

## into discussion

Ask everyone to give a brief answer to the question: “What would be your dream job, and why?”

## into God’s presence

The book of Revelation provides us with a beautiful vision of heaven and the worship which takes place there. We are going to use some of the words of worship which are spoken and sung in that book as inspiration for our own worship. Ask a different person to read each of the following passages (just the actual prayers and songs), allowing a minute or so between each. During the pauses, offer up your own prayers of praise.

Revelation 4:8, 4:11, 5:9-10, 5:12, 7:12, 15:3-4, 19:6-8, 5:13

## into God’s word

Read 1 Samuel 16:1-23 and think about the following questions together:

- Do you see any contrast between God’s selection of David as king, and his previous selection of Saul as king? You may like to look back at 1 Samuel 10:23-24.
- Why do you think God had Samuel look at Jesse’s seven older sons, rather than just guiding him straight to David?
- Verse 7 tells us that people naturally judge each other by external things: their appearance, their social standing, what car they drive, what job (or not) they have, how they speak or even how tall they are! Jesus rebuked the Pharisees for such short-sightedness, James lambasted the church for falling into the same error, and today the church is frequently confronted with similar accusations. As individuals, and as a church, how guilty are we of being swayed by external appearances in our opinions of one another? Is it even possible for us to look upon the things of the heart?
- God had already declared that He had rejected Saul as king, and now He has had David anointed to rule. Why do you think He caused David to serve under Saul rather than simply ousting him?
- When Saul was anointed as king God’s Spirit fell upon him in a powerful way (1 Samuel 10:9-11). In verse 14 of this chapter we read that the Spirit of the Lord had departed from him. It is worth reflecting for a minute upon the impact that this must have had upon the young David – look at the impassioned words he wrote in Psalm 51:10-12 when his own actions might have risked his throne.

## into life

Break down into groups of two or three to discuss:

It must have been difficult for David, being required to enter the service of the king after having been told that he was destined to be king himself. Sometimes God quite deliberately places us in positions which we find frustrating or limiting. Perhaps He does this because it tends to reveal a bit of what is going on in our heart...

- Has God ever done anything like this to you? Please do not use names if your experience was similar to David’s!
- Did God teach you any lessons through the experience?

Pray for one another when you have finished your discussion.

## back-page background

This chapter of 1 Samuel contains a verse which might strike us as strange and a little disturbing at first reading:

<sup>14</sup>Now the Spirit of the LORD had departed from Saul, and an evil spirit from the LORD tormented him.

What does this mean? Surely God is supremely holy, and his nature and character is the very antithesis of everything evil. Can He really be said to be the source of evil spirits? Do demons torment people at His bidding? What should we make of this?

This way of speaking is actually found in a number of places in the Old Testament. We read of God unleashing destroying angels against his people in judgement in Psalm 78:49. Judges 9:23 tells of the Lord sending an evil spirit between Abimelech and the people of Shechem, causing them to rise up to overthrow him. King Ahab is lured to his death by a lying spirit from the Lord in 1 Kings 22:22.

How can we reconcile verses such as these with our view of an entirely good God?

Firstly, let's remind ourselves that the Bible is absolutely clear that evil spirits are real and powerful. Throughout the scriptures, evil spirits are shown to be personal, intelligent, utterly wicked and completely opposed to the purposes of God. Mercifully, though, their activity is restrained and limited by God. The story of Job shows that Satan is not free to act

with impunity, but only within bounds set by the Lord (Job 1:12 and 2:6). Put a different way, the activity of evil spirits should not be thought of as necessarily being what God wills, but it is what He chooses to permit.

Secondly, there are times when continual and conscious disobedience towards God on the part of an individual, or even a nation, can lead to the total withdrawal of His blessing and protection. In the examples above, and in the case of Saul in the passage we are considering, individuals have brought God's judgement upon themselves, and that judgement has taken the form of God removing his restraining hand and permitting evil spirits to act.

We must be careful not to extrapolate too much from this. The fact that God is able sovereignly to use even evil spirits to bring about his purposes, and that this has on occasion included the chastisement of his people, should certainly not lead us to conclude that bad things happening are a divine punishment or that any activity of an evil spirit is a judgement from God. It is also important that we remember that as Christians, living in the light of Jesus' death and resurrection, we have an authority over the demonic which not even David was endowed with. He played his harp and an evil spirit departed for a time, whereas in the name of Jesus we have authority to drive them out and forbid them to return (Mark 16:17; Luke 10:19).