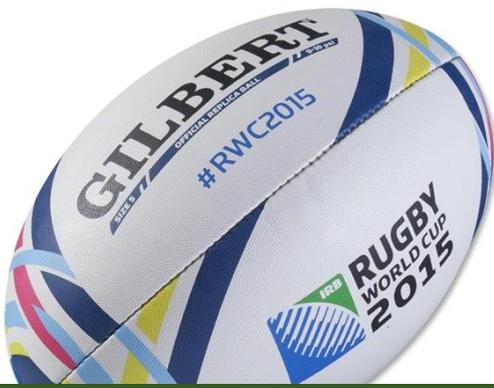


# TOO BIG TO MISS

**A STUDY OF DAVID THROUGH THE EYES OF A RUGBY FAN**



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# BIGGER THAN THE GIANTS

A formidable opponent on a sports field is terrifying enough when what is at stake is a World Championship title. For a young boy named David, the stakes were far higher - the threat of slavery for his entire nation! Nothing could be more intimidating and yet David steps onto the battlefield with courage. This week we journey with David as he takes on his giant.

## MONDAY: ANOINTED

### READING

But the Lord said to Samuel, "Don't judge by his appearance or height, for I have rejected him. The LORD doesn't see things the way you see them. People judge by outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.

1 Samuel 16: 7

### REFLECTION

When the LORD sent the prophet Samuel to anoint one of Jesse's sons as the future king of Israel, Samuel was initially impressed by David's tall and strong brother Eliab. The LORD, however, gently drew Samuel away from these superficial standards with a simple reminder – "people judge by outer appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart".

God chose David not because of any physical attribute, but because of the attitude of his heart. As the olive oil was poured over this young man's head, the Spirit of the Lord came powerfully upon him.

This is David's story, but it is also our story. From childhood we discover a competitive world where "being chosen" is a privilege for a select few. We experience disappointments when we're not chosen – be it for a sports team at school or a promotion at work. Yet the LORD makes it clear that being called into the winning team for Christ is no longer an opportunity reserved for an exclusive group of people. Instead, God has chosen every follower of Christ to play a unique role in God's plan for the world. If we take up the call with a humble and trusting heart, we too can slay giants in the name of the LORD.

Do you base your self-worth on outer attributes or an inner awareness of God's love? Have you ever taken time to consider what action or service God has *chosen* you for? In what ways do you need the Spirit to equip you for your calling?

### PRAYER

*Father, look into my heart and purify me so that I can do that which you have called me for. Amen*

# TUESDAY: TAUNTED

## READING

As he was talking with them, Goliath, the Philistine champion from Gath, stepped out from his lines and shouted his usual defiance, and David heard it. Whenever the Israelites saw the man, they all fled from him in great fear. **1 Sam 17: 23 – 24**

## REFLECTION

When was the last time you saw a giant?

I'm not talking about the guy on stilts at Gold Reef City. I'm not talking about the bouncer at the night club. I'm talking about the last time that you stood in front of a person or a problem or a predicament and thought to yourself – *There is no way I can overcome this!!!!!!* Everything in you wanted to flee. Your feet were already out of the door.

Maybe you're standing in front of one right now and chances of victory seem small. Perhaps you have all but given up as that addiction or difficult relationship or unjust situation looms tall ahead of you. If that is you today, may this be a reminder that you aren't standing on that battle field on your own. Even if everyone else has run away in great fear, there is one who stands at your side who is far bigger than any giant you could ever face. For a moment tune out the sound of the giant's threatening taunts and listen instead to the voice of truth that says **YOU ARE NOT ALONE.**

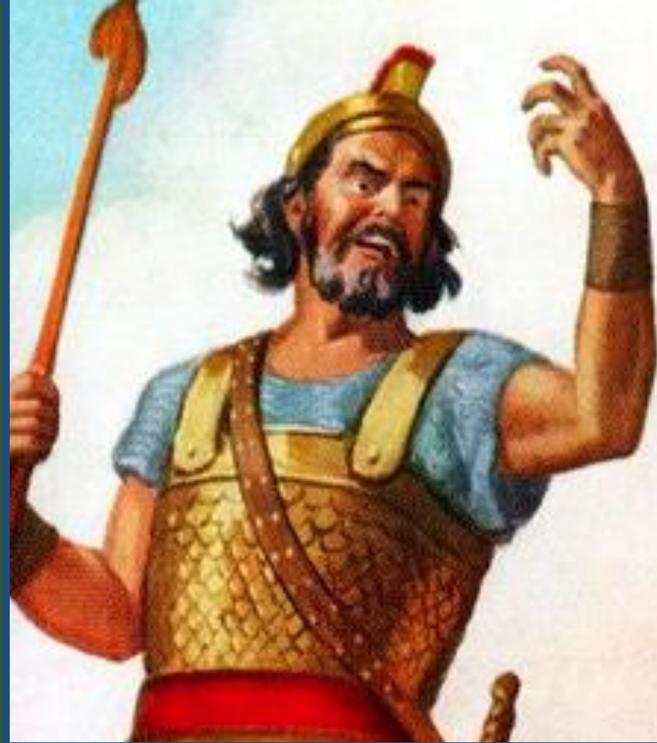
What is causing fear in your heart today?

What is causing fear in the hearts of those you love?

How can you experience and share God's *encouragement* today?

## PRAYER

*Almighty God – you are bigger, you are greater, you are stronger. Help me not to forget that. Help me not to give in to my fear but to choose to trust you. May I learn to hear your voice over any other.*  
*Amen*



## FOR the kids

Watch this cute song "God is Bigger than the Boogeyman" <http://tinyurl.com/pfoaftr>



But the voice of Truth tells me a different story  
And the voice of Truth says "Do not be afraid"  
And the voice of Truth says "This is for My Glory"  
Out of all the voices calling out to me  
I will choose to listen and believe the voice of Truth.

~CASTING CROWNS



# WEDNESDAY: DELIVERED

## READING

But David said to Saul, "Your servant has been keeping his father's sheep. When a lion or a bear came and carried off a sheep from the flock, I went after it, struck it and rescued the sheep from its mouth. When it turned on me, I seized it by its hair, struck it and killed it. Your servant has killed both the lion and the bear; this uncircumcised Philistine will be like one of them, because he has defied the armies of the living God. The LORD who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will rescue me from the hand of this Philistine." Saul said to David, "Go, and the LORD be with you." **1 Sam 17: 34 - 37**

## REFLECTION

"God has not let me down before and he won't start now" – this was essentially what David was saying as he confidently predicted Goliath's defeat. Stop for a moment and remember the times in your life when you thought you would never make it to the end of the challenge you were facing and yet, miraculously, God brought you through it.

In times when it feels like God is distant and uninvolved in your life, the simple act of recalling past experiences of God's faithfulness can restore our trust that the same God is with us in our present struggles and faithful to deliver us.

## PRAYER

*Father, thank you for all those times you came to my rescue, both in the times that I fell into your arms with gratitude and in the times I didn't even notice how much you had helped me to pull through. I am sorry that so often my pride prevents me from seeing your hand in my success. As I look back on all that you have done for me, may I be filled with courage for all that lies ahead of me. Amen*



The Lord who rescued me from the paw of the lion and the paw of the bear will deliver me from this Philistine

# THURSDAY: DRESSED TO KILL

## READING

Then Saul dressed David in his own tunic. He put a coat of armour on him and a bronze helmet on his head. David fastened on his sword over the tunic and tried walking around, because he was not used to them. "I cannot go in these," he said to Saul, "because I am not used to them." So he took them off. **1 Sam 17: 38 - 39**

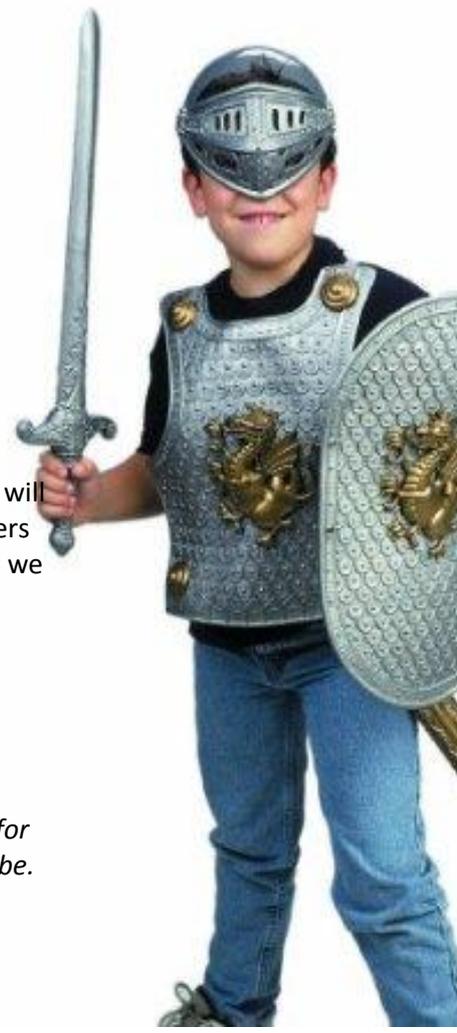
## REFLECTION

If David's primary objective had been to please King Saul, he would have stumbled out onto the battlefield in heavy armour – possibly with tragic consequences for all of Israel. When you and I face challenges it can be helpful to get advice from others, but it is important to remember that prayerful obedience is worth more than all the solutions that will be offered to us by onlookers. Facing giants while "dressing up" in the expectations of others can weigh us down and steal our victory. On the other hand, when we come to God just as we are, we make room for God to use us for his glory.

Have you talked to God about your problem as much as you have talked to others?  
Is your solution to your problem what God expects of you or what others expect of you?

## PRAYER

*Jesus, help me to see myself through your eyes and to stop pretending to be someone else for the sake of pleasing others. I want the freedom of becoming the ME you have made me to be. Help me to let go of all of defences that are not from you and to fight life's battles in your strength alone. Amen*



# FRIDAY: DROP YOUR WEAPONS

## READING

David replied to the Philistine, “You come to me with sword, spear and javelin, but I come to you in the name of the LORD of Heaven’s armies – the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied.

Today the LORD will conquer you, and I will kill you and cut off your head.”

1 Samuel 17: 45 - 46

## REFLECTION

The world we live in tells us that we need to keep our weapons ready - to rely on our money or education or status or beauty as our guarantee of success. Yet, as all too many people have learned, none of these physical things can offer us the promise of true joy or peace. However impressive our “stuff” might be, its value is limited to fleeting satisfaction in this life and no worth whatsoever in the life to come. In the spiritual battles that we all face, our hope of victory is found only in the name of the LORD. As we live in him and he lives through us, Christ help us to overcome our fears, temptations and addictions. He brings us to true victory where we are “more than conquerors” because of his love (Romans 8: 37).

What material things are you relying on for security instead of relying on God?

## PRAYER

*Jesus, give me the courage to surrender every “weapon” I use to fight my way through life in my own strength. I want to rely on you alone. May your word be my sword and your Spirit my shield. May I face my battles with courage in the name of the LORD. Amen*



# SATURDAY: WHO AM I

## READING

As soon as David returned from killing Goliath, Abner brought him to Saul with the Philistine’s head still in his hand. “Tell me about your father, young man,” Saul said. And David replied, “His name is Jesse and we live in Bethlehem”

1 Sam 17: 56 - 57

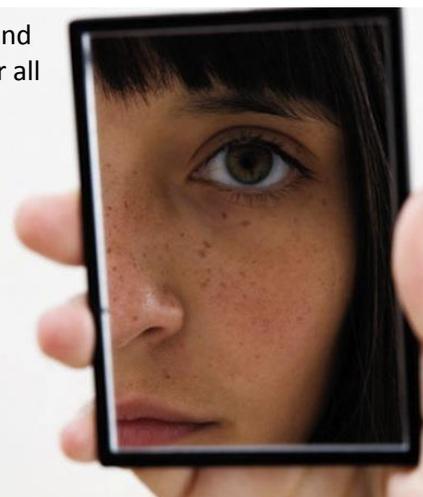
## REFLECTION

To ask the question “Who is your father” was to take seriously the identity of any young man. It was essentially the same as asking “Who are you *really*?” A boy’s identity was culturally inseparable from that of his father in ancient Israel, and even we today might sometimes feel we are defined by our parents’ status or actions. The children of an abusive father or alcoholic mother might live in fear that they too will succumb to these unhealthy family patterns. Others grow up with so much admiration for a “perfect” parent that they never quite consider themselves adequate by comparison. Our parents are an important part of who we are, but they do not define us nor are they the benchmark by which we are to measure ourselves. If you are sincerely asked to give an account for who you are, the primary defining point of your identity is not who BIRTHED and RAISED you but who CREATED and DIED for you. May this be a comfort and a challenge for all of us as we are transformed into resemblance to our Father in heaven.

What three words do you think God – your Father – would use to describe who you are?

## PRAYER

*God, help me to understand what it means to find my identity in you. My family, my culture, my gender and my name are all a part of who I am, but none of these define me. I want to understand deep within myself that I am a child of the King. Amen*



# SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

## KICK-OFF

Share the story of the most formidable opponent you ever faced in a sports match, competition or real life situation.

*“God is bigger than any word or concept that we have come to use to hold or understand God. That is why the Hebrews of old were not allowed to have the name of G-d on their lips, (they weren’t allowed to write it out in full either), because it was both too holy and too large. In other words they recognised that God (and God’s name) broke out of all human categories not least our human vocabulary. There are some today who even decide not to use the word ‘God’ perhaps because they find it is too small, too limiting, too bound to a sense of religious institution and choose rather to use other words. A current favourite is “the universe”, that I imagine is used either consciously or unconsciously to counteract the contamination of God by the small.” Rev Alan Storey*

## SCRUM

### READ 1 SAMUEL 17: 20 – 51

- Goliath and his threats caused a lot of emotion among the people of Israel, including great fear (verse 24) and anger (verse 28). What are the threats facing your community? In what ways are they causing fear and anger?
- When David stepped up to the challenge of fighting Goliath, his brother Eliab insulted him, not believing he could slay the giant. How do you continue to press on when you have faced discouragement?
- Read the passage and list all the specific choices David made which ultimately led to Goliath’s defeat. How can you learn from him as you face decisions of your own today?
- Do you respect King Saul’s leadership in this situation? Why or why not? If you are in a leadership position, what can you learn from his actions?
- David found courage in his memories of God’s past faithfulness (verse 37). Share a time God really helped you overcome a challenge. How can these kinds of stories encourage us as individuals and as a nation?
- David refused to rely on armour or weapons but rather on God’s power. Which of the following “weapons” you typically use in life to defend yourself - manipulation, sarcasm, avoidance, aggression or dominance. What is stopping you from confronting difficult situations in a more Christ-like way?

### READ MATTHEW 10: 16 - 31

- What emotions are stirred in you as you hear Jesus saying these things?
- The passage suggests that conflict and danger are inevitable in the life of a disciple. When last did your witness for Christ bring you to a place of suffering or persecution?
- Jesus says “do not be afraid of those who kill the body”. What are you most afraid of in life? How would your life and your actions be different if you were not afraid?

## OFF THE PITCH

In addition to battles that we face personally, there are some battles that whole communities and nations face. As a group, identify one “giant” threatening our country (e.g. poverty, violence, education decline) and commit to praying and even taking action against this “giant” in any way that you can.

## CLOSING

Invite your group to close their eyes and picture whatever “giant” they are facing while you read Psalm 3 aloud to them. Close your session together in prayer.



# BIGGER THAN THE CROWD

Every team hopes to play their final match with home crowd advantage, relying on cheers to boost their performance. As David took the journey from a humble shepherd to the King of Israel, he too had crowds of onlookers, some who shouted his praises and others who despised him. In the end, what mattered to David was not the spectators on the side-lines, but his ultimate coach, the LORD. This week we explore David's journey with the crowds.

## MONDAY: THE FANS

### READING

When the victorious army was returning home after David had killed the Philistine, women from all the towns of Israel came out to meet King Saul. They sang and danced for joy with tambourines and cymbals. This was their song: "Saul has killed his thousands, and David his ten thousands" **1 Samuel 18: 6-7**

### REFLECTION

If you have ever won a match for your team then you have a taste of what David experienced. He became an overnight celebrity, inundated with admiration. Being popular feels good but it isn't without challenges. There is the temptation to become arrogant. One might enjoy popularity so much that the approval of the crowd becomes addictive – bringing you to a place where you will do anything (even compromise your integrity) to retain their praise. Being popular can also mean that you are placed on a pedestal - and I don't know about you, but I am afraid of heights! Galatians 1: 10 says this *"If I was still trying to please man, I would not be a servant of Christ"*. We need to surrender our desire for popularity and replace it with a desire to please the LORD - our audience of one. When we live for his glory rather than the approval of others we find the freedom to follow God without restraint.

Where in your life are you compromising yourself for the sake of approval or popularity?  
Is there anyone in your life whose opinion of you means more to you than it should?  
How can you be intentional about pleasing God rather than pleasing others?

### PRAYER

*Jesus... It feels good when people say my name with admiration in their eyes. Something in me stirs when I know that others are looking up to me. Yet in a deeper place I know that the approval of human beings will never be enough for me to feel truly accepted and loved. I hurt myself and others when I let the voices in the crowd become more important to me than Your voice – my creator and my coach in this life and the life beyond.. Amen*





# TUESDAY: THE RIVAL

## READING

This made Saul very angry. “What’s this?” he said. “They credit David with ten thousands and me with only thousands. Next they’ll be making him their king!” So from that time on, Saul kept a jealous eye on David.” **1 Samuel 18: 8-9**

## REFLECTION

How do you respond when you know that someone is jealous of you or threatened by you? Do you rub it in by flaunting your achievements? Do you downplay your potential to avoid stepping on their toes? Neither response is helpful. Each one of us has been individually created and uniquely called by God. When someone else sees us as a rival rather than a co-worker in the cause of Christ, we need to avoid the temptation to enter into a cycle of envy and contempt.

Can you relate to David who was envied or to Saul who felt threatened and jealous? If you relate to David, how can you avoid becoming discouraged by your rival? If you relate to Saul, what do you think is at the root of your jealous feelings?

## PRAYER

*LORD... When I am faced with the scorn of people who see life as a competition, help me to respond in a way that brings the glory back to you. Amen*

# WEDNESDAY: THE FRIENDS

## READING

Read the account of David’s friendship with Jonathan in **1 Samuel 20: 19 – 20**. Key verse: Jonathan made David reaffirm his vow of friendship again, for Jonathan loved David as he loved himself. **1 Sam 20: 17**

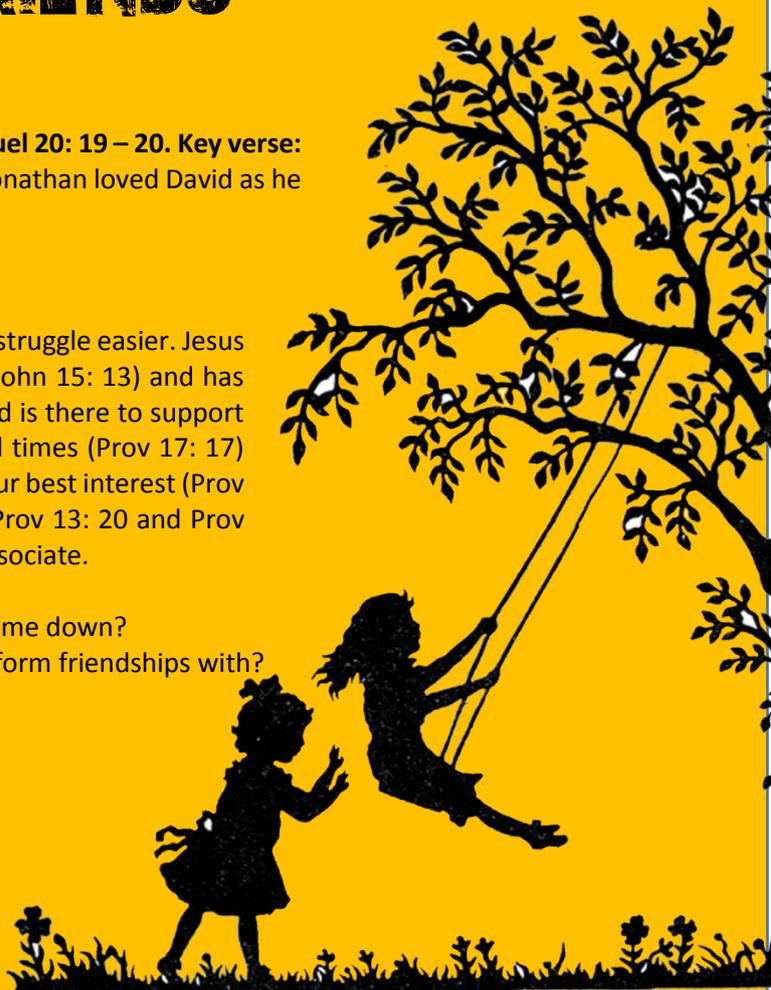
## REFLECTION

Knowing that you have a true friend cheering you on makes any struggle easier. Jesus has been a true friend to us, even laying down his life for us (John 15: 13) and has given us the gift of friendship with another people. A true friend is there to support you in your time of need (Ecclesiastes 4: 9-10), loves you at all times (Prov 17: 17) and may even say things that are difficult to hear when it is in your best interest (Prov 27: 5-6). Scripture warns us to be careful in choosing friends (Prov 13: 20 and Prov 22: 24-25) as we will begin to resemble those with whom we associate.

Am I surrounding myself with people who build me up or break me down?  
How am I being influenced by the people that I have chosen to form friendships with?

## PRAYER

*Father, thank you that you created us with a longing in our hearts for friendship and community with others. Help me to connect deeply with people that will enrich my life and draw me closer to you, and enable me to be that kind of friend to others. Thank you for your friendship to me. Amen*



# THURSDAY: MOCKERS

## READING

“As the ark of the LORD was entering the City of David, Michal daughter of Saul watched from a window. And when she saw King David leaping and dancing before the LORD she despised him in her heart... When David returned home to bless his household, Michael daughter of Saul came out to meet him and said, “How the King of Israel has distinguished himself today, disrobing in the sight of slave girls of his servants as any vulgar fellow would!” David said to Michal, “It was before the LORD who chose me rather than your father or anyone from his house when he appointed me ruler over the LORD’S people Israel – I will celebrate before the LORD. I will become even more undignified than this.” **2 Samuel 6: 16, 20 - 21**

## REFLECTION

Sometimes God touches his people so deeply that they abandon all inhibitions and worship or follow him in radical ways. Unfortunately, not everyone in your life will be supportive when God leads you to transform the way that you live. Co-workers may label you a “religious nut”. Fellow Christians may become uncomfortable if your renewed devotion reminds them how complacent they have become. You may even find that those who are closest to you respond in hurtful ways, as David discovered when he returned home to a contemptuous wife.

It is sad that our society encourages outrageous displays of passion from patriots at sports stadiums, yet does not easily tolerate zealous demonstrations of love for Christ. Each of us needs to decide in our worship and lifestyles whether we will bend to those who mock our extravagant love or whether we, like David, will with firm resolve that we will “become even more undignified than this”.

## PRAYER

*Lord, help me to be bold in demonstrating my love for you. Amen*



# FRIDAY: THE COACH

## READING

“Now then, tell my servant David, ‘This is what the Lord Almighty says: I took you from the pasture and from following the flock to be ruler over my people Israel. I have been with you wherever you have gone, and I have cut off all your enemies before you. Now I will make your name great, like the names of the greatest men on earth. And I will provide a place for my people Israel and will plant them so they can have a home of their own and no longer be disturbed. Wicked people shall not oppress them anymore, as they did at the beginning and have done ever since the time I appointed leaders over my people. I will also give you rest from all your enemies.’” **2 Sam 7: 8 - 11**

## REFLECTION

Sir Alex Ferguson spent 26 seasons as the manager of Manchester United, the English football (soccer) club. Some call him the greatest coach in history.

Sir Alex said that his job as a coach was to inspire people to be better. To give them better technical skills, make them winners, make them better people, and then they could go anywhere in life. As a coach on the field you don’t see everything, but a regular observer does! He delegated the training sessions to his assistant coaches but he was always present and he watched over them. He trained several football stars to become world famous players.

The most important spectator of our lives is the coach who takes his players from zero to hero. In 2 Sam 7:8-11 God says to David that He has coached him from an ordinary shepherd to become leader of His people. He helped David to become one of the most famous people of the world. David and his descendants would become Kings. One of them, Jesus, became the eternal King of this world. As with David, God continuously watches over us. We don’t need the crowds. We need God as our coach to become successful.

## PRAYER

*LORD, teach me to submit to you and follow your lead, knowing you’re always there. Amen*



Guest Contributor  
for today:

Nicolaas  
Oosthuysen

West View  
member



# SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

## KICK-OFF

Have you ever had a crowd cheer for you? How did it feel? How did it affect your performance?

## SCRUM

- David had many diverse onlookers in his life – the adoring fans, the jealous rivals, a devoted friend, a discouraging brother and a wife with particular expectations. Can you relate to David in any of these? Which ones and why?
- Read these examples of how David responds when the voices of his onlookers were discouraging or unhelpful:  
*1 Samuel 17: 29*  
*1 Samuel 17: 39*  
*1 Samuel 17: 45 – 46*  
*2 Samuel 6: 21*

Where would you put yourself on the following scale when it comes to asserting yourself in life?

**Doormat** ----- **Bulldozer**

How do you feel about this? How would you like to grow in this area?

- David was not afraid to stand up for himself and for God. Yet in 1 Samuel 24 and 26, David has the opportunity to kill King Saul and chooses to spare his life. What does this teach us about the difference between being assertive and being aggressive?

### READ PHILIPPIANS 3: 12 - 21

- Exodus 23: 32 (KJV) says “Thou shalt not follow the masses in doing evil”. It may sometimes feel that we are surrounded by crowds of people who are making poor choices and living destructive lives. As Christians we are always “away from our home turf” because we are not citizens of this world but citizens of heaven. What practices have been helpful to you in following Christ’s example rather than that of those around you?
- Are there any voices in your personal crowd of onlookers that are holding you back from pressing on to take hold of Christ? If so, how can you choose to minimize their influence in your life?

## OFF THE PITCH

Ask each group member to identify one person in their life who needs encouragement and to commit to being a “spiritual cheerleader” for them this week. Give them a word of encouragement, pray for them or support them in any other way. As you bless, you will be blessed.

## CLOSING:

### Lectio Devina using Hebrews 12: 1

Encourage all group members to sit comfortably with their eyes closed. Explain that someone will be reading a passage of scripture at least three times with a period of silence in between. Encourage them to meditate on the words of the passage and to ponder what God is saying to them personally. Then spend some time in silent prayer.



# BIGGER THAN OUR BROKENNESS

In sports and in life, there are boundaries set before us and when we “cross the line” there are inevitably consequences. This week we enter into a dark time in David’s life and witness his journey from the brokenness of his own sin to the healing power of God’s redemptive

## MONDAY: IN PLAIN SIGHT

### READING

One evening David got up from his bed and walked around on the roof of the palace. From the roof he saw a woman bathing. The woman was very beautiful, and David sent someone to find out about her. The man said, "She is Bathsheba, the daughter of Eliam and the wife of Uriah the Hittite." Then David sent messengers to get her. She came to him, and he slept with her. (Now she was purifying herself from her monthly uncleanness.) Then she went back home. **2 Samuel 11: 2 - 4**

### REFLECTION

In our day and age it would be unusual to see someone bathing on their rooftop, but it is far from uncommon for our eyes to be flooded with nudity wherever we look. A popular Johannesburg strip club entices patrons with crude billboards to be seen by young and old. Internet pop-ups promise pleasing pictures and videos at the click of a mouse. Magazine racks no longer hide pornographic magazines but place them in prime view. Blockbuster movies romanticize violent and abusive sex, luring women into unhealthy fantasies of domination and pain. It may begin to feel unlikely that anyone in our society today can follow the advice of the old Sunday School song which says “be careful little eyes what you see”. Unfortunately like David we will all be caught off guard with unexpected visual temptations. Perhaps the song ought to be adapted to say “Be careful little mind how you respond to what you see”. Will you allow yourself to linger lustfully or will you look away?

Will you give your mind freedom to fantasize about the sight or will you pray for strength to refocus your mind on that which is pure and faithful? Pornography destroys relationships. It creates unrealistic expectations. It takes away the thrill of genuine sexual encounter. It makes sex about personal satisfaction instead of two people mutually pleasing one another. It crushes trust and confidence. It causes your partner to question his or her worthiness. It is addictive. If you are caught in the trap of pornography, take responsibility today to turn your eyes away. Find a trusted Christian friend to confide in who can pray for you and help you to develop a plan to overcome this addiction in your life. God will be with you every step of the way.

**PRAYER** *Lord, teach me how to live in purity in the midst of a crude world. Amen*

## Protecting children from pornography

Children as young as eight years old are at risk of being exposed to pornographic material on their phones and tablets or those of their friends. It is crucial for parents to be aware of what their children are viewing on their devices and to have honest preventative conversations with them. Talk to your children openly and honestly about their bodies as something special that God has made. Have age-appropriate conversations about sexuality and respect, answering their questions. Let your child know they can talk to you if they are ever unsure of something they see. For more information and ideas visit the following website: [www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/sexuality](http://www.focusonthefamily.com/parenting/sexuality)



# TUESDAY: HER STORY

## READING

The woman conceived and sent word to David, saying "I am pregnant" **2 Samuel 11: 5**

## REFLECTION

Imagine the story of David and Bathsheba from her perspective. There she was, busy with a simple act of daily hygiene, when she was suddenly accosted by messengers from the King. They ushered her to the palace, barely giving her a chance to pull her robe over her shoulders. Can you picture her trembling as she was brought before David? The Bible doesn't tell us how their encounter unfolded and whether David was persuasive and seductive or if he simply stated his desire, taking advantage of the fact that one did not say "no" to a King. What we know is this - when it was over, Bathsheba went back home alone, ashamed and literally bearing the consequence.

The Bible is filled with untold perspectives of women – named and unnamed – who were exploited by the powerful and strong. How did Sarai feel when Abraham denied she was his wife to protect his own skin? What would have happened to Naomi had Ruth not decided to accompany her? Even the notorious seductress Delilah was a pawn used by her Philistine family members.

Not much has changed. Our society is structured in such a way that the voices of the vulnerable and weak are silenced. We see pictures of Syrian refugees but seldom come to know their names. We stumble across the statistics of human trafficking but their stories are not told.

Jesus was different. His birth announcement bypassed Herod's household and invited humble shepherds in. His mother and father were ordinary people who could afford no more than a dove for their sacrifice. He spoke deeply with a woman whom his contemporaries would have ignored and allowed another to sit at his feet rather than serve him a meal. When the disciples tried to spare him the nuisance of blessing small children he admonished them and let the children come. There is no such thing as a "nobody" with Jesus and no excuse to treat anyone as though their story doesn't matter.

Have you ever experienced the pain of not being heard?

How can you allow God to heal you of resentment and to help you gain a voice?

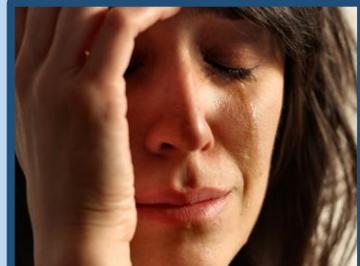
Whose perspective do you need to stop and consider today?

## PRAYER

*Father, forgive me for jumping to conclusions and judging others without knowing their perspective or hearing their story. Teach me to see and to hear the voices of those who are vulnerable as I seek to live my life in a loving way. Amen*



The helpless  
put their  
trust in you.  
PSALM 10: 14



# WEDNESDAY: ONE LEADS TO ANOTHER

## READING

In the morning David wrote a letter to Joab and sent it with Uriah. In it he wrote, "Put Uriah out in front where the fighting is fiercest. Then withdraw from him so he will be struck down and die." So while Joab had the city under siege, he put Uriah at a place where he knew the strongest defenders were. When the men of the city came out and fought against Joab, some of the men in David's army fell; moreover, Uriah the Hittite died. **2 Samuel 11: 14 - 17**

## REFLECTION

Like a virus in the body, sin multiplies rapidly. One poor choice can lead to a myriad of wrong-doing. Sin multiplies to covers its tracks, as in the case of David who used murder as a way to hide adultery. Sin multiplies when a conscience that goes ignored once becomes easier to ignore again. Sin multiplies not only in the lives of individuals but in the systems of society – governments, businesses, institutions.

Once its deadly plague has its grip on our lives, we may fear we have become terminally sin-sick. Perhaps this is how Paul felt when he cried "Who will save me from this body of death?" (Rom 7: 24).

Fortunately Paul goes on to answer his own question and ours as well...

"THANKS BE TO GOD – THROUGH JESUS CHRIST OUR LORD!"

## PRAYER

*Lord, break the cycle of sin in my life and save me from myself. Amen*



# THURSDAY: TAKE A STAND

## READING

For background, read the whole of 2 Samuel 12 along with the reading for today:

Have mercy on me, O God, according to your unfailing love; according to your great compassion blot out my transgressions. Wash away all my iniquity and cleanse me from my sin. For I know my transgressions and my sin is always before me. Against you and you only have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight, so that you are proved right when you speak and justified when you judge”

**Psalm 51: 1 - 5**

## REFLECTION

All nations have heroes and heroes tend to fall. From Paralympian athletes to Tour de France champions, we have seen time and again that no one is above the human brokenness that causes us to sin. There is no one but Christ who has lived a perfect life.

What is needed is people with courage to stand up and challenge society’s leaders and heroes when their actions are destructive or corrupt, just as the prophet Nathan courageously confronted King David. In taking a brave stand, Nathan not only stood up for those too weak to defend themselves, but showed deep love to David, leading him to a place of humble remorse. His truthful words cut through all of David’s justifications, and he cried out to God the confession of Psalm 51. We need more people to take a stand when leaders behave in unacceptable ways, praying that God will guide us in healthy resistance and lead our “heroes” to a place of humble repentance.

Who will be the prophet Nathan to our politicians when they steal from the poor to fund lavish lifestyles? Who will be the prophet Nathan to powerful men and women in our workplaces or communities that use their authority to disempower others?

Who or what can you courageously confront today?

## PRAYER

*God, show me where I can shine a light into dark places by speaking the truth in love. Amen*

# FRIDAY: REDEMPTION SONG

## READING

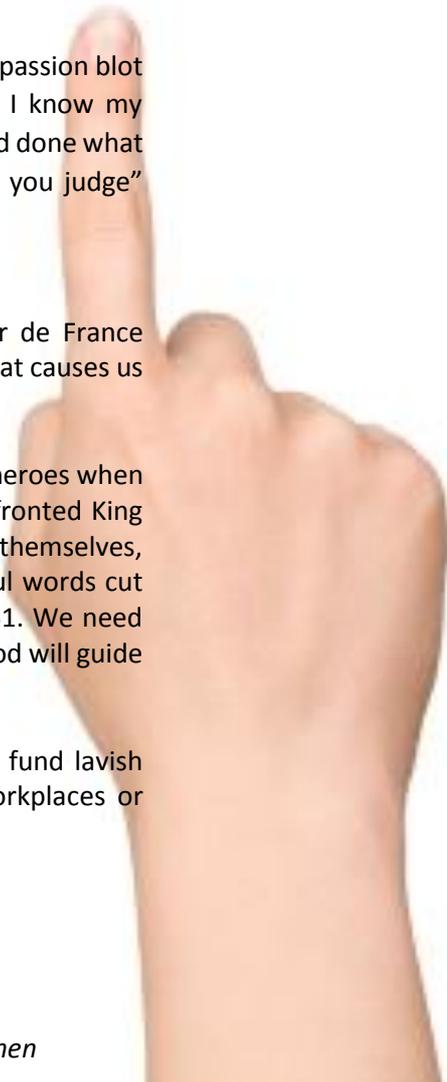
“Cleanse me with hyssop, and I will be clean; wash me, and I will be whiter than snow. Let me hear joy and gladness; let the bones you have crushed rejoice. Hide your face from my sins and blot out all my iniquity. Create in me a pure heart, O God, and renew a steadfast spirit within me. Do not cast me from your presence or take your Holy Spirit from me. Restore to me the joy of your salvation and grant me a willing spirit, to sustain me” **Psalm 51: 7 – 12**

## REFLECTION

David did more than play too close to the line – he jumped right over it! Yet in his moment of surrender and repentance God responded not with condemnation but with grace. He receives his child’s contrite and broken heart as a worthy sacrifice and restores him to a place of wholeness and joy. Philip Yancey has this to say about the mercy which triumphs over judgement: “By striving to prove how much they deserve God’s love, legalists miss the whole point of the gospel, that it is a gift from God to people who don’t deserve it. The solution to sin is not to impose an ever-stricter code of behaviour. It is to know God”

## PRAYER

*Father, thank you that you offered me forgiveness before I was even born. I choose to receive your amazing grace. Amen*



# SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

## KICK-OFF

Have you ever received a red card (or equivalent) in a sport? Share the story with your group.

## SCRUM

Psalm 51: 10 - 17

- While so many leaders (then and now) may have been unwilling to admit they were wrong, David openly confessed that he had messed up, confessing his sin in this Psalm.  
How easy is it for you to admit when you have done wrong? What makes it difficult or easy?
- David doesn't make excuses for his behaviour, but simply acknowledges that he is a sinner.  
What excuses do we tend to use when we succumb to sins in our daily lives?  
How do excuses and justifications keep us from real healing and growth?
- David asks God to create a pure heart within him (verse 10).  
If you are willing, share an area in your life where God has been changing an attitude of your heart.
- David describes a few ways he will respond to God's forgiveness. List these and consider whether these practices are a part of your life as much as they could be.
- *"I have come to know a God who has a soft spot for rebels, who recruits people like the adulterer David, the whiner Jeremiah, the traitor Peter, and the human-rights abuser Saul of Tarsus. I have come to know a God whose Son made prodigals the heroes of his stories and the trophies of his ministry." Philip Yancey*

God so often used the biggest sinners to make the biggest impact in the Kingdom of God.  
How could this change the way that we as a church treat those whom we consider sinful or impure?

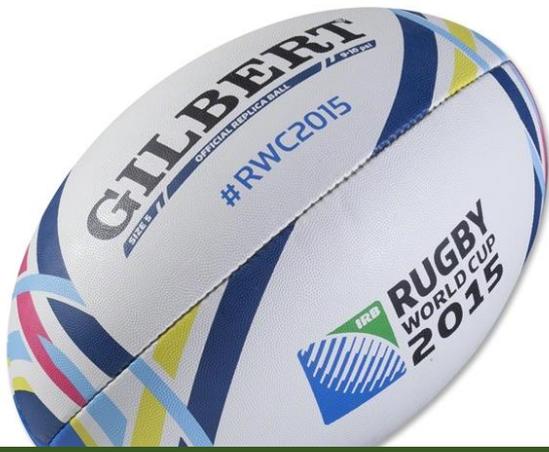
- Read **2 Samuel 12: 13 – 20** and then read **John 9: 1 – 3**  
What reason did people in ancient times give when they encountered pain and suffering?  
How did Jesus respond to this kind of reasoning in the Bible?  
Do you feel that the death of David's child really was an act of God? Why or why not?  
Can anyone other than Jesus pay the price of someone else's sin by their death?
- Discuss the quote below by Rev Alan Storey  
*"Sadly many of us have grown up with an understanding that in order to be holy we must delete (which often means deny) the 'bad' within us. But it is impossible to cut off the shadow (as pointless as trying to run away from our own shadow!). True holiness is the owning and embracing of our shadow. This is why if we read the journals of those who we call Saints, they write extensively about their shadow – they own it – and in so doing they don't have any need to project it onto anyone else causing great harm – thus they are Saints."*

## OFF THE PITCH

When we pray the Lord's Prayer, we say "forgive us our sins as we forgive those who sin against us". God has shown us amazing grace in our lives and God expects us to show that grace to others. Identify someone that you need to make amends with. This week make an effort to reach out to that person and offer your forgiveness.

## CLOSING

Read Psalm 103: 8 – 13 aloud together as a group and then close in a prayer of gratitude



# BIGGER THAN INJUSTICE

Something deep inside of us reviles against injustice from questionable decisions from a referee on a sports' field to the deep injustice of poverty and violence. Among David's own children a drama of exploitation and revenge unfolds, beginning and ending in tragedy. Where is God when life is utterly unfair?



## MONDAY: SUFFERING IN SILENCE

### READING

For background, read the whole of **2 Samuel 13** along with the reading for today:

Tamar put ashes on her head and tore the ornamented robe that she was wearing. She put her hand on her head and went away, weeping aloud as she went. Her brother Absalom said to her "Has that Amnon, your brother, been with you? Be quiet now my sister, he is your brother. Don't take this thing to heart." And Tamar lived in her brother Absalom's house a desolate woman. **2 Samuel 13: 19 - 20**

### REFLECTION

One of the slogans for "Thursdays in Black" (a campaign that raises awareness of violence against women) is the three word phrase "LOVE SHOULDN'T HURT". Today's passage is one of the most disturbing stories in scripture. A young virgin selflessly serving her brother becomes the object of his obsession and is stripped of her rights and her dignity as he overpowers her with force. Amnon "refused to listen to her and since he was stronger than she, he raped her".

Tamar was an incredible woman, confronting her attacker and refusing to hide the evidence of his hateful actions. Yet justice was denied to her as she – like so many abused women today – was advised to suffer in silence with the words "Hush, he is your brother."

Have you ever been asked to suffer in silence instead of seeking justice?

What steps can you take to move from a place of secret pain into a healing journey where you share your story?

What role can you play in the important fight for the rights of women and children affected by violence in our community?

### PRAYER

*Lord, bring justice for all victims of sexual or gender-based violence. Teach your church to take a stand so that we will not perpetuate the cycle of suffering in silence but give a voice to the survivors and justice for the perpetrators. Amen*

# TUESDAY: REVENGE

## READING

*"... Amnon is dead. This has been Absalom's expressed intention ever since the day that Amnon raped his sister Tamar"...Meanwhile, Absalom had fled. As he finished, the King's sons came in, wailing loudly. The King too, and all his servants, wept bitterly. 2 Sam 13: 32, 34, 36*

## REFLECTION

This is a story of blood and of tears, a story of how things unfold when justice is denied. While Absalom had advised his sister to keep quiet about her assault, a deep resentment within him turned to rage until finally it spilled over in murderous revenge. In an act of vigilante justice, Absalom takes matters into his own hands and murders his brother Amnon. King David – who knew about the rape but had chosen not to act on it – is now left mourning the loss of one son and the exile of another. Everywhere you looked there was a trail of tears and a lingering atmosphere of anger, blame and heartache.

Many a father or brother can relate to Absalom's actions in taking revenge for the attack on his sister. Some may even have respect for his choice to have the guilty party killed.

Yet scripture warns us of the dangers of revenge:

Job 18: 4 – *"You are only hurting yourself with your anger"*

Romans 12: 9 – *"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord.*

We are called to seek justice in this world as we confront the powerful, speak for the defenceless and take a stand against the actions of evil people. However, there comes a time when the injustices of this world are more than we as human beings can conquer. In these times our challenge is to hand it to God rather than allowing our righteous indignation to develop into rage and revenge – possibly leading us to actions just as harmful as those which angered us in the first place.

When injustice seems to prevail in this lifetime, we can trust God that the day will come when God's own self will see to justice for all who have been exploited and abused.

Are you holding onto resentment or hatred which you need to hand over to God?

## PRAYER

*LORD, search me for anger deep within my soul. Help me to leave it in your hands, trusting that justice will prevail not in my timing but in yours. I want to be free of this pain. Amen*



# WEDNESDAY: A FATHER'S LOVE

## READING

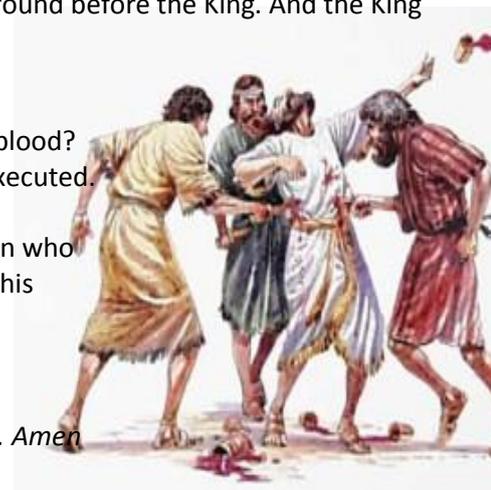
*"The King summoned Absalom and he came in and bowed down with his face to the ground before the King. And the King kissed Absalom." 2 Samuel 14: 33*

## REFLECTION

What do you do when the murderer of your son is also your child, your own flesh and blood? When Absalom was brought before David, he would have been justified to have him executed. Yet the love of a father prevailed and David had mercy on his son Absalom, lifting him from the ground and kissing him. If an earthly father is overwhelmed with love for a son who had caused him so much pain, how much more will our heavenly father show grace to his children when they come before his throne.

## PRAYER

*Lord, thank you for your fatherly forgiveness of my sins. May I never take it for granted. Amen*





# THURSDAY: KINDNESS

## READING

“Don’t be afraid” David said to him “Surely I will show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table” **2 Samuel 9: 7**

## REFLECTION

When one King took over from another in ancient times, the custom was to have his entire family killed to eliminate the threat of being usurped by a come-back king. By cultural standards of the day, David would have been justified in making sure that every last one of Saul’s offspring were dead. Yet, when David found out that one boy was still alive, he responded with nothing but kindness. Mephibosheth was the son of Jonathan. When his grandfather Saul was killed in battle, the little boy’s nanny had tried to save him from being killed, but in her rush she dropped him, leaving him crippled in both feet. Now the child was extremely vulnerable – not only a fugitive but unable to defend or care for himself in a world that did not extend help to those with disabilities. When David responded to the news of this young man by offering him a place at his table rather than a one-way ticket to the gallows, Mephibosheth couldn’t believe what was happening saying “What is your servant that you should notice a dead dog like me”.

This is the deepest of justice – when the people of God base their decisions not on what is justifiable but on what is truly the right thing to do. This is deep justice - when the people of God look upon their fellow human beings and value them more than they even value themselves. This is deepest justice – when a man shares his home, his family and his table with those who cannot provide for themselves.

## PRAYER

*God, teach me to stop seeing justice only as punishment for those who deserve it but as help for those who need it. Show me how to make this world a more just place by extending myself to help those who are in need. Amen*

# FRIDAY: SURRENDER

## READING

For background, read **2 Samuel 15, 17, 18 and 19.**

“Be still before the LORD and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes.” **Psalms 37: 6-7**

## REFLECTION

Absalom may have been able to justify his revenge on Amnon, but there is no justification for the behaviour that followed. Rather than responding with loyalty to the compassion he has received, Absalom leads a rebellion against his father, the King. When the traitor is finally killed with a sword, David cries out “Absalom, Absalom!” and weeps with anguish, wishing that he had rather died. To the very end he held out hope that his son would turn away from shameful ways.

There may be times in our lives when we are torn between fierce affection for our loved ones and a disapproval of their actions. We might wish that we could stand in their place and make choices for them. We hope that they will turn their lives around but have no way of knowing for sure if this will happen.

These are the moments when we need to surrender our loved ones into God’s hands knowing that there is a limit to what we can do to for them, trusting in God’s unlimited love and power to touch their lives.

## PRAYER

*Lord, when the actions of those I love lead me to despair, grant me the serenity to entrust them to your power and your love. Amen*



# SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

## KICK-OFF

Have you been watching the World Cup? Do you feel that any referee has made an unfair decision? Have you had similar personal experiences?

## SCRUM

Read 2 Samuel 22: 17 - 29

- David experienced a lot of injustice in his life and in his family
  - a cruel predecessor who tried to kill him numerous times
  - the death of an innocent baby
  - his eldest son becoming a rapist and subsequently paying with his life
  - his son Absalom conspiring against him and disgracing him in spite of his fatherly kindness

Many who experience disintegration and injustice in their life are unable to pick up the pieces. They become bitter, cynical and angry at God. Yet David writes a song (2 Samuel 22) that praises God for his justice.

*What do you think it was that enabled David to pick up the pieces and continue to praise God?*

*Where in your life have you seen God being faithful to those in need of justice?*

*Where do areas of injustice remain? What is our role in bringing about justice?*

- **Retributive justice** is about revenge and punishment whereas **restorative justice** is about helping people come to a place of transformation. What are the outcomes when retributive justice is used in David's story?
- *"When I feed the poor they call me a saint, when I ask why the poor are hungry, they call me a communist"*  
Dan Helder Camara

How does this quote help you to think of justice as more than just punishment for sin?

Why do you think people are more comfortable with acts of charity than with transforming questions?

Read Psalms 146: 5 -9 and Luke 4: 18 - 19

- Who are the oppressed in our society? How close to your home are people living in hunger? Are there people in your life who are "prisoners" and need to be set free?
- The Bible often speaks of God lifting up the lowly and bringing down those who are proud. Jesus' mother sings the following in Luke 1: 52 – 53: *"He has brought down rulers from their thrones but has lifted up the humble. He has filled the hungry with good things but has sent the rich away hungry"*

Do you feel *comforted* or *convicted* when you read words like that in scripture?

The church has been mandated with upholding the cause of the oppressed – are we doing enough?

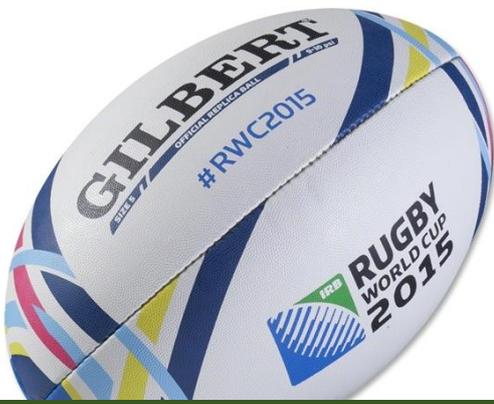
- What has been your attitude toward the refugee crisis in Europe and the xenophobic violence in South Africa? Psalm 146: 9 says that "the LORD watches over the alien"  
How does this verse and others (Exodus 23: 9; Leviticus 19: 34) challenge or validate your views?

## OFF THE PITCH

One small way you and your group can contribute to the call in Psalm 146: 9 to sustain the fatherless and the widow is to join the "Santa Shoebox" initiative in which vulnerable children in child-headed households and situations of poverty are provided with a Christmas gift that includes clothing, a toy, stationery, toiletries and sweets. Encourage each member of your group to sign up on [www.santashoebox.co.za](http://www.santashoebox.co.za) or through your local church to pledge a shoebox OR Read Luke 14: 13 – 14. How can your group celebrate at the end of this series in a way that helps those in need?

## CLOSING

Close your session tonight by saying or singing together the prayer by St Francis "Make me a channel of your peace"



# BIGGER THAN DEFEAT

King David is remembered as the greatest King of Israel, but in the end he was a mortal man whose life consisted not only by triumph but also disappointment, distress, defeat and ultimately death. This week brings us to the end of David's life and through his lineage to the life of the one who is bigger than every enemy and battle we could ever face.

## MONDAY: DEATH WON'T WIN

### READING

"The Spirit of the Sovereign Lord is on me, because the Lord has anointed me... to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion - to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of joy instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair." **Isiah 61: 1 - 3**

### REFLECTION

One never feels more defeated than in times of grief, something David twice in the loss of two of his sons. C.S Lewis described grief like this:

*"No one ever told me that grief felt so like fear. I am not afraid, but the sensation is like being afraid. The same fluttering in the stomach, the same restlessness, the yawning. I keep on swallowing. At other times it feels like being mildly drunk, or concussed. There is a sort of invisible blanket between the world and me. I find it hard to take in what anyone says. Or perhaps, hard to want to take it in. It is so uninteresting. Yet I want the others to be about me. I dread the moments when the house is empty."*

There are no answers that can console a person who has lost a loved one, but there is a promise we can hold to that God is bigger even than the immensity of our pain. God our comforter is near to us when our hearts are broken. He holds us in our pain and reassures us gently that while we have had to suffer for a time in all kinds of trials, we have an inheritance waiting for us in heaven which is imperishable, undefiled and unfading (1 Peter 1: 4). It is no wonder with such a God, that King David responded to the news of his son's death by going to the house of the Lord to be in his presence.

### PRAYER

*Gracious God, comfort those who mourn, hold them close and grant them peace. Amen*

## Talking to Children about Grief

When children lose a loved one, they feel the pain of grief even if they are unable to express it. You can help children who are grieving in a variety of ways:

1. Help the child identify her losses (e.g. you feel sad that we won't see granny today)
2. Let them know that feelings – and crying – are acceptable and need not be hidden
3. Encourage them to express their feelings in a letter or drawing
4. Arrange for a play therapist or counsellor to spend time with your child



# TUESDAY: DISAPPOINTMENT

## READING

“You know that because of the wars waged against my father David from all sides, he could not build a temple for the Name of the Lord his God until the Lord put his enemies under his feet. But now the Lord my God has given me rest on every side, and there is no adversary or disaster. I intend, therefore, to build a temple for the Name of the Lord my God, as the Lord told my father David, when he said, ‘Your son whom I will put on the throne in your place will build the temple for my Name.’ **1 Kings 5: 3 – 5**

## REFLECTION

Being a grandfather I get invited to school plays. What often happens during these events is that a child wants another role in the play that he or she has been given. There can be only one prince or princess and then the child is selected to be a frog. Initial disappointment must be overcome and comes the first show, the frog with his/her brilliant smile and funny make-up steals the show. The child has become the best frog he or she can be for just that moment. That is what the director saw in the child when the role was allocated.

David had hoped to build a temple for God but it didn't happen in his lifetime. It happened during his son Solomon's reign.

Peace did not exist during David's rule and he had not the time, resources and peaceful environment required to build a proper temple. Instead he became a mighty King and his story and Psalms still inspires and heals millions of people today. Solomon on the other hand has been given peace, rest and the resources to build the temple.

We can feel defeated when we don't reach our personal goals but God has a plan that goes beyond what we can do. Trust Him!

## PRAYER

*Almighty God, so often I confuse my ambitions with your plan for my life and I become disappointed when things don't happen the way that I had hoped. Help me to trust you, knowing that you see a bigger picture and have a bigger purpose for all things. Amen*



Guest contributor  
for today:

Nicolaas Oosthuysen

West View member



# WEDNESDAY: PROMISE FULFILLED

## READING

“Is not my house were right with God, Has he not made with me an everlasting covenant, arranged and secured in every part; Will he not bring to fruition fruition my salvation and grant me my every desire.” **2 Samuel 23: 5**

## REFLECTION

The reading today is a section of the last words that David spoke before he died. David had realised that he was not immortal and accepted that his life on earth was coming to an end. His death was not defeat. God had promised a reign that would last forever, but David knew that this reign went beyond one mortal man. A child would be born who would reign not for a lifetime but for eternity. Many years later Magi from the East made their way to Jerusalem to follow a star. The heavens were proclaiming that God's promise to David was finally fulfilled – a new King had been born to reign forevermore.

## PRAYER

*Lord, how deep your love for us that you would send your only son to take on flesh. Thank you. Amen*



# THURSDAY: THE ULTIMATE VICTORY

## READING

“When you were dead in your sins and in the uncircumcision of your flesh, God made you alive with Christ. He forgave us all our sins, having cancelled the charge of our legal indebtedness, which stood against us and condemned us; he has taken it away, nailing it to the cross. And having disarmed the powers and authorities, he made a public spectacle of them, triumphing over them by the cross.” **Colossians 2: 13 - 15**

## REFLECTION

When a team is humiliated on the sports field, the “great upset” is displayed across the front pages of the newspapers and the feeds of social media. The whole world makes a spectacle of their loss and their coach becomes an overnight laughingstock to all who watched the game.

A devastating loss by the South African Springboks in their opening match against Japan in the Rugby World Cup 2015 may have been called the “greatest upset in rugby history” but it could never begin to compare with the greatest upset in the plans of the evil one.

In one astounding act of love, Jesus defeated all powers of darkness. He cleared away their claim for blood by taking on the sins of the world. He wiped away the lies about God as cruel and unmerciful. He untangled the power of sin in the lives of those he loved. He silenced all creation with a cry of abandonment, holding in that moment every fear and tear any one of us has ever known. Finally, he disarmed them of their greatest weapon – death – as he was raised to life!

The enemy was humiliated for everyone to see. The cross assures us that there is no power in darkness but only in light. The empty tomb reminds us that there is no power in death but that to die is Christ for he has gone before us into the Resurrection and we will share in his glory then just as we share in his suffering now.

It is because of Christ that we, with John Donne, can say:

“Death, be not proud, though some have called thee  
Mighty and dreadful, for thou art not so;  
For those whom thou think'st thou dost overthrow  
Die not, poor Death, nor yet canst thou kill me”

## PRAYER

Teach me Jesus to live a life that is victorious,  
for the powers of darkness have been overcome. Amen

# FRIDAY: FINISH WELL

## READING

Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus. **Philippians 3: 12 – 14**

## REFLECTION

It is one of the great paradoxes of our faith. It was with a definitive finality that Jesus defeated evil in the cross, even speaking the words IT IS FINISHED. Yet here we are, over two thousand years later, still with a role to play in the warfare between light and darkness. God chose to involve the church in a battle that God could have fought alone.

Sometimes the presence of evil on the pitch can be so apparent that we might begin to question if we are on a winning side at all. This is when we say things like “there is no hope” or “the whole world is going to hell”.

In these moments of disillusionment, we would do well to remember that this is a match which has already been won. The drop-kick that won the game happened when Christ overcame the evil one on the cross. Where we find ourselves is on the pitch waiting for that final whistle to blow. We don't know when our “80 minutes” will be over but we do know this – the one who chose us for the team is cheering us on as we run with all that is within us to the try line.

## PRAYER

*Jesus, thank you that you have already assured me of the victory that I run toward. Amen*



# SMALL GROUP MATERIAL

## KICK-OFF

Share one insight that has meant the most to you as you journeyed through this series.

## SCRUM

Read Paul's summary of the life of David in **Acts 13: 22 – 38** (each group member read a paragraph)

- Having studied David's life, discuss what it was about him that he was called a man after God's heart
- Which of these attitudes/ accomplishments could you incorporate into your own life?
- The same people who read the prophetic scriptures (verse 27) fulfilled them by rejecting Jesus. How can you make sure that your faith does not devolve into mere religion without relationship?
- David was a great man, but his purpose was temporary and his body mortal and subject to decay. While God spared his life many times he did ultimately die. Jesus, however, was raised to life and ascended to heaven. What does this teach us about our humanity? What does it teach us about Jesus' divinity?
- “Don't tell God how big your problems are, tell your problems how big your God is”  
Where in your life do you continue to feel defeated? How can you claim the victory of Christ in this area?

## OFF THE PITCH

What lessons from the life of David and the victory of Christ can you apply (a) in your family (b) in your work place (c) in your church life so that you too can increasingly grow into a man or a woman who is “after God's heart”.

## CLOSING

May the grace of the Lord Jesus Christ, the love of God & the fellowship of the Holy Spirit be with us all evermore. Amen