



NORTH PARK WORSHIP CENTRE CHRISTIAN DISCIPLESHIP PROCESS



FALL 2026 THRIVE GROUP CURRICULUM

“PUTTING GOD FIRST”

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 1

Trust God with Unmet Desires

How do we handle it when God doesn't seem to be listening?

What does it mean to keep choosing God in the midst of successes and failures? When it's easy and when it's not? As one of Israel's history books, 1 Samuel gives accounts of both people who did choose God and those who did not. It begins during the rule of the judges, who were sporadic leaders, mostly for military purposes, when the government was a theocracy (with God as the only leader). One of the first people we meet is Hannah, who, after a struggle with infertility, gave birth to Samuel, who later became a priest, judge, and prophet, guiding Israel wisely.

Scripture: 1 Samuel 1–2:11

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Do you wonder if God is really listening to you? If he knows—and cares—how badly you long for something, why doesn't he answer? Hannah felt this way. She longed for a child. Out of her grief and anguish, she made a trip to the temple and poured her heart out to God. In fact, she was so sorrowful over her childlessness that the priest thought she was drunk! However, because she continued to pray, God granted her petition. The Bible doesn't say how many days, months, or years went by, but God eventually granted her a child. As a result of her gratefulness to God, she honored the vow she'd made while childless: to give the child back to God's service as soon as he was weaned. What a tough experience for a first-time mom—to receive a long-awaited child, then not get to care for him. Thus, Hannah's child came not in the way she expected, but God did grant her request.

Are you open to God's surprises, or are you insisting he do things your way?

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] Do you think you can pray for anything? Why or why not?
- [Q] How do you determine whether your desires are from God or from yourself?
- [Q] Why do you think God often answers our prayers differently than we think he will?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God answers prayer in his wisdom, not ours.

Read 1 Samuel 1.

Why does God seem to answer some prayers and not others? Pastor Randy Frazee shared this with his congregation:

My mother was dying. I went to God and made a special request. By her bedside I prayed 50 times. I counted. Fifty times I asked God to grant my request. I did this because I had studied the teaching of Jesus on prayer; he admires someone who knocks at the door continuously. This gave me the notion that if I knocked continuously, eventually God would arise from his seat and fix my problem.

I asked God specifically to give my mother one of two things. The first of my requests was my desired request. The second was a concession. The first request was that he would give my mother 18 more years. I prayed 50 times, “God, give her 18 more years.” Or I told him, “Take her today.”

I asked for 18 more years for a particular reason. Number one, my mother was 62, and 18 more years would make her 80. I thought that was a good round number. But more specifically, my oldest brother just had a baby girl. I thought it would be great if my mother could see her graduate from high school.

This request did not just come out of the air as it might sound. I received the request from a creative prayer that was done by a man named Hezekiah in 2 Kings 20. In 2 Kings 20:1–6, Hezekiah lies on his deathbed and prays to the Lord, “Remember, O Lord, how I have walked before you faithfully with wholehearted devotion and have done what is good in your eyes.” And Hezekiah wept bitterly.

Before Isaiah had left the middle court, the word of the Lord came to him. “Go back and tell Hezekiah the leader of my people, this is what the Lord the God of your father David says, ‘I have heard your prayer and seen your tears. I will heal you. On the third day from now you will go up to the temple of the Lord, and I will add fifteen years to your life. And I will deliver you and this city from the hand of the king of Assyria. I will defend this city for my sake and for the sake of my servant David.’”

God heard his prayer, saw his tears, and gave him 15 more years. Now, I asked for 18. But he didn’t give me 18 more years, not even 18 months, not even 18 days. Within 18 hours, my mother passed away.

I had to ask myself the question: *What’s that all about? Does God not love me? Have I not served Him as Hezekiah did? Did he not see my tears when I turned my face to the wall and wept bitterly? Why did God come through for Hezekiah and not for Randy Frazee?*

We often wonder why God doesn’t answer our prayers the way we want him to. Philip Yancey points out that even Jesus faced this: “When Jesus prayed to the one who could save Him from death, he did not get that salvation; He got instead the salvation of the world”

[Q] Why does God seem to answer some prayers and not others?

[Q] Do you believe that God values persistence in prayer? Why or why not? Support your answer through Scripture.

➤ If he does value persistence, why does he not always answer the way we want him to?

[Q] What was good about Hannah’s heart attitude in this account?

[Q] What do you make of the fact that even Jesus’ prayer was answered in a different way than he wanted it to be answered?

[Q] What would our lives be like if God relied on our wisdom rather than his own to answer our prayers?

Teaching point two: Understanding God’s attributes is essential to knowing how to pray to him.

Hannah understood the nature of God, which gave her wisdom in how to pray. An anonymous poem called “What Want I More?” puts into perspective that knowing Christ gives us a framework for all of life, as well as what we ask for:

In the heart of London City,
'Mid the dwellings of the poor,
These bright, golden words were uttered, "I have Christ! What want I more?" Spoken by a lonely woman,
Dying on a garret floor,
Having not one earthly comfort—"I have Christ! What want I more?"

(Quoted by Norman Vincent Peale in "My Favorite Quotations,"
CHRISTIANITY TODAY, Vol. 34, no. 15)

Read 1 Samuel 2:1–11.

- [Q] Why did Hannah rejoice in the Lord according to verses 1–2?
- [Q] How does knowing that God is holy and the Rock help us to trust him in prayer?
- [Q] According to verse 3, what does humility have to do with our attitude in prayer?
- [Q] Why do you think Hannah uses so many military allusions in this prayer?
- [Q] List the attributes of God from this prayer.
- [Q] What does Hannah's prayer teach you about prayer?

[Q] Which of the following do you think is the most important part of prayer?

- Praise to God
- Humility and confession before God
- Persistence
- Belief that God will answer as you have prayed
- Belief that God will answer according to his wisdom
- Why did you choose the one(s) you did?

[Q] Read 1 Samuel 7:3–6. What kind of man did Samuel become?

- How much of that do you think had to do with the way Hannah prayed for him?
- What do you suppose she prayed for him?

Activity: Advise the following people as to how they can pray about their problem.

- Julie has cancer.
- Matt just lost his job.
- Michelle's daughter is rebellious.
- Joseph's wife says she doesn't love him anymore.

For example, Julie should pray for healing, but trust God if it doesn't happen the way she wants it to.

Matt should pray that God would reveal to him if there is anything in his behavior that needs to change that caused him to lose his job. He then needs to trust God to provide another job.

Michelle needs to pray that her daughter will wholeheartedly long for Jesus Christ more than anything else.

Joseph should pray for a change of heart for his wife, the ability to love her as Christ does, and willingness to seek outside help for his marriage.

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Just as Hannah's prayer ended up blessing all of Israel through her son, Samuel, we need to realize that we can impact others through the way we pray. Consider this account by Tina Blessit:

In the fall of 2005, my 9-year-old son, Austin, had his tonsils removed. Before the surgery, an anesthesiologist came in to start an IV. He was wearing a cool surgical cap covered in colorful frogs. Austin loved that "frog hat." When the doctor started to leave, Austin called out, "Hey, wait." The doctor turned. "Yeah, buddy, what do you need?" "Do you go to church?" "No," the doctor admitted. "I know I probably should, but I don't." Austin then asked, "Well, are you saved?" Chuckling nervously, the doctor said, "Nope. But after talking to you, maybe it's something I should consider."

Pleased with his response, Austin answered, "Well, you should, 'cause Jesus is great!" "I'm sure he is, little guy," the doctor said, and quickly made his exit.

When Austin's surgery was finished, the anesthesiologist came into the waiting room to talk to me. He told me the surgery went well, then said, "Mrs. Blessit, I don't usually come down and talk to the parents after a surgery, but I just had to tell you what your son did."

Oh boy, I thought. What did that little rascal do now? The doctor explained that he'd just put the mask on Austin when my son signaled that he needed to say something. When the doctor removed the mask, Austin blurted, "Wait a minute, we have to pray!"

The doctor told him to go ahead, and Austin prayed: "Dear Lord, please let all the doctors and nurses have a good day. And Jesus, please let the doctor with the frog hat get saved and start going to church. Amen."

The doctor admitted that this had touched him. "I was so sure he would pray that his surgery went well," he explained. "He didn't even mention his surgery. He prayed for me! Mrs. Blessit, I had to come down and let you know what a great little guy you have."

A few minutes later, a nurse came to take me to post-op. She had a big smile on her face as we walked to the elevator. "There's something you should know," she said. "Some of the other nurses and I have been witnessing to and praying for that doctor for a long time. After your son's surgery, he tracked a few of us down to tell us about Austin's prayer. He said, 'Well girls, you got me.'"

If that little boy could pray for me when he was about to have surgery, then I think maybe I need his Jesus, too." ("A Prayer Before Surgery," TODAY'S CHRISTIAN [July/August 2006], p. 27)

Action Point: What prayer would you most like God to answer right now? Considering the principles we've discussed in this study, how can you pray about that in way that God will honor? Break into pairs and pray for each other.

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 2

Glorify God in All You Do

We exalt God when we live with excellence and joy.

We all work, whether it is a paid or volunteer position. So what kind of work is important to God? Only work where we are doing religious activities? What about those times that we are filling out a report, waxing a car, vacuuming a house, or helping a child with homework? Everyday tasks become God's work when our attitude is right.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 14:1–15

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Most of our days are spent doing mundane things. Even those in full-time Christian work spend much of their days making phone calls, scheduling meetings, and doing necessary things to live, such as going to the grocery store or the post office.

So what kind of work does God care about? Is there any value in serving in the military, working as an administrator, fixing cars, or cleaning a house?

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] Can secular work also be the Lord's work? If so, what makes it his work?
- [Q] How can we glorify God in our everyday duties?
- [Q] How might those in full-time Christian work fail to please God even though they are doing his work in the world's eyes?
- [Q] What do you think God wants most from us in our work?
 - Good work ethic
 - Good attitude toward coworkers
 - Sharing Christ with others at work
 - Encouraging other Christians at work
 - Other

Why did you choose the one(s) you did?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Our attitude toward God determines whether or not we are working for him.

What is it that makes work the Lord's work? It's not the specific task itself, but the character of the person doing the work. Work that's supposedly the "Lord's work" can be done with a selfish heart, laced with perfectionism, that doesn't care about others. And a secular job can be done with a heart for God—one that works hard, responds to those in need, and strives to bring God's presence into the workplace. Look at Jonathan, for example. His courage and character as a soldier inspired the loyalty of the soldiers who attended him.

As you learn to connect with God in the mundane moments of life, everything you do becomes the Lord's work.

Read 1 Samuel 14:1–15.

- [Q] What was Jonathan's job? How did he turn that job into something that honored God?
- [Q] What about his attitude turned his work into the Lord's work?
- [Q] How does this story illustrate that attitude is contagious?
- [Q] What kind of attitude can you exhibit at your work to turn it into God's work?

Teaching point two: Simply signing up to do God's work does not guarantee that we are going to please him.

Read 1 Samuel 14:24–45 and 15:1–31.

Saul was made king of Israel because the people wanted a king, like other nations, rather than having the Lord be their ruler. In this passage, we see that Saul did not last long as king. He was a rash and unpopular ruler who almost killed his own son, Jonathan, because of a foolish oath, and he also failed to obey God's command.

Simply signing up for God's work (ruling God's people, Israel) did not guarantee that Saul would please God. In fact, he failed to please him in every way. Again, we see that our heart attitude is what counts.

- [Q] Why do you think Saul made this rash oath (14:24)? Why do you think it backfired?
- [Q] How did this oath affect his men (14:28)?
- [Q] What was the difference between Jonathan's attitude and Saul's?
- [Q] Why did the men side with Jonathan?
- [Q] What command did God give to Saul through Samuel (15:3)?
 - How did he disobey it (15:9)?
 - What were the consequences of his disobedience (15:23)?

Teaching point three: The secret to doing God’s work is wanting Him to be the center of all we do.

The great 18th-century preacher Jonathan Edwards said: The enjoyment of [God] is the only happiness with which our souls can be satisfied Fathers and mothers, husbands, wives, or children, or the company of earthly friends are but shadows, but enjoyment of God is the substance. These are but scattered beams, but God is the sun. These are but streams, but God is the fountain. These are but drops, but God is the ocean.

Read Ecclesiastes 2:24–26.

[Q] How can we find satisfaction in our work (v. 24)?

[Q] What does it mean when it says without God we can’t eat or find enjoyment (v. 25)?

[Q] What does God give those who please him (v. 26)? Read Matthew 15:10–20.

[Q] What do these verses tell us about how our heart attitude affects everything?

[Q] How can we apply this to our work?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Whether we’re in full-time Christian work or secular work, we can please God in what we do. Consider this account:

Chiropractor Perry Hefty and his wife, Arlys, wanted to be in what they considered “ministry” for many years. One day when Perry was crying out to God about this deep desire, he heard God speak: “Begin with what you have.” So instead of getting the \$2.5 million he would have needed to start a healthcare ministry and retreat center for missionaries, pastors, and other full-time Christian workers, Perry started doing what he could: giving free chiropractic services to Christian workers who were in financial and physical need. That was in 1994. Since that time, Perry’s office has given away hundreds of thousands of dollars worth of services—about a third of his business—to help restore physical and often spiritual health.

“Many of the missionaries and Christian workers who came to the office were deeply discouraged,” says Perry. “But they felt they needed to put on a bright and happy face so they could raise ministry support. So we dedicated ourselves and our facility to being used by the Lord to heal and restore his people.” Perry and Arlys prayed for people in the office, encouraged them, and counseled them, often building relationships that continued long after treatment ended.

When Perry constructed a new office building in 1999, he and a prayer team prayed over the land, the building project, and the business and ministry that would take place there. Even after they moved into the building, Perry says he often stayed late to anoint the doorways with oil and pray for the people who would come in the next day. “Patients noticed the difference. They would often comment, ‘Wow, it just feels so peaceful here,’” Perry says. The Heftys still dream of building that Christian retreat center. But in the meantime, they’ve learned that God is happy to use them to minister, whatever business they’re in. Navigators

Action Point: Write down honest answers to the following questions: *Who am I at work? Is God’s presence obvious to me? Am I cooperative, or do I insist on my own way? Am I a team player or someone who looks for recognition? When someone asks me to do a difficult task, do I pray and give it a try instead of insisting the task is impossible?*

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 3

Focus on What's Important

Our goal should be to please God instead of people.

So many things pull on our time and attention. It's easy to get sidetracked from what is really important. This study looks at how Samuel chose David as the next king of Israel. We can learn from what Samuel learned about the qualities God values.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 16:1–13

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

We don't know others the way God knows them. As you look around at your group of friends, you may notice one has a great body or personality, another has a great job, still another has a great family. One may be categorized by others as a winner, and another as a loser.

But society's standards are confusing. The "best" person is the one who makes the most, who has a loving spouse, or whose kids are on the honor roll. Today's culture does not value what's most important: the quiet simplicity of knowing God, and the strength and peace such a relationship gives us.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] How do you measure whether or not you are doing well?

➤ Do you think that's a good way to measure yourself? Why or why not?

[Q] How can you know what is important in life?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Focus on what God wants to do in and through your life instead of comparing yourself to others.

Read 1 Samuel 16:1–13.

Imagine the surprise of David's family when Samuel wanted to see the runt who had been out in the fields singing to himself (we now call those songs *psalms*).

Why him? Apparently, no one would have guessed David was a candidate, because they didn't even bring him to meet Samuel.

Outwardly, David may have seemed like an unlikely choice, but God saw much deeper than David's relatives and friends could. It's impossible to read someone else's motives—to know that person's pain or imagine his or her dreams. There is so much you don't know about others—or God's plan for them—that it makes no sense to compare yourself to them. Instead, focus on purifying your own motives and giving God your dreams. Then who knows what glorious things God may bring into your life!

[Q] What kinds of things did Samuel think God would take into consideration in a king (v. 6)?

[Q] What was important to God (v. 7)?

[Q] How was David a different kind of king from Saul?

[Q] As king, how did David have to learn to think about himself differently than his family did?

Teaching point two: Focus on who is truly important—God himself.

If we want to make sure we are living for the right purposes, we have to be centered in God.

Augustine said, “Christ is not valued at all, unless he is valued above all.” (Encyclopedia of Christian Quotations [Baker, 2000], p. 179)

Christian author Brennan Manning calls us to examine the cause of our emotions:

To ascertain where you really are with the Lord, recall what saddened you the past month. Was it the realization that you do not love Jesus enough? That you did not seek his face in prayer often enough? That you did not care for his people enough? Or did you get depressed over a lack of respect, criticism from an authority figure, your finances, a lack of friends, fears about the future, or your bulging waistline?

Conversely, what gladdened you the past month? Reflection on your election to the Christian community? The joy of saying slowly, “Abba, Father”? The afternoon you stole away for two hours with only the gospel as your companion? A small victory over selfishness? Or were the sources of your joy a new car, a Brooks Brothers suit, a great date, great sex, a raise, or a loss of four inches from your waistline? (*The Importance of Being Foolish*, Harper Collins, 2005)

[Q] Read Haggai 2:6–9. According to this passage, why should we value God above anything this earth has to offer?

[Q] Read Luke 10:38–42. What did Mary choose that was the better thing?

[Q] Read Revelation 2:1–7. How is Christ presented in verse 1?

- What kind of good things was the Ephesus church doing?
- What most important thing did they fail to do (v. 4)?

[Q] Read Revelation 3:6–11. What about this passage makes you want to worship Christ above all else?

Teaching point three: Focus on the reward we gain for following Christ instead of following the standards of this world.

Randy Alcorn says: Think about the special spiritual moments you've experienced. Perhaps it was during a time of prayer, in worship at church, in a conversation with a loved one, or while you were walking on the beach or in the woods.

Have you ever had a sudden sense that you were moving on the edge of eternity, briefly yet truly breaking into its circle, knowing in that moment you were exactly where you belonged, taking part in what the universe must be about?

That was a glimpse of eternity.

Read Mark 10:29–31.

[Q] What incomprehensible things are promised in these verses?

[Q] How might we need to leave each of the following in this life for the sake of the gospel?

- Home or property
- Family
- Vocation

[Q] What does it mean to you that the first will be last and the last will be first (v. 31)?

Activity

Purpose: *To help us grasp the glory that awaits us.*

Activity: *Ask group members to name a moment when they have felt especially close to God. Allow them time to describe this in as much detail as they can, then give them time to speculate how much better it will be to see Christ in heaven.*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Action Point: Life is so overwhelming that sometimes it helps to start from zero—to cut out everything and then ask yourself, *What must I do? What is God absolutely urging me to do?*

Pretend for a moment that you are looking at your calendar or date book. In your imagination, erase every single thing you should do. Look at that empty space and ask God to make clear what you need to do to fulfill his purpose for you. Ask him, “What one or two tasks do you want me to do, or what lifestyle changes do you want me to make?” (Consider the simplest commands: to love God with all your being and to love others.)

Then review each of the other items. With rigorous honesty, examine your motives. Ask yourself, *Why do I do this? To please others? Because I want to be admired?* (The latter was one of King Saul’s driving motivations; see 1 Samuel 15:30). Which tasks do you carry out because God has convinced you that they are important? If you’re not sure, put all those items on hold and ask God to reveal your motives and his priorities to you.

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 4

Look for Open Doors

Give your gifts and abilities to God to use.

God has given each of us abilities. It may be something as noticeable as a beautiful voice, or as unassuming as the ability to be able to concentrate for a long time in prayer. But no matter how God has made you, or whatever you see as your limitations, he can use your abilities to bring honor to his name.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 16:14–23

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Look for open doors. After David was anointed king, you'd have expected him to enter the royal court in some executive capacity, right? No, he gained entrance as a harp player. Who would have guessed God would use David's harp-playing skills that way? In the same way, you can look at your knack for gardening, your love for children, or your ability to argue a court case, and wonder how God can use it.

Your gifts and talents can open doors. Picture the frustrated neighbor who asks your help to pick out perennials for her backyard. Seeing you as a fair, caring person who understands how living things thrive and what makes a garden take shape can give texture to the compassion and truth of the gospel. Or a haggard parent may notice how you deal with your children at school. Or a vengeful plaintiff may notice you argue the case fairly and to his benefit, but you don't leave the defendant destitute. The use of your gifts can show the gospel at work in a genuine way.

When you lay your talents and gifts before God, you need to ask: *Show me how to use this talent simply for the love of you.* Then wait with alert eyes to see what God will do.

Discussion Questions:

- [Q] What kinds of gifts and abilities has God given you that you can give back to him?
- [Q] Have you ever seen those gifts and abilities open doors for ministry? If so, tell us about it.
- [Q] What kind of doors can you imagine them opening?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: God gave us abilities to use for Him.

Dr. Scott Kurtzman, chief of surgery at Waterbury Hospital, was on his way to deliver an 8 a.m. lecture when he witnessed one of the worst crashes in Connecticut history. A dump truck, whose driver had lost control, flipped on its side and skidded into oncoming traffic. The resulting accident involved 20 vehicles; four people died.

Thanks to years of emergency-room experience, Doctor Kurtzman immediately shifted into trauma mode. He worked his way through the mangled mess of people and metal, calling out, “Who needs help?”

After about 90 minutes, when all 16 victims had been triaged and taken to area hospitals, Dr. Kurtzman climbed back into his car, drove to the medical school, and gave his lecture—two hours late.

This was not the first time Dr. Kurtzman has assisted those in need. Over the years, he’s stopped at a half-dozen crashes and assisted at three. “A person with my skills simply can’t drive by someone who’s injured,” says Kurtzman. “I refuse to live my life that way.” God has given us all abilities, even if that ability is simply offering a cup of water in his name. Read 1 Samuel 16:14–23.

[Q] How did God use David’s ability for his purpose?

[Q] In the next chapter (17), we read about David’s famous defeat of Goliath. How did David’s association with Saul in chapter 16 lead to the opportunity to accomplish this great feat in chapter 17?

[Q] How might God use the following abilities for his glory?

- Musical ability
- Artistic ability
- Mechanical ability
- Cooking ability
- Administrative ability

[Q] Why do we often belittle our abilities rather than embrace them?

Teaching point two: God will hold us accountable for how we use the abilities he has given us.

The movie *Chariots of Fire* is based on the true story of two British runners competing in the 1924 Olympics. Eric Liddell is a devout Christian and one of the finest runners in the world. According to the movie, Eric’s sister, Jennie, wants him to leave competitive running to join the family on the mission field in China. Jennie feels Eric is putting running ahead of serving God, and she questions his commitment.

In one scene, Eric attempts to help his sister see his point of view. Eric announces with a smile, “I’ve decided I’m going back to China. The missionary service has accepted me.” Jennie interrupts him. “Oh, Eric, I’m so pleased.”

Eric continues, “But I’ve got a lot of running to do first. Jennie, you’ve got to understand. I believe that God made me for a purpose, for China. He also made me fast, and when I run, I feel his pleasure. To give it up would be to hold him in contempt. You were right; it’s not just fun. To win is to honor him.”

Eric Liddell ended up dying of a brain tumor in a Japanese internment camp in China. But before he went there, he won a gold medal in the Olympics. God used his running as well as his missionary work to draw many to himself.

If Liddell had disobeyed God in either of these areas and wasted his abilities, he would have missed out on the purpose for which God made him.

Read Matthew 25:14–30.

[Q] Did it matter in this parable who was given the most talents?

- If not, what did matter?

[Q] Why did the master so severely judge the servant who hid his talent?

[Q] What did the servant miss out on in addition to displeasing his master?

Activity

Purpose: *To help us realize that we can glorify God by allowing him to work through our abilities.*

Activity: *As a group, brainstorm a list of ways you can see people's talents and abilities being used. These may be used at church, in the community, in the home, or at the workplace. Which people do you admire the most and why?*

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

What you see as your limitations may point to the very ability God has given you. For example, a woman who is disabled physically may have more time for prayer. Or a man who doesn't feel gifted in teaching can demonstrate Christ to others by helping them with household projects. We need to set aside our ideas of what serving God is like and ask him to show us how he wants us to serve him. When we embrace that, we will be living the way he made us to.

Reverend Thomas Tewell writes:

My friend Andy Eddington, once the president of Shriner College in Texas, would go to prisons and preach to men on death row in Huntsville, Texas. I used to go with Andy every now and then, and on one of those trips we stopped at a greasy spoon on our way home to Dallas. Andy loved sugar in his coffee, so he took not one, not two, but three teaspoonfuls of sugar. As the waitress watched, Andy said, "Ma'am, we're going to need more sugar for this table." This Texas waitress looked at Andy and said, "Listen, bud, before I give you more sugar, you stir what you got."

Now, there's a sermon there, and the sermon is: Stir what you got. Use your gifts. (Thomas Tewell, pastor, Fifth Avenue Presbyterian Church, New York, New York; from a plenary address at the Preaching with Passion Conference, 5-31-01)

Action Point: Ask each person in the group to write down at least one ability God has given them and share it with the group. Brainstorm how God might use that ability to honor him. Take into consideration the personality of the person who has the ability as you brainstorm. Is the person an introvert or an extrovert? Does the person like change or prefer things staying the same? Does the person enjoy risks or are they cautious?

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 5

Make Friends for the Sake of God's Kingdom

Jonathan modeled how to be a great friend.

We make friends for all sorts of reasons. But no matter what draws us to a friend initially, our goal in that friendship should be to help that person become all God wants them to be. That kind of loyalty will always seek their ultimate good, even if it costs us our own safety and comfort.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 19:1–7

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

A study conducted by the National Opinion Research Center at the University of Chicago, released in June of 2006, revealed that Americans have fewer people they can confide in than did past generations.

In 1985, the average American had three people in whom to confide matters that were important to them. In 2004, that number dropped to two.

Perhaps even more striking, the number of Americans with no close friends rose from 10 percent in 1985 to 24.6 percent in 2004.

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Why do you think it's harder to make friends today than it was in past generations?

[Q] Do you feel that you have close friends? Why or why not?

[Q] What does it take to make a good friendship?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Friendship is a choice. It doesn't just happen.

Read 1 Samuel 19:1–7.

We usually make friends with those people with whom we have a lot in common. Jonathan and David had a lot in common; both were fearless warriors. They could have been competitive, but instead they were best friends (18:1). Jonathan loved his friend David and knew the worth of true friendship—something our transient culture doesn't always value over advancement or accomplishments.

Jonathan chose to love David, even when he knew David would usurp his own position as the next king of Israel, since he was the rightful heir as Saul's son. This friendship is a model for all of us. Jonathan recognized that David needed him more than ever, in spite of his success. Saul was jealous of David and even threatened to kill him, but Jonathan remained a supportive, caring friend, willing to sacrifice his life for David. Imagine how much this must have meant to David as King Saul hunted him.

To be a true friend to someone, that person needs you to be someone he or she can be truly honest with, who keeps confidences, does not demand anything, and does not set them on a pedestal.

[Q] What do you think drew Jonathan and David into friendship?

[Q] Why do you think Jonathan was able to put aside his own ambition for David? What can we learn from that?

[Q] How does having a common mission draw people together? How is this especially true in the church?

[Q] Which of the following do you think are most the most important elements of friendship?

- Loyalty
- Common interests
- Love for God
- Common mission
- Common situation in life
- Other

Why did you pick the one(s) you did?

Teaching point two: Friendship may demand that we make great sacrifices.

Read 1 Samuel 19:9–10 and 20:17–42.

The key to learning about friendship from this story is to put ourselves in the place of Jonathan rather than David. So often we think of friendship in terms of how we want others to treat us. But this passage challenges us to think about how we are treating our friends.

Sometimes we will need to make sacrifices for our friends. Consider this story from Pastor Bill White:

Recently I witnessed an unusual accountability partnership at my church.

In an effort to break his habit of using profanity, Paul started meeting with another guy from church, and they set up an aggressive plan for holiness. Each Sunday, Paul would report to William how many times he cussed during the week, and he'd put \$5 in the offering plate for each incident. The first week cost Paul \$100. Although following weeks improved somewhat, he wasn't having the success he wanted and was losing a lot of hard-earned cash.

After the fourth week, William told Paul he had unilaterally changed the deal for the coming week, but he wouldn't tell Paul how. Paul wanted to know, but all William would say was, "Trust me. It will cost you both less and more."

The following Sunday before worship, Paul was looking a bit down, obviously having failed again. William put a hand on his shoulder and said, "Paul, this will cost you both less and more. It's called grace." At that he took out a check made out to the church, dated and signed by William. Only the amount was blank. "Your sin still costs, but for you it's free. Just fill in the numbers. And next week there will be more grace."

That first week of grace cost William \$55, but the second only cost him \$20. There was no third week. It cost Paul too much to fill in those checks, so he quit sinning. (PreachingToday.com)

[Q] Why was Jonathan able to defy his father to help David?

[Q] What risk did Jonathan take to help David?

[Q] What is the most sacrificial thing you've ever done for a friend? What motivated you to do it?

[Q] What is the difference between thinking of how we can be a good friend, rather than simply having a good friend?

Being a good friend puts the emphasis on what we can do. Having a good friend puts the emphasis on what the other person can do for us.

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us identify sacrificial friendships.

Activity: Brainstorm about famous characters from books or movies who have sacrificed for their friends. Record their answers on a whiteboard or poster board.

When they have finished ask:

- What makes these sacrifices so memorable?
- What can you emulate from their sacrifices?
- Which of those characters would you most like to be like? Why?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

A *USA Today* article portrayed vividly the courage of true friendship: Anne Hjelle and Debbie Nichols were friends who were mountain biking on a wilderness trail near Mission Viejo, California, when a 110-pound mountain lion sprang from the brush, pounced on Anne's back, and dragged her off by the head.

Nichols screamed for help and grabbed Hjelle's legs, trying to free her and engaging in a desperate tug of war with the cat while other cyclists threw rocks at the cat until it fled.

Jackie Van Woerkom said she was riding behind Hjelle and Nichols and later spoke to Nichols at the hospital. "She had some blood on her face. She definitely showed signs of a major struggle," Van Woerkom said. "She was shaking, trembling. She said, 'I was not going to let go. I was not going to let go.'"

Nichols described the tenacity of the cat, saying, "This guy [the cat] would not let go. He had a hold of her face ..." But the tenacity of the cat was overcome by the faithfulness of a friend. She continued, "I just told her, 'I'm never letting go.'" (*USA Today*, 1-09-04)

Action Point: Ask each person in the group to write down the name of one person they would like to be a better friend to. Next to that name, instruct them to write at least one thing they can do this week to assist or encourage that friend. Close in silent prayer, allowing each person time to pray for that friend.

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 6

Forgive Those Who Have Broken Your Trust

David's treatment of Saul showed true forgiveness.

If anyone has ever had a reason to hold a grudge, it was David. Although he married Saul's daughter, played the harp to soothe Saul, and constantly repelled Israel's enemies, Saul repeatedly tried to kill him. It is especially hard to forgive someone who has broken our trust in them, but David models how to do it.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 24

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

Note to leader: At the beginning of the class, provide each person with the Participant's Guide included at the end of this study.

All of us have reason to struggle with forgiveness. Consider these examples:

"It has come to the editor's attention that the Herald-Ledger neglected to cover the civil-rights movement. We regret the omission."

—*The Herald-Ledger of Lexington, Kentucky, apologizing for the 40-year-old policies of the paper to relegate the coverage of sit-ins, marches, and the like to brief mentions in a column called "Colored Notes" (July 4, 2004).*

"The comment was not meant to be a regional slur. To the extent that it was misinterpreted to be one, I apologize."

—*Assistant U.S. Attorney Kenneth Taylor, apologizing for referring to potential jurors in the eastern Kentucky mountains as "illiterate cave-dwellers" (Oct. 17, 2003).*

"I really, from the very bottom of my heart, want to apologize for statements I made about Christianity. I did it mainly out of frustration. At one time or another, I've offended almost every group. I'm sure I'll be apologizing again."

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Give some examples of how people betray our trust.

[Q] Why is it hard to forgive such a person?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Forgiveness is a matter of trust in God.

Read 1 Samuel 24.

We all struggle with trusting God to look out for us. When you ask yourself how you can forgive someone who has broken your trust, ask it gently. When someone offends you or works against you, it's foolish to force yourself to say you've forgiven him or her. Especially if that person is anything like King Saul, your reticence may be merited. Even after their relationship appeared to be ironed out, David and his men returned to their hideout (24:22) to keep themselves from further danger.

The first step to truly forgiving is to trust God to work with the person who has offended you. David did that in two ways. He assumed God was in charge of the situation. If Saul was still king, then that must have been God's will. Also, David did not assume he was right and Saul was wrong—even when it sure looked like it. Although Saul had tried to murder David, David did not respond by murdering Saul when he had the chance, refusing to pay evil for evil. When you leave the judgment and consequences in God's hands, you indicate that in the face of grievous error, you believe in God's ability to rescue you and bring about justice. Under that umbrella of God's protection, you can afford to see your enemy as a person with heartbreaks and problems, in need of God's love, perhaps even from you.

[Q] What is amazing in the way David dealt with Saul?

[Q] Why did he protect Saul's life when Saul was trying to take his?

David clearly wanted God to be the judge, not him. He knew he lacked the wisdom to take out the king of Israel. As surely as God had appointed David as king, he knew that God would be the one to set it up.

[Q] What did David's trust in God have to do with his mercy toward Saul?

[Q] Later Saul again resumed his war against David, but what was his immediate reaction to David's mercy?

[Q] How does unexpected kindness defuse a situation more powerfully than open warfare?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us learn to trust God for justice.

Activity: Advise the following people as to how they could show kindness rather than get revenge:

- Martha found out her neighbor was spreading rumors about her behind her back.
- Paul's coworker makes fun of him constantly.
- Karen's son is rude to her in front of his friends.

Teaching point two: Forgiveness requires us to look at our own sin and not merely the other person's sin.

David was able to forgive Saul because he allowed God to be the judge instead of taking matters into his own hands. He trusted God to decide who was right by ultimately choosing who would be on the throne of Israel.

Obviously Saul was displaying sinful behavior. There is no doubt that he was in the wrong. But David chose to let God punish that sin, rather than carrying out his own punishment.

Abbot Moses of the 10th century said, “They who are conscious of their own sins have no eyes for the sins of their neighbors.”

Read Matthew 7:1–5.

[Q] What reason did Jesus give for not judging others (v. 1)?

[Q] Why is it so much easier to see other people’s sins than it is to see our own?

[Q] How can we acknowledge and hold people accountable for their sin without judging them?

David is a good example of this. He had no trouble determining that Saul was wrong, and he didn’t wake Saul up so that Saul would have a chance to attack him. However, he refused to seek revenge.

[Q] How can we take the plank out of our own eye (v. 5)?

[Q] Which of the following sins are easiest for you to ignore in your own life:

- Lack of concern for others
- Lack of zeal for God
- Judging others
- Self-absorption
- Other

Why did you pick the one(s) you did? How can you allow God to change that about you?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

Augustine of Hippo said:

“You have enemies, for who can live on this Earth without them? Take heed to yourselves: love them. In no way can your enemy so hurt you by his violence, as you hurt yourself if you don’t love him” (On the Lord’s Prayer in St. Matthew’s Gospel, chapter 6)

Action Point: Write down the name of one person you need to extend forgiveness to, even if they don’t deserve it. If you are comfortable, share the name of this person with the group. Pray for each other that you will have the courage to forgive and be able to trust God for ultimate justice.

APPLICATION:

PRAYER:

1 Samuel: Putting God First - Study 7

Hope in God for Your Future

*It's not okay to rely on horoscopes,
consult Ouija boards, or have your palm read.*

Never has it been more socially acceptable to consult mediums, read horoscopes, or seek the advice of psychics. It is easy to fall into thinking this is okay to do and is particularly confusing to our children. Saul's experience warns us of the consequences of dabbling in this type of activity.

Scripture:

1 Samuel 28:3–25

PART 1

Identify the Current Issue

In an interview with Barbara Walters on the ABC television show “20/20,” Barbra Streisand told of visiting a Long Island psychic to contact her late father.

Streisand said, “It was very frightening. This table started to spell letters. It spelled M-A-N-N-Y, which was his nickname. I looked under the table, but there’s no wires. There’s no way this thing could move except with a vibration of some sort. And I never wanted to do it again.”

(John Tyngiel, “People Who Talk to the Dead,” *Time*, 11-26-00)

Discussion Questions:

[Q] Why is it so tempting to consult psychics, horoscopes, and other future-telling mediums?

[Q] Why do you think people often get results when they do this?

PART 2

Discover the Eternal Principles

Teaching point one: Avoid all satanic activity, no matter how tempting it is.

Read 1 Samuel 28:3–25.

As king, Saul expelled the mediums and spiritists from the land. In other words, he got rid of them because God said they weren't good for the people.

However, when Saul was in a pinch, he consulted a medium at Endor. Although he disguised himself, God knew what he had done.

Judgment was swift: Saul learned that God would tear the kingdom out of his hand and give it to David.

Even worse, he would allow Saul and the Israelite army to be delivered into the hands of their enemies, the Philistines.

If you treat witchcraft and its many forms lightly, others around you—such as your children—may treat them lightly, too. And with teen magazine articles with titles such as “Witchcraft for a New Generation,” it’s already an appealing alternative. So explain to your kids as early as possible that anything having to do with witchcraft (and be specific) is not acceptable: that includes heavy metal music with satanic themes, worshiping the moon, and watching movies and television shows that feature mediums and satanic activity. Such activities promote freedom and power, but they put you in bondage to Satan.

[Q] Why did Saul consult a medium—what did he hope she would do for him (v. 15)?

[Q] Why do you think God allowed Samuel to appear to Saul?

- Does this appearance condone calling up the dead to speak to us? Why or why not?

Matthew Henry’s Concise Commentary says: *Saul desires the woman to bring one from the dead, with whom he wished to speak; this was expressly forbidden, Deuteronomy 18:11. All real or pretended witchcraft or conjuration is a malicious or an ignorant attempt to gain knowledge or help from some creature, when it cannot be had from the Lord While Samuel was living, we never read of Saul’s going to advise with him in any difficulties; it had been well for him if he had. But now he is dead, “Bring me up Samuel” The whole shows that it was no human fraud or trick. Though the woman could not cause Samuel’s being sent, yet Saul’s inquiry might be the occasion of it. The woman’s surprise and terror proved that it was an unusual and unexpected appearance. Saul had despised Samuel’s solemn warnings in his lifetime, yet now that he hoped, as in defiance of God, to obtain some counsel and encouragement from him, might not God permit the soul of his departed prophet to appear to Saul, to confirm his former sentence, and denounce his doom? There appears much solemnity in God’s permitting the soul of a departed prophet to come as a witness from heaven, to confirm the word he had spoken on earth.*

[Q] What kind of experiences tempt us to consult mediums and psychics?

[Q] Why does God want us to avoid such activity?

Optional Activity

Purpose: To help us learn to trust God for justice.

Activity: Advise the following people as to how they should respond to these situations:

- Coral’s neighbor invited her to a Wicca meeting in her home.
- Toby has read his horoscope for years and finds himself planning around its predictions.
- Brenda lost her sister last year. A friend told her she would be able to talk to her again by seeing a medium.

Teaching point two: Spiritualist practices are opposed to God.

James W. Cox says:

The preacher brings a report from the battlefield of the conflict between Christ and Satan. The news is that for the whole of humankind Jesus Christ has won the victory in his death and resurrection. 3)

This is why we are to avoid spiritualist activities. The battle that affects us from the time we are born until we die is the conflict between Christ and Satan. Whom we choose to go to for our wisdom for life determines whose side we are on. We cannot be wholeheartedly serving God and advancing his kingdom when we are consulting with Satan.

[Q] Read Deuteronomy 18:9–15. What adjective does God use to describe the practices of the other nations in verse 9?

- Why are these practices detestable to the Lord?
- Why is sacrificing your children lumped in with divination and sorcery?
- Who did the Lord want the Israelites to listen to instead (v. 15)? Who should Christians listen to instead?

[Q] Read Isaiah 41:21–29. How does God sum up those who consult false gods? How is seeking the advice of a medium or psychic like wind and confusion?

[Q] Read Isaiah 47:12–15. Why is consulting someone to tell our future so futile?

[Q] Read Micah 5:12–15. Why does God take such a strong stance against these practices?

[Q] Which of the following have you sought when you wanted wisdom about a decision or comfort about a loved one who has died?

- A psychic
- God’s Word
- Mature Christians
- Astrology
- A medium

If you chose any of these other than God’s Word and mature Christians, what made you seek them? Can you see what was wrong with that choice? If you are still drawn to those things, how can you break their hold on your life?

PART 3

Apply Your Findings

S. D. Gordon said: It is startling to think that Satan can actually come into the heart of a man in such close touch with Jesus as Judas was. And more—he is cunningly trying to do it today. Yet he can get in only through a door opened from the inside. “Every man controls the door of his own life.” Satan can’t get in without our help.

Action Points: Consider studying this subject further. Using a good Bible concordance, look up everything you can find on this subject. Look under words such as *astrology*, *medium*, *spiritist*, and *witchcraft*.

Also consider reading Neil T. Anderson’s books *Victory Over the Darkness*, *The Bondage Breaker*, and *Restored*.

Close in prayer, confessing any help you may need with this.