, in the light of your glory and grace.

In the glorious name of King Jesus.

Amen.

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Week 2 - King Solomon

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: If you had just moments left to live, what is a piece or two of wisdom that you would want to make sure were passed down to those you care about? Something you've learned in your journey that you wish you knew earlier, or that someone had told you?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: Matthew 19:23-30, I Kings 3:5-27, Deuteronomy 17:14-17, Ecclesiastes 1:12-14, 9:7-10, 12:8, 13

Solomon's journey has much to teach us about worldly wisdom, vs spiritual wisdom, and about what matters most. As you read more about his journey, look at the missing pieces that would have been made complete by partnering with Jesus.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. In Matthew 19, was Jesus saying that being rich is bad? If not, explain your answer.
3. In Matthew 19:26, Jesus was saying that salvation is impossible for humans. If true, then how are we saved? What's our job?
4. If God came to you and asked "what do you want?" what do you think you'd say? Why do you think Solomon chose wisdom?
5. How would you define wisdom?
6. Knowing that Solomon struggled to follow God throughout his life, but that he was also listed as one of the wisest men to ever live, how would you classify the kind of wisdom he received?
7. Solomon tried everything under the sun to find happiness and contentment, then, at the end of his life, he said only God matters. What was it about his journey, you think, that led him to that conclusion and how does it tie into the word "Meaningless"?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Envy and greed are so often at the heart of our hunger for power, and they are so easy to slip into, even when you have good intentions. How can you and I, as a community, help each other keep Jesus the main thing, instead of ourselves?
2. When you read through the story of Solomon, what characteristics of Jesus did Solomon need to be a better leader for God?
3. In the series guide, we talk about how Christians tend to use swords to cut down, shame, and push people away, whereas God tends to use the sword for discernment, to cut to the heart, spiritually. How do we keep focused on the latter, without giving in to the former?

4. If everything, as Solomon wrote time and time again in Ecclesiastes, is meaningless (work, wealth...everything), then what's the point of this life? How should we live it? Should we enjoy it? If so, how?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: What are you praying for?

- Spend some time in quiet reflection, asking God to reveal to you something in your spiritual life that is lacking right now.
- Once he reveals that to you, ask him again if that is the thing you are most lacking at the moment.
- Then, over the next seven days, ask God to reveal to you ways in which you may seek to nurture that thing in your spiritual life. Maybe it's more alone time with God, or quiet time without speaking a word, or worship, or repentance, or serving, etc...
- Choose two of those "ways" to practice over the next two months, making a journal entry of what it felt like before you started, versus what it feels like or the differences you've seen in your life after two months of practice.

Invite the group to check in next week about what they discovered.

FINISH WELL: Bring It Home

1. The kingdom of God is so unlike the kingdoms of man. For one, instead of violence and power grabbing, God's kingdom is driven by love. Read I Corinthians 13 and notice one aspect of the description of love that you need more of in your life.
2. Who are the people in your life that help you stay grounded in God's kingdom, over the kingdoms of man? How often do you connect?

WORDS OF WISDOM to Memorize

5 You must have the same attitude that Christ Jesus had.

6 Though he was God, he did not think of equality with God as something to cling to.

7 Instead, he gave up his divine privileges; he took the humble position of a slave and was born as a human being. When he appeared in human form,

8 he humbled himself in obedience to God and died a criminal's death on a cross.

9 Therefore, God elevated him to the place of highest honor and gave him the name above all other names,

10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth,

11 and every tongue declare that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

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Week 3 - King Ahab

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Is there a lesson, a task, a recipe, that no matter how many times you've learned it, you have to keep relearning? If so, share with the group. If you can't think of one, is there a time when a close relationship to you was divided by something innocent (fans of different sports teams, or musical arts, or an opinion)?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: I Kings 16:29-33, 17:1, 18:1, 16-21, 36-39, I Kings 21:1-16, 22: 4-9

Ahab tried his whole life to live under the rule of two masters. Be on the lookout for which one he seemed to serve the most, and what happened in his life as a result.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. Why do you think a leader like Ahab was so quick to ignore the Law of your God and people, in order to prostitute yourself and serve other gods, and unite with other people who serve other gods?
3. Why do you think the "anger of the Lord" was provoked with Ahab's actions? What is the "anger of the Lord"?
4. Elijah couldn't have been popular, since he prophesied a drought that would negatively impact each person in Israel. How do you think Elijah navigated this time and stayed serving the Lord?
5. What do you think Ahab thought was going to happen on Mount Carmel?
6. Reading verse 37 of chapter 18, what was God's intent for going through this whole event on Mount Carmel?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. In our world today, what other things do we tend to put our time and trust in rather than God?
2. Throughout Scripture, God seems to have to teach the people the same lessons over and over again. He does so for us today as well. Can you think of some ways that we can help each other remember the hard lessons in order to live the life that God came to give us?
3. I once read in a commentary that Jesus had different reflexes than we do. Our reflexes, as humans, are often to retaliate when we've been wronged - eye for an eye, tooth for a tooth, kind of thing. Jesus tells us to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us. How do we seek to exchange our reflexes for his?

4. Do you have people in your life that you keep close, but who disagree with you on some things? Does that relationship help you or hurt you? If it helps, how do you keep them close if you have those differences?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: Exchanging your heart of stone, for His heart for others

- Over the next seven days, listen to the closing scenes of Jesus' life leading up to the cross via an audio version of the Bible. Those references include: Matthew 26:47-27:56, Mark 14:43-15:41, Luke 22:47-23:49, John 18:1-19:37
- Listen and watch for how Jesus responds to hatred and anger, violence and chaos
- Write down his responses.
- Ask God to take your heart of stone, and replace it with Jesus heart for others

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

FINISH WELL: Bring It Home

1. What is one area in your life right now that you wish to be more like Jesus?

CLOSING PRAYER (Leader or Participant Reads)

Abba, Father,
King of Kings and Lord of Lords
Give me a heart to love like you love,
Serve like you serve,
and help me make you my One and Only...
Today, tomorrow, and all my days
In the precious name of my Savior and King, Jesus,
Amen.

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Week 4 - King Hezekiah

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Share with the group something interesting about your family history, ancestors, etc.... Is there something from your family history that carries on to this day? Something that has changed?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: 2 Kings 18:1-7, 2 Chronicles 29:1-11, 2 Kings 19:10-19, 20:1-6, 16-19

Hezekiah was one of the good guys in a line of plenty of bad ones. Pay close attention to the decisions he made that kept him humble and seeking God, first.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. Do you think it was easy for Hezekiah to reform Judah, or do you think he would have gotten pushback for making so many changes to "the way things were"?
3. What do you think your response would have been to the letter from the King of Assyria? Hezekiah prayed, but do you think the response from the prophet Isaiah, verse 20-28, came quickly? How do you practice waiting on the Lord when your circumstances are difficult?
4. What are some ways Hezekiah could have responded to the news of his impending death other than to turn to God in prayer?
5. What do you make of God seemingly changing his mind about what would happen to Hezekiah? What happens when we pray for healing and healing doesn't come?
6. In 2 Kings 20:16-19, Hezekiah receives word that the future for Judah is not great, Babylon would conquer them and take them away from Jerusalem. But he seems to accept that news because at least there will be peace in his times. Do you think Hezekiah could have done something to help prepare for the future, or to make a way for future generations? Why not turn to prayer as in previous situations? Is considering future generations a responsibility of a good leader, or is it just about making sure the people you serve now are cared for?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. Many churches in North America are on the decline, and much of that comes from an unwillingness to change. Why is change/reform so hard for us and how do we overcome that fear?
2. Why do you think many of us have a hard time turning to God FIRST in prayer? Why does it seem like we try everything we know to do first, THEN, we pray?
3. Hezekiah seemed to break some family cycles of bad behavior. How do you and I work to do some of those same things in our lives?

4. What are you doing in your church, in your life, to help care for future generations?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: Seeking Reformation

- Spend the next seven days praying over areas in your life, and in your church, that God may want to bring about change/reform.
- After those seven days, write down your thoughts/insights.
- Begin sharing your experience with some close friends and confidants; see if any of them share or can confirm your same feelings.
- Choose a path to at least address one change in your life or in your church.

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

FINISH WELL: Bring It Home

1. Hezekiah was a man of prayer. What is one practice you could begin this week to help you turn to prayer more often as a source of strength, guidance, and growth?
2. Who is someone in your circle of influence that could use prayer for healing (mentally, emotionally, physically, spiritually)? Can you pray over them and trust in God for the outcome?

Scripture to Memorize

1 One day Jesus told his disciples a story to show that they should always pray and never give up.” (Luke 18:1, NLT)

16 Always be joyful. 17 Never stop praying. 18 Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus. (I Thessalonians 5:16-18, NLT)

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Week 5 - King Josiah

INTRODUCTION: The following is a guide to help facilitate discussion between you and the person you're studying with or with your Connect Group. Feel free to add, subtract, or change questions to fit the conversation, and pray for the Spirit to lead in all things.

OPEN: Think of a time when you were absolutely certain something was true — and later discovered you were wrong. How did that realization feel? What did it teach you about knowing, certainty, or humility?

SCRIPTURE READING

Read together: 2 Kings 22:8-11, 18-19, 23:1-3, 25-27

Josiah became king at 8 years old and led one of the biggest reforms in their history.

HEAD: Explore the Text

1. Share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts you received just from listening to the text, allowing the Holy Spirit to lead.
2. What were some of the signs that the people had not just lost the Word of the Lord, but had drifted from the heart of God and what He wanted for them?
3. Josiah immediately repents when he hears the Word of the Lord. What were some of the other potential responses he could have had? What do you think kept him open to be so quick to repent at this moment?
4. What do you think it might have been like to be in the crowd that day, and hear the word of the Lord spoken, maybe for the first time in your life?
5. Certainly in Josiah's time, the reform was sweeping, but it didn't take them long to drift back to their hold habits after Josiah was gone. How does reform become a matter of the heart, instead of just a checklist of external things done to appease someone?

HEART: Personal Reflection

1. In the course of your life, what is one or two specific verses that have really impacted you? Maybe they gave you a new understanding of yourself or God.
2. Have you ever experienced a real change of heart over an issue or situation in your life. What happened and did the change last?
3. Have you witnessed a dramatic change in another person's life? Share with the group.
4. What do you think are the characteristics of real, lasting, change versus change that is easily susceptible to fall back to old patterns and habits?

HANDS: Practice This Week

Spiritual Practice: Listening to God's Word

- Did you know that God's Word was meant to be heard before it was meant to be read? For this week, take time to simply listen to God's Word being read. Choose some Psalms, or the gospels, or even a short letter like Philippians or Colossians.
- After your experience, what was it like to listen to God's Word, as opposed to reading it? Different? Similar? Any challenges? Any benefits?

Invite the group to check in next week about their experience.

FINISH WELL: Bring It Home

1. What is an area in your life where you see the need for reform? How can you commit to seeking reform in that area in the coming year?
2. What is an area you see in your church or community or workplace that could benefit from a heart full of love and grace? What would it look like to commit to praying over that need for a few months?

CLOSING PRAYER (Leader or Participant Reads) or Scripture to Memorize

Creator God,

You who formed the heart and designed the mind,

Who knows us more than we know ourselves,

Please, point out the areas in me that need more of you

Your Word, Your Spirit, Your Power.

Soften my heart and open my mind to what you need to do in me,

That my life may have you as the center and circumference of my faith.

Amen.