

SMALL GROUP STUDY GUIDE

IT'S COMPLICATED S1 - Week 1

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 QUESTIONS

As we begin this series, spend some time talking to each other about what kinds of things make life so complicated? Our faith or lack thereof? Our sin? Our differences? In recent memory, what is something that you've faced and found complicated?

HEAD

1. Read Psalm 23 and 1 Samuel 17:34-37 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. In Psalm 23:1, what do you think it means to have all that you need, or lack nothing, if the Lord is your shepherd? Put it in your own words?
3. Psalm 23:4 is all about protection even in the most difficult of times.
4. Knowing David was a man who chased after God's own heart, a musician, poet, and warrior, how do you think he spent his down time as a shepherd?
5. What do you think gave David such confidence to know that if he could kill a bear or a lion, surely he could defeat Goliath?

HEART

1. If Psalm 23 has been a meaningful passage to you in the past, share why?
6. Jesus also uses the terminology of being a shepherd. What is endearing to you about this picture of the Lord as our shepherd?
7. What differences do you see between David's life as a shepherd, and the way David describes God in Psalm? What similarities?
8. David used violence to protect his sheep, and ultimately used violence to protect God's people and prove who was the one true God. What do you think about the use of violence? Is it ever ok? How would you reconcile your comment with Jesus' "turn the other cheek," "pray for your enemies," and "those who live by the sword die by the sword"?
9. In this week's guide, we talked about the difference between David's courage, and the response we often give, "Lord I believe, help my unbelief?" Do you think God praises one of these and looks down upon the other? Explain.
10. Inside each of us lies at least two different people; the people we want to be, strive to be, and the people we are. How do we continue to strive to be the people we want to be, on the days when the people we are seems to win out?

HANDS

Try to commit Psalm 23 to memory, maybe by writing it down and keeping it by your bedside stand so that each morning, when you awake, you recite its words as your own prayer. Do this for a week, taking time each day to meditate (or spend

some extra time) on one of the passages. At the end of the week, review and see if this is a practice you'd like to continue.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"11 I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd sacrifices his life for the sheep. 14 I am the good shepherd; I know my own sheep, and they know me, 15 just as my Father knows me and I know the Father. So I sacrifice my life for the sheep. 16 I have other sheep, too, that are not in this sheepfold. I must bring them also. They will listen to my voice, and there will be one flock with one shepherd."

John 10:11, 14-16 NLT

IT'S COMPLICATED S1 - Week 2

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OPEN QUESTIONS

Families can be complicated things at times. Share with the group your family dynamic (siblings, parents, relationships), along with one thing you remember fondly about growing up, and maybe something that was difficult or frustrating at times.

HEAD

1. Read 1 Samuel 16:1-12 and Psalm 21 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading?
2. Knowing God had previously said that Israel shouldn't have a king because He was their king (1 Samuel 8), why do you think God caved and chose a king for them?
3. Saul fell into the traps that God had predicted if Israel had a king, but God still finds another king for Israel, but one no one would have expected. Why do you think God often chooses people we wouldn't, to do His work?
4. How do you think it felt to be one of Jesse's older sons who got passed up for the youngest?
5. Concerning Psalm 21, what are your takeaways from this Psalm about how God works with fallen human beings to bring about victory for His kingdom?
6. Psalm 21:8-12 sounds harsh for a God of love. How do you reconcile the picture of God in the New Testament, with this one from the Old Testament?

HEART

1. What are some of the ways you think this story is complicated as it relates to God? How about to Family?
2. Why do you think God chose a young shepherd boy to be king over Israel? Recognize that the young in these times were not as respected or taken as seriously as those that were older and more mature.
3. As God continued to acquiesce to the requests of the Israelites, what can we learn about His grace, about His flexibility, and about His willingness to meet us where we are in hopes to bring us to where He is?
4. As a young shepherd boy chosen to be king, why do you think David was better positioned to write a psalm like Psalm 21 that recognizes that the king's victory is God's doing?
5. Any thoughts on why God would have anointed David at this time, even though it would be years before the people installed him as their king?

HANDS

Take a moment to look back over your life and reflect on the victories that God has given you. How did you know it was God? It's always easier to look back and see

how God worked, and harder to identify what He is up to in this present moment. Pray together today for the eyes to see God at work, and the faith to know He is even when you can't see it.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"Trust in the Lord with all your heart; do not depend on your own understanding. Seek his will in all you do, and he will show you which path to take."

Proverbs 3:5-6, NLT

IT'S COMPLICATED S1 - Week 3

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OPEN QUESTIONS

The story of David and Goliath is a favorite tale for many who grow up in the faith. Share one of your favorite childhood stories (Biblical or not), and what it was about that story you liked so much.

HEAD

1. Read 1 Samuel 17:1-58 and Psalm 143 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading?
2. There were so many stories before this one of God delivering His people from difficult circumstances (think Egypt). Why do you think the Israelites struggled so much with every new obstacle instead of remembering what God had done in the past to help them act in the present?
3. Why do you think Saul was willing to let a child lead face the giant as opposed to one of his best soldiers? How do you think Saul felt after the victory? Was he simply relieved, jealous, ashamed? Maybe all the above?
4. Do you think David was all courage and no fear? He sounds that way. Share what you think was going through his head as he walked toward Goliath.
5. In the series guide this week, we reflected some on why David carried Goliath's head into battle. Share your thoughts on why you think he did this?
6. In Psalm 123, even though David is paralyzed with fear, he writes that he knows God is Faithful and righteous. Why do you think it's important to remember who God is despite how you are feeling at the time?
7. David reminds himself of God's unfailing love in times of trial. How do you think this helps him carry on?

HEART

1. Have you ever been paralyzed with fear, or in a season of life where you felt that you had lost all hope? What happened and if you were able to come out of it, how did you come out of it?
2. What are some of our "giants" that we face today? What are ways we can help each other face those giants in the power of our mighty God?
3. In addition to David, who are some other characters in Scripture that seemed like the least likely people chosen to be the hero?
4. Is it possible for us to be both afraid and courageous in saying yes to whatever it is God is asking us to do? Explain your answer.

HANDS

Write out some of the giants you are currently facing in your life. Pray over them and in some tangible way, give them over to God. Then, spend time memorizing Psalm 143:8-10, making it a part of your prayer time for the following week.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"Let me hear of your unfailing love each morning, for I am trusting you. Show me where to walk, for I give myself to you."

Psalm 143:8, NLT

IT'S COMPLICATED S1 - Week 4

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OPEN QUESTIONS

Who is one of your oldest friends (not in age, but in length of years you've known them), and what is one thing the two of you love doing together?

HEAD

1. Read I Samuel 18:1-4, 19:1-7, and Psalm 55 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading.
2. The way the story is written, it's as if David and Jonathan knew they'd be best friends from the moment they laid eyes on each other. Knowing about the tensions between Jonathan's family and David, how do you think these two kept their friendship alive and well?
3. Jonathan removing his robe and giving it today was significant. He was passing the torch of leadership. If Saul caught wind of this, what do you think his response would have been and why?
4. Do you think Jonathan's actions in 1 Samuel 19:1-7, was a betrayal or something else?
5. What can we learn about addressing conflict from how Jonathan address Saul in this interaction?
6. Do you think David's "enemies" were literal people, or the enemies of anxious thoughts, painful and crippling grief, and anything that kept him from living life the way he wanted to live it? Explain your answer.

HEART

1. What does it take for you and me to invite new people into our lives?
2. When do you know whether or not friendship and love is worth the risk involved? What qualities are you looking for? What things do you need to know?
3. Have you ever lost a loved one and gone through the stages of grief? What was it like and what lessons did you learn from that journey that you carry with you and share with others?
4. Read through Psalm 55 again. What feelings and emotions can you identify with and why?
5. Have you ever been in a situation or season in life where you wanted to "fly away...far away, to the quiet wilderness"? What was going on? In what ways to you practice pulling away from the complications that life brings, to simply sit at the feet of Jesus and cling to his every word?

HANDS

Because grief is such an awkward and complicated journey, is there someone you can think of in your circle of influence who has experienced a loss in the last two

years? Could be the loss of a job, a dream, or a loved one. What's one way you could reach out to them this week to let them know you love them, you care, and that you are there if they need someone to talk to?

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"3 Every time I think of you, I give thanks to my God.4 Whenever I pray, I make my requests for all of you with joy...8 God knows how much I love you and long for you with the tender compassion of Christ Jesus. 9 I pray that your love will overflow more and more, and that you will keep on growing in knowledge and understanding."

-Philippians 1:3-4, 8-9, NLT

IT'S COMPLICATED S1 - Week 5

INTRODUCTION

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OPEN QUESTIONS

Have you ever had a time in your life when you had no idea what God was up to, or if He was paying attention at all? What was happening and how did you get through it (assuming, of course, that you're not in that season right now)?

HEAD

1. Read 1 Samuel 18:5-16 and Psalm 131 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading?
2. Saul became jealous of David very quickly, but he was also the one who put David in a position to be the hero when he wasn't willing to do it himself. Do you think Saul ever blamed himself for David's popularity?
3. We know David had his own struggles, but according to the Psalm, his heart was not proud. How do you think David stayed humble amidst the victories and the praises of others?
4. What do you think the spirits were that Saul was wrestling with and what made him vulnerable to those spirits? Was God causing his anguish or was something else at work?
5. In Psalm 131, David admitted that there were certain things he chose not to spend time thinking about, recognizing that they were beyond him and maybe not worth the time trying to figure out. In the journey of faith, what might be some things that fit into this category? Things "too awesome for me to grasp"?

HEART

1. In what ways does jealousy harm our relationship with others? In what ways does jealousy show itself within the church and what does it do to a community, to a movement?
2. Can you think of any ways we can keep jealousy at bay within the church and do a better job of working together instead of on our own?
3. What is it about others' success that makes us jealous, angry, or afraid?
4. Discuss how and why jealousy, anger, fear, and even shame, can all go together. How do we navigate these emotions as a follower of Jesus and within the body of Christ?
5. Are there things you do that help you calm and quiet yourself when emotions are raging or complicated?

HANDS

Spend some time thinking through how you process your emotions. What activities do you find helpful? Do you have people in your life you feel safe enough to talk to and work through them? If you don't already, take some time to actually

come up with an emotional management plan that includes activities to help you work through your complication emotions when they arise (journaling, exercising, praying, coffee with a friend, etc...).

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"Don't worry about anything; instead, pray about everything. Tell God what you need, and thank him for all he has done. Then you will experience God's peace, which exceeds anything we can understand. His peace will guard your hearts and minds as you live in Christ Jesus."

Philippians 4:5-6, NLT

IT'S COMPLICATED S1 - Week 6

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OPEN QUESTIONS

Share one of your favorite Psalms, or a favorite song, along with why that Psalm or song speaks to you in particular.

HEAD

1. Read 1 Samuel 24:1-22 and Psalm 57, 140-142 together and share any wisdom, insights, or thoughts that come to you from the reading?
2. Saul had tried to kill David repeatedly. Why do you think David remained so loyal to Saul after such a long period of being chased with the intent to destroy?
3. How do you think God uses our conscience to guide our spiritual journey?
4. Saul's heart changes in the moment he realizes that David could have killed him but didn't. Obviously, he was thankful to still be alive, but what do you think Saul saw in David that caused him to exclaim, "I realize that you are surely going to be king"?
5. So often in the Psalms, David both cries out in need but also offers praise. How might this ability have helped him be described as "a man after God's own heart"?
6. If Saul had truly accepted that David would be king, why didn't David and his men go home with Saul to take on those responsibilities?

HEART

1. Are there any lessons we can learn from David's loyalty to Saul as God's anointed one even when Saul was acting in a way that didn't reflect the character of God?
2. Considering our conscience, we often struggle to know if God is speaking something to us, or if it's our own thoughts. In what ways have you found helpful to discern God's leading and directing in your life?
3. Do you feel safe to share all of your thoughts and emotions with God? Why or why not?
4. David talked about sheltering in the shadow of God's wings. Is there a place you go to find shelter, peace, or connection to God? Where and what is it about that space that's meaningful to you?
5. How might we be able to help each other worship even in suffering? How might attending church play an important role in this exercise?

HANDS

Saul had his struggles for sure, but one way to begin to come out of those struggles and that darkness is confession. As has often been said, our secrets keep us sick. This week, find some time to simply confess your sins, your struggles, your fears,

and even your questions, to God. Don't hold back, even if tears come. Tears can be the words you can't say, and they have a positive effect as it relates to your mental health. After the exercise, assess how you feel. Would it help to talk to someone? A friend? A pastor? A counselor? Know that God is with you along every step of your journey, ever loving, ever faithful, ever close by.

LIVING WORDS FOR YOUR WEEK

"I will thank you, Lord, among all the people. I will sing your praises among the nations. For your unfailing love is as high as the heavens. Your faithfulness reaches to the clouds."

Psalms 57:9-10, NLT