

# small group **discussion**

## **Faithfulness: the Life of Samuel**

For the sermon on September 27-28, 2014

“Decision Time”

### **Get Acquainted**

Who’s a leader you’ve always admired? What leadership qualities do you admire most about this person?

### **Get Started**

What resonated with you most as you listened to this week’s sermon? What was the single most compelling or impactful thing you heard?

### **Background to the Story | 1 Samuel 4-6**

As we skip ahead a few chapters in the life of Samuel, we see him as a grown man, embracing his call to the leadership of Israel. Our story this week comes off the heels of the calamities of chapters 4 to 6: the death of Eli and his sons and the capture of the Ark of the Covenant. It’s quite evident that God’s glory had departed from Israel.

Israel was mired in the consequences of embracing multiple gods. They will not be blessed or live under the favor of God if they remain in their sin. The warning for them, and for us, is huge: “If you run from me...if you defy me...and if you ignore all of the warnings I send, do not think I will obligate myself to bless you.” But faithful Samuel guides the people toward a full, uncompromised devotion, a devotion they were lacking during the debacles of chapters 4 to 6.

### **Listen to the Story | 1 Samuel 7**

- **Option 1:** The small group leader tells the story accurately and passionately from memory. The group listens with Bibles closed.
- **Option 2:** Someone from the group reads the story while the group listens with Bibles closed.

### **Tell the Story | 1 Samuel 7**

- **Option 1:** Everyone gets a partner and retells the story to their partner from memory.
- **Option 2:** One or two people volunteer to retell the story to the group from memory.

### **Read the Story | 1 Samuel 7**

- Read the story with everyone following along in their copy of the text. Feel free to use another Bible version if you have read it before.

### **Explore the Story**

#### **What do you see? What does this mean?**

1. Who are the characters and what roles are being played in the story? What did they say and do?
2. Describe the tension in the story.
3. What choices are being made? What choices *could* be made? What are the outcomes of the choices?
4. What did you find compelling in this story?
5. What questions do you have? (Something you don’t understand or need more information about.)

## How does this story connect with *your* story?

**The Crisis.** The United States Marines have a slogan: *Moving toward the sounds of chaos*. While most run from crisis, chaos, and conflict, good soldiers and leaders move toward it to bring resolution. Samuel is emerging as a leader who would be called to move into crisis. The threat of the Philistines was the type of crisis that could cause people to reevaluate where their dependence lies. But, the people didn't simply return to the Lord, Samuel guided them. How would you describe people who are willing to step into crisis and chaos? What characteristics do they display? Do you do this? Why or why not? What chaotic situations may God be calling you to step toward?

**Spiritual Guidance.** There are times in our life when we are called to guide someone spiritually. And there are times when **we** are in a mess and need to be guided by a wise and discerning person. Good leaders will use the unpleasant events in our life as opportunities to guide us to reevaluate our relationship with God. Talk about the spiritual leaders you've had in your life. Who has guided you through crisis, correction, or chaos in the past? Discuss how this group can help carry the role of spiritual guide in your life.

**Divided Allegiance.** For God's glory to be restored in Israel, the people would need to place their allegiance solely on God. Samuel gave them this clear instruction: "If you are returning to the LORD with all your hearts, then rid yourselves of the foreign gods and the Ashtoreths and commit yourselves to the LORD and serve him only..." (1 Samuel 7.3-4). One of the most powerful words in this verse is **only**. Something had to go. They not only needed to add God, they needed to subtract their false gods.

**This week's One Big Question is... What in your life is competing for total devotion to God?** Remember, what fills our calendars, what empties our wallets, and how we view our relationships can be good indicators of where our devotion lies. What are some other indicators of competition with God? How do we identify idolatry (other gods) in our lives? What needs to go?

**Confession.** One of the most beautiful statements in this passage is Israel's simple confession. The brevity of their acknowledgement is stunning, "*We have sinned against the Lord.*" Confession means to agree with God that something is sin—and it needs to be part of our daily prayer life. However, we are often blind to our own sin, and when we allow God to point out sin in our lives, we see it for what it really is—offensive and hurtful to God. Do you carve out time to ask God where there is sin in your life? What should confession look like? Why can confession be so difficult?

**Read 1 John 1.9, Psalm 139.23-24, and James 5.16** together for more on confession.

**Deliverance.** When Israel turned their hearts back to him, God delivered them from the Philistines and his glory was returned to them. As a tribute to God's glory returning, the Israelites set up an "Ebenezer" stone. What stones of remembrance do you need to place to mark God's goodness or a turning point in your devotion to him?



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