

Making Great Decisions

1: How Do I Choose?

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Olympics: Did you love it or loathe it? What will be the legacy? Discuss!

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Share something good and something bad that's happened to you over the last few weeks. Give thanks to God together & pray for one another.

WORD

BEFORE STARTING: This series is about making good decisions – a crucial part of living well as Christian disciples.

Individually, on a piece of paper write down:

- 1: One good decision you've made recently
- 2: One bad decision you've made recently
- 3: What factors would you say makes a decision good or bad?

As a group, discuss what you've written

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-13 (We're following stories from David's life)

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Nov 2012



- Look back through the whole story. How many different ways can you find that Samuel could have gone wrong?
- Samuel was very confident in his ability to hear God's voice (v11) How clearly do you feel that you hear God's guiding? What differences would it make to your life if you heard God as clearly as Samuel?
- Samuel didn't just hear God, he acted on what God said. If you felt sure that God was saying something to you, what factors might encourage or deter you from responding?
- How can we get better at hearing God's voice? Think of different ways – especially those that you have found helpful or know have helped others.

- v7: How many different ways can you think of that we judge people? Which are considered acceptable/unacceptable in today's society? How valid are they?
- In what situations do you find yourself judging people? How can you get better at seeing people the way that God sees them?
- What decisions would you make differently if you saw people (including yourself) in the way that God sees them?

- **Extra:** Can you think of examples from the life of Jesus when he saw people differently from how people would expect?

WHAT NEXT?

- Share in 2s-4s: What decisions (big or small) will you have to make in the next fortnight that affect others? How do you feel about them?
- Pray for one another to make good decisions
- Pray about any other decisions that will affect you/others?
- Pray for Alpha starting soon

Making Great Decisions

2: Decisions: Resisting Pressure

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Each name a film you like & why you like it.

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Read today's reading & then read Psalm 57 (written by David at that time). Each choose a verse that stands out for you (it can be the same one) & go round in turn, saying it out loud as a prayer.

WORD

A brief background to the story... Saul is king of Israel, but is jealous of David's popularity following David's success, including the defeat of Goliath. Saul is now trying to track down and kill David.

Read 1 Samuel 24:1-13

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

In verses 3-4 David had to make a quick decision – weighing the advice of friends (quoting God's words to him!) his conscience and his knowledge of God's principles.

- For what reasons might David have thought it was God's will for him to kill Saul?

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Nov 2012



- What do you think David's thought process was in those moments? What factors made his decision easier or more difficult?
- Are there situations you face/faced in your own life when it's been right to either take the advice of friends/others or to ignore it? How do you assess the advice of friends/others?
- Share any times when you have given well-intentioned good or bad advice to friends, relatives or colleagues.

Exercise: Each on your own, take a piece of paper.

1: Write or draw in the middle a difficult decision - either one that you have faced, or you might have to face.

For example: 'Should I take a job that means working away more or on Sunday mornings?' or 'How often should I visit my elderly relative?' or 'How much time or money should I give to church?' or 'Should I move house?' or 'How do I choose a spouse?' or...

2: Draw/write round the edge as many different factors that could influence the decision as you can think of.

3: In 3s, 4s or 5s: Share what you've thought about/written

- David could have taken matters into his own hands by killing Saul. Instead he relies on God.
 - * In what situations do you find it most difficult to rely on God (or to wait for God's timing), rather than take matters into your own hands?
- Saul recognises that David has been right and he has been wrong. When have you been humbled by someone else's better decision?

WHAT NEXT?

- Keep praying for one another to make good decisions.
- Pray for those in society who have to make tough decisions that affect many others – eg in politics, business, public services
- Pray for the upcoming Alpha Course

Making Great Decisions

3: Decisions: In touch with God

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Play with a building game or toy together, like Jenga, Lego, Kinex etc

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Read Psalm 18:1-3 & 16-29: This is another Psalm David wrote reflecting on last time's encounter with Saul. Try coming up with your own short Psalm-like verses about some situation in your life at the moment or in the past. Don't worry if they're not very poetic!

WORD

David is now king. Read the whole chapter or...

Read 2 Samuel 7:1-7 & 11b-13 & 17-22 & 27-29

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- In verses 1-7, how and why did Nathan & David go wrong?
- Why do you think Nathan said what he did in verse 3? How easy is it to assume that because God is for us, then we're in the right?
- Share any times when you or others have decided to do something that you thought was right, only to find later that you got it wrong?

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Nov 2012



- Nathan said one thing to David & then had to go back & say he was wrong. Why do you think this would be easy or hard?
- Nathan heard God clearly (eventually!) How easy do you find it to work out what God's saying to you?
- God effectively says to David that he shouldn't build a temple –that will be his son's job (v13 –Solomon). How do you think David felt about this? What could he do about it? Have you ever felt similar?
- Consider David's prayer (v18-29): What overall pattern does it take? What are the main themes? How does David talk to God? What is the tone?
- Are there types of prayer that David includes that you think we don't use much today? Are there other types of prayer that are missing?
- How do you normally pray? Are there things that you can learn from David's prayer?
- **Extra:** God promises that David's kingdom will last for ever (v13, 16). How was this fulfilled in the New Testament? How could this be relevant for us today?

WHAT NEXT?

- Spend some time praying together, but begin with some prayers of praise. You could try using verse 22: 'How great you are, O Lord, you... each finishing the sentence & all joining in with 'Amen'.
- **Challenge!** Try setting yourself a prayer target for the next fortnight*. Share your target with another member of the group & ask one another how you've done next time you meet!
**For example: I will take 3 minutes of silence each day and ask God to speak or I will ask God to guide me after each mealtime or I will pray for a work colleague/neighbour on my way to work or I will say a short prayer after each phone call/email for the person who called or...*

Making Great Decisions

4: Decisions: When we get it wrong

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Share any funny stories you've heard of people making mistakes (you could search Youtube for 'funny mistakes' or similar)

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Place a cross in the middle of the room (it could simply be made of paper or sticks). Play some quiet instrumental music or worship song in the background. Individually, think of an important decision that you are making now or in the future. When you have, choose an object (eg a watch, shoe, credit card, something in the room etc) to represent it. Then place that item in the middle of the room at the cross. As you do, quietly commit the decision to God and ask for his help.

WORD

Read 2 Samuel 11

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- What was David's first sin? What sins followed?

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Nov 2012



- At each stage: How could David have decided to get out of the downward spiral? Why didn't he? (as many reasons as possible)
- How many other people can you identify that David's sin impacted and how?
- How do you think God felt about David's actions? How do you think David felt about his own actions?
- What do you think was the impact of David's actions on his relationship with God and his ability to make good decisions?
- Can you think of situations where we convince ourselves that something that is wrong is right?
 - * Think of examples individually, in organisations, nationally and internationally.
 - * What are the effects?
- Even Jesus was tempted – but he didn't give in. What are the most common temptations we face today? In what practical ways can we resist them?
- When we do sin, what steps can we take to ensure we don't make things even worse?

WHAT NEXT?

- Share how you've got on with the Prayer Targets you set last time – if you haven't done well – say sorry to God & try again... or set a more realistic target!

Try using Up-In-Out for praying:

- UP: Say prayers of thanks and praise to God
- IN: Share personal prayer requests & pray for one another.
 - * Pray also for the church – activities, members, leaders
- OUT: Pray for our local community, our work in it and outreach
- FAR OUT: Pray for one of the organisations that we support as a church, such as Eden or Tearfund

Making Great Decisions

5: Decisions: Getting Back on Track

WELCOME

Spend time relaxing & sharing together. You could try this...

Can you think of a story with a moral that you think is particularly good? (It could be one of Jesus' parables or a children's story or TV or something else)

WORSHIP

Use music, silence, prayer, meditation, reflection, songs, hymns, etc. or be creative with drawing, writing, symbols, poetry etc to help people to draw near to God. You could try this...

Sing a worship song together. Then have 3 minutes of timed silence alone. Each ask God to point out anything in your life that you're getting wrong. Say sorry to him, ask for his forgiveness and his help. Then read Psalm 51:1-12 aloud together. (Psalm 51 was written by David after today's story). Then say to one another: 'God forgives you.'

WORD

This week's story follows on from last time's, so first, see how much of that story you can remember between you. Check it in 2 Samuel 11.

Read 2 Samuel 12:1-20

Discuss your initial reactions to the passage:

- Does anything in the passage jump out at you? Why?
- Does anything connect with something you've been doing, reading or thinking about?
- Is there anything you haven't noticed before?

Now use **some** of the questions below (*and set a time limit to leave yourselves time to pray!*)

- Compared to 2 Samuel 7, Nathan has a much tougher message for David. How do you think he felt when God sent him to tell David?

Growth Group Notes

Sept-Nov 2012



- Read Matthew 7:3-5. Jesus warns about the dangers of pointing out someone else's sin. However, God tells Nathan to confront David with his sin. How do we decide when it's right to point out someone else's sin or not?
- David appears to have convinced himself that what he's done wrong is actually OK – perhaps because it couldn't be undone – 'water under the bridge'. But God wants him to **repent, be forgiven and then move on**. Give examples of how we might do the same.
- What effects does it have on people's lives (give examples) when:
 - * ...they say their sin doesn't matter (or justify it) and don't repent?
 - * ...they say 'nobody found out' so it's all OK
 - * ...they recognise their sin, but don't ask God for forgiveness
 - * ...they recognise sin, repent, but don't move on
 - * ...they recognise their sin, seek forgiveness, repent and move on
- How does being right with God affect our decision-making?
- Admitting you're wrong isn't popular today. What effect does this have on our lives and our society?
- David couldn't say sorry to Uriah or be forgiven by him, because Uriah was dead. How do you think this made it easier/harder?
- David recognised that as well as sinning against others, he had sinned against God (v13) What does this mean?
- God forgives David his sin, but is concerned about the wider impact on the reputation of God and his people in the eyes of others (v14). Do we ever 'over-personalise' sin and forget the wider impact?

WHAT NEXT?

- Discuss how you can build into your lives patterns of repentance and forgiveness. Pray for one another to resist temptation.
- You could finish by praying the Lord's Prayer together (Matthew 6:9-13) – focussing particularly on verse 12-13
- How have you got on with this series? Feedback is always helpful!