

A JOURNEY OF A LIFETIME

SAMSON & THE JUDGES



SHEPHERDCHURCH

Lesson 7: Samson & the Judges

Welcome

In your opinion, what's the best and worst superpower and why?

The first tie-in of this WELCOME section to the lesson's subject is the concept of superpowers (obviously, connecting with Samson's super strength). This should be a fun exercise and could include some playful banter. For instance, some people would want the superpower of being invisible, but it's also a little creepy, LOL! Other people might want the superpower of flight, but who's to say that you would actually fly fast if you were able to fly? What if you just flew at the same speed/rate that you walk?

Worship

This week's worship moment is about finding our strength in God—even in weakness. Listen to a song like "Battle Belongs" by Phil Wickham on YouTube, Spotify, etc. As you listen, reflect on questions like "What battles are you trying to fight in your own strength?" or "What would it look like to hand them over to God today?" After the song, take a few minutes to pray as a group. Invite God to give you His strength in whatever battle you're facing this week.

Budget about 10 minutes for this section of your Life Group time.

There are 10 questions/prompts in the WORD section. Your Life Group doesn't have to cover every question below. Life Group Leaders may select the ones that best fit your group. You can also use the remaining questions as personal reflection throughout the week.

Word

Please watch the video lesson and read [Judges 13-16](#) before your Life Group meets.

The period of the Judges was one of the most turbulent times in Israel's history. After the death of Joshua, the Israelites entered the Promised Land but failed to fully drive out the surrounding nations, as God had commanded. As a result, they were drawn into idolatry and disobedience. The book of Judges (covering roughly 1375-1050 B.C.) tells the story of this era. These judges were not courtroom figures, but regional leaders—military deliverers and spiritual guides—who helped bring the people back to God. Some well-known judges include Deborah, Gideon, Jephthah, and the most famous of all: *Samson*.

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Samson's story is found in Judges 13-16. He was a Nazirite from birth—set apart to God with special vows that included not cutting his hair. Endowed with supernatural strength, Samson was called to deliver Israel from the Philistines. But his life was filled with contradictions. Though chosen by God, Samson often lived by impulse and pride, making poor choices—especially in his relationships. Yet even in his failure, God used him. In a dramatic final act, Samson gave his life to defeat Israel's enemies, showing that God can redeem even the most broken of lives.

The time of the Judges reminds us that when everyone does what is right in their own eyes, chaos follows—but even then, God is faithful to raise up deliverers and move His plan forward.

1. Which actors/actresses or people from your life would you cast if you were making a movie about Samson? Read the Scripture references about each character and then write your answer in the chart below.

<i>BIBLICAL CHARACTER</i>	<i>STORY ROLE</i>	<i>SCRIPTURE REFERENCE</i>	<i>ACTOR/ACTRESS YOU'D CAST</i>
SAMSON	A Nazarite judge (leader) with supernatural strength and deep flaws.	Judges 13-16	
SAMSON'S MOTHER	A God-fearing woman visited by an angel	Judges 13:2-7, 13-24	
SAMSON'S FATHER	Asks for guidance on how to raise Samson...he's faithful but unsure.	Judges 13:2-23	
THE ANGEL OF THE LORD	Announces Samson's birth and gives Nazarite instructions	Judges 13:3-21	
TIMNAH	Samson's first wife who was Philistine and pressured into betraying him	Judges 14:1-20	
SAMSON'S FATHER-IN-LAW	Gives Samson's wife to another man, unintentionally provoking conflict	Judges 14:20; 15:1-2	

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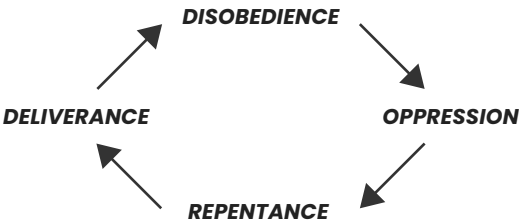
BIBLICAL CHARACTER	STORY ROLE	SCRIPTURE REFERENCE	ACTOR/ACTRESS YOU'D CAST
DELILAH	Seduces Samson and betrays him for money	Judges 16:4–21	
PHILISTINE LEADERS	Political and religious leaders who conspire against Samson	Judges 16:5, 23–30	
THE YOUNG SERVANT	A young boy who leads blind Samson to the temple pillars	Judges 16:26	

When you introduce this activity, remind your Life Group that the goal isn't to make light of Scripture but to help us see the personalities and roles of each character in Samson's story more vividly. This activity is designed to make them jump into Judges 13-16. Make sure everyone has an understanding of the passages listed in the chart before assigning their "casting." As they consider their casting choices, please encourage them to think about the traits of the biblical characters, as well as physical descriptions. For instance, Jason Momoa, Florian Munteanu, or The Rock might do a good job portraying Samson. Gal Gadot or Salma Hayek might be good candidates for Delilah.

As people share their casting choices, you can ask questions like: "What do you see in Samson's story that made you choose that person?" or "How does your choice capture the strength or weakness this character displayed?"

(1.) What cycle is described in *Judges 2:16-19* and how does that cycle show up in both modern society and in our personal lives?

This is the second part of prompt 1. Judges 2:16–19 describes "the cycle of sin" in Israel's history.



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After Joshua's generation passed away...

- The Israelites repeatedly turned away from God and **disobeyed** by doing things like worshipping the gods of the surrounding nations.
 - In response, God allowed them to fall into **oppression** at the hands of their enemies.
 - The people would eventually **repent** and cry out to God.
 - Out of compassion, God would **deliver** them by raising up judges who rescued them.
- However, as soon as the judge died, the people restarted the cycle, often worse than before.

Historically, this reflects Israel's struggle with covenant loyalty in a land filled with competing cultures, idols, and temptations. The Hebrew verb *shaphat* (שָׁפַט), translated as "judge," does not mean a courtroom official but "a deliverer or leader" raised up by God to save His people. This highlights God's mercy and His commitment to redeem despite Israel's unfaithfulness.

This same cycle shows up in modern society: people pursue self-interest, power, or cultural idols, which eventually leads to brokenness and oppression—whether through injustice, addiction, or fractured relationships. When the pain becomes unbearable, we cry out for help, and God often intervenes with grace, wisdom, or even people in our lives who guide us back to Him.

On a personal level, many of us repeat this pattern: drifting from God in times of comfort, experiencing the consequences of sin, calling out to Him in desperation, and finding restoration—only to face the same temptations again. The cycle in Judges is both a warning about the destructive nature of sin and a reminder of God's persistent mercy, pointing forward to Christ, the ultimate Deliverer, who breaks the cycle once and for all.

Here are some follow-up questions you can ask to move the conversation along, continue the discussion, etc.

- How would you describe "the cycle of sin" in your own words?
- Where do you see this same kind of cycle at work in our culture (in politics, entertainment, your work, etc.)?
- Can you think of a time when you've drifted away from God, faced the consequences, and then cried out for His help? What did you learn from that experience?
- How does Jesus—the ultimate Deliverer—change the way we think about this cycle of sin?

2. What helps you personally break out of the cycle and stay more consistent in your walk with God?

For believers today, staying consistent often means leaning into spiritual rhythms: prayer, Scripture meditation, accountability, community, and regular confession. It also means recognizing that Christ is our ultimate Deliverer—He provides strength where we are weak (2 Corinthians 12:9–10) and grace to break patterns of sin. As a Life Group Leader, encourage members to share practical ways they've experienced God's help in staying consistent. Be ready to affirm small, ordinary steps (like setting aside quiet time or having an accountability partner), not just "big" spiritual victories. The aim is to normalize growth as a process and remind everyone that God's Spirit empowers consistency, not just human willpower.

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Here's a set of leader prompts you can use if people get stuck or give surface-level answers when responding to the question:

- Are there daily or weekly routines—like prayer, reading Scripture, journaling, or listening to worship music—that help keep you grounded in God?
- Who in your life helps you stay on track when you're tempted to drift?
- When you fail, what helps you not stay stuck in guilt but return to God more quickly?

3. According to *Judges 13:1-5*, what did it mean to be called as a Nazirite? What can we learn about God's calling in our lives—even before we are born (see *Jeremiah 1:5* and *Psalms 139:13-16*)?

In *Judges 13:1-5*, the angel of the Lord announces that Samson would be a Nazirite from birth. The Hebrew word, *nazir*, means "consecrated" or "set apart." According to Numbers 6, a Nazirite vow included:

- Not consuming anything from the grapevine (eating grapes, drinking wine, etc.).
- Not touching any dead body (anything unclean)
- Not cutting one's hair

A Nazirite vow was supposed to separate you from the world. It was an outward appearance of your inward faith. Typically, people chose to take this vow for a limited period of time, but Samson was uniquely called to live as a Nazirite for his entire life. This shows that Samson's calling wasn't rooted in personal decision but in God's divine choice and purpose. His supernatural strength and role as Israel's deliverer were not random gifts but the result of being set apart by God.

Though not as common, a Nazirite vow could be taken for a short amount of time, with 30 days being the minimum amount of time one could take the vow. As a matter of fact, many scholars believe Paul took a Nazirite vow in Acts 18:18 and participated in the vow again (or aspects of the vow) in Acts 21:23-26.

This idea of being chosen before birth is echoed in *Jeremiah 1:5*, where God tells the prophet, "Before I formed you in the womb I knew you, before you were born I set you apart." Similarly, *Psalms 139:13-16* reminds us that God is intimately involved in forming life in the womb and has ordained our days before one of them came to be.

These passages show us that God's calling is intentional and personal. Just as Samson was set apart for a mission, God created each of us with a purpose. He has invited us to live as those set apart by and for God. Such truth should encourage us to fully embrace our identity in Christ and faithfully pursue the unique calling God has placed on our lives.

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4. Based on what you have read in *Judges 13-16*, how did Samson demonstrate strong leadership?

To start, it must be said that Samson was a really bad leader. This is why this question is so vital: it compels us to search the Scriptures to see the very few times when Samson made good leadership decisions and/or acted like a good leader.

One clear example is when Samson tore apart a lion with his bare hands (Judges 14:5-6). While it may seem like a display of brute force, it marked the Spirit of the Lord empowering him in a unique way to confront danger and demonstrate God's strength. Later, in Judges 15:14-15, when the Philistines came against him, the Spirit of the Lord again came powerfully upon Samson. With only the jawbone of a donkey, he struck down a thousand men.

In both situations, Samson's leadership was not about strategy or wisdom but about being God's chosen instrument to bring victory to Israel when they were under Philistine oppression.

Finally, Samson's most significant leadership moment occurred at the end of his life (Judges 16:28-30). Though blinded and bound, he prayed for God's strength one last time and pulled down the Philistine temple, defeating more enemies in his death than in his life. This final act demonstrated both humility (crying out to God rather than relying on himself) and sacrifice (he gave his life for the sake of his people). It's probably Samson's final act of faith in the Philistine temple that got him listed in the Hall of Faith (Hebrews 11:32).

These moments remind us that even bad leaders can be used by God when they yield to His Spirit. Such moments also reinforce the truth that authentic leadership often involves courage, dependence on God, and sacrifice for others.

5. Despite being chosen, Samson repeatedly gave in to temptation. Why is it so easy for us to squander our calling and spiritual gifts? What helps you stay focused on and committed to God's calling in your life?

When you first begin reading Samson's story, you assume, "Oh, Samson took a Nazarite vow, so that means he'll be a godly leader that's full of integrity." Sadly, this is not the case. We need to pay attention to these little details because otherwise, you'll make the mistake of assuming that Samson was a hero during his entire life. Here are some of the sins that Samson committed:

- Samson broke each aspect of his Nazarite vow.
 - He touched a dead body (Judges 14:8-9). He scooped honey from a dead lion's body, defiling himself by touching a corpse, and made others unclean when he gave them the honey.
 - He drank at feasts (Judges 14:10). The Hebrew word for "feast" (*mishteh*) implies a drinking party, suggesting Samson compromised his vow to abstain from the grapevine.
 - He was responsible for his hair being cut (Judges 16:17-19). He revealed the secret to his strength (not cutting his hair), thereby allowing Delilah to shave his head, directly breaking the outward sign of his dedication to God.

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- In Judges 14:1-3, Samson insisted on marrying a Philistine woman even though the Israelites were forbidden from marrying pagan women who worshiped other gods (Deuteronomy 7:3-4).
- He consistently engaged in sexual immorality (Judges 14:1-3; 16:1-4)
- Samson was prideful by repeatedly attacking the Philistines out of personal anger and revenge rather than out of obedience to God's mission to deliver Israel (Judges 14:19; 15:7-8, 15; 15:3-8, 11-16).
- Throughout Judges 13-16, Samson flirted with Philistine culture (their women, values, money, etc.) instead of staying holy and separate. He repeatedly compromised his calling to be "set apart."
- When his parents objected to his desire to marry a Philistine woman, he disregarded God's law and dishonored his parents by ignoring their counsel (Judges 14:1-4).
- Unlike other judges (Deborah, Barak, Gideon, Jephthah, etc.) who led Israel to fight the enemy, Samson fought as a lone wolf. He never inspired Israel to depend on God together, as a team. His leadership was sporadic and self-serving, which caused Israel to feel paralyzed by fear. For instance, 3,000 men of Judah turned Samson over to the Philistines, saying, "Don't you realize the Philistines are rulers over us?" (Judges 15:11). As a result, Israel was trapped in fear and oppression and remained under Philistine oppression throughout his 20 years as a judge (Judges 15:20; 16:31).

Ironically, in Hebrew, Samson's name is translated as "sunshine, sun, or solar," while Delilah's name means "night." Think about the irony: with the obvious "play on words" of their names, Samson was supposed to be a light for Israel, but the night compromised him.

This question invites people to wrestle with the tension we see in Samson's story and in our own lives: God gives us gifts and a calling, but we often squander them through distraction, pride, sin, etc. Like Samson, it's easy to rely on our own strength, get caught up in immediate desires, or chase after what looks appealing instead of what is truly from God. Scripture warns about this tendency in passages such as, 1 Corinthians 10:12 says, "So, if you think you are standing firm, be careful that you don't fall!"

The truth is, our hearts are prone to drift, and without intentional dependence on God, we can waste the opportunities He's entrusted to us.

On the other hand, staying focused on God's calling requires humility and practices that keep our eyes fixed on Him. Jesus said in John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing," which reminds us that fruitfulness flows from abiding in Him. Spiritual practices like prayer, Scripture meditation, accountability relationships, and serving others help us realign when we drift. Remembering that our calling is about glorifying God rather than building our own reputation also keeps us grounded. Ultimately, it is the Spirit's power—not our own willpower—that enables us to live faithfully and use our gifts for God's purposes.

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6. Read *Judges 14:1-3*. Why do you think Samson ignored his parents' counsel and pursued unhealthy relationships? What can this teach us about boundaries?

In Judges 14:1-3, Samson demands that his parents arrange a marriage with a Philistine woman from Timnah, despite their protests that he should marry among his own people. Historically, Israel was commanded not to intermarry with the surrounding nations (see Deuteronomy 7:3-4) because such unions often led to idolatry and covenant unfaithfulness. The Philistines in particular were Israel's oppressors during this period, making Samson's desire not only a matter of personal preference but also a political and spiritual compromise. The Hebrew word used when his parents "objected" (Judges 14:3) carries the sense of "a deep protest," signaling that they understood the seriousness of this decision. Yet Samson, blinded by desire, disregarded wise counsel and dishonored his parents.

Samson's actions reveal a heart driven by impulse rather than discernment. He saw what he wanted and demanded it, echoing the broader theme of Judges: "Everyone did what was right in their own eyes" (Judges 21:25). His unwillingness to set boundaries in relationships foreshadowed later failures with women, especially Delilah. This passage shows us how dangerous it can be when boundaries are ignored. Boundaries are not about restricting joy but about protecting identity, purpose, and relationship with God. Like Samson, when we dismiss godly counsel and chase what looks appealing, we risk undermining the very calling God has placed on our lives.

For us today, the lesson is clear: boundaries matter because they guard our spiritual health and keep us aligned with God's will. Or, here's another way to think about boundaries from Dr. Henry Cloud and Dr. John Townsend—"Boundaries give you what you create and allow."

Listening to wise voices—whether parents, mentors, or the Word of God—can protect us from decisions that feel right in the moment but lead to long-term pain. Samson's choice reminds us that relationships are never neutral and either draw us closer to God or pull us away. The way we handle boundaries reveals whether we are walking by sight, like Samson, or by faith, trusting God's design for our lives.

As we'll study later on in this lesson, God always offers us the hope of redemption. Think of it this way: Samson walks 45 miles or 90,000 steps from his land to Philistine territory... that's a long time to walk to sin and ignore God. Each step was a chance to turn around (aka, to repent). However, it doesn't matter if you're on step one or step 89,655—if you'll admit, "I've been walking in the wrong direction," everything can change.

7. *Judges 16:20* says that Samson "did not know that the Lord had left him." What are some warning signs that we're depending on our strength instead of God's power?

Despite having four chapters about Samson, who was supposed to be leading Israel, we always see him AWAY from Israel. He seems almost always to be hanging out in enemy territory. It does something to us when we spend more time chasing sin or hanging in sin's territory instead of running to God and spending time with the Christians who build us up.

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In Judges 16, the Philistines realize Samson is locked in on Delilah. So, they go to her and offer a massive bribe—what would easily be over a million dollars in today's terms. Delilah asks Samson about the source of his strength several times in Scripture. Samson lies to her the first three times. He says, "If you do _____, then 'I will be like a man'" (in the original Hebrew). Then, Delilah asks Samson the source of his strength for the fourth time, Samson tells her the truth, and literally in Hebrew, he ends his statement differently: "I will be like every man."

- The first 3 times: *I will be like a man.*
- This 4th time: *I will be like every man.*

When he compares himself to other people, there's a massive difference in how he does so the fourth time. The word, *every*, highlights the difference. "I will be like *every* man," or, in other words, Samson had come to despise his calling. He spent too much time in Philistine territory and too little time with people of faith. He spent too much time depending on his own strength instead of depending on God. Sin has a way of distorting how we view God and reality. In Samson's case, he wanted to be like everyone else. This is what was driving Samson all along!

- Samson didn't want to be special.
- He didn't want to have anything to do with Israel.
- He didn't want to be a Nazirite.
- He didn't want to be a judge or a leader.

This was a way of Samson walking away from his calling. Samson was trashing his vow and pushing God away. The more we walk to sin and with sin, the more tempted we will be to despise our calling.

The warning here is that spiritual pride and self-reliance can blind us to our dependence on God. Throughout Scripture, the pattern is clear: when people forget God and trust only in themselves, the result is weakness and collapse (see Proverbs 16:18, "Pride goes before destruction"). The Hebrew idea of "strength" (*koach*) often refers to "ability or power," but in biblical context it is always understood as something totally granted by God. When we confuse the two, we're in danger of repeating Samson's mistake.

Today, warning signs might include:

- **Prayerlessness** because we believe we can handle things on our own
- **Neglecting Scripture** because we assume our wisdom is enough
- An **inflated sense of pride** in our achievements causes us to forget that every gift comes from God (James 1:17).
- **Burnout** because we push ourselves beyond limits without relying on God's strength & rest.

Ultimately, depending on our strength rather than God's power shows up when we measure success only by external results instead of by faithfulness and obedience. The antidote is a posture of humility and surrender, just as Jesus said in John 15:5, "Apart from me you can do nothing."

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8. Where do you see both God's discipline and His hope at work in *Judges 16:18-22*? What does this reveal about God's character?

In Judges 16:18-22, Delilah betrays Samson by cutting his hair, the visible sign of his lifelong Nazirite vow. With his vow broken, Samson loses the supernatural strength that came from being set apart for God. The Philistines capture him, gouge out his eyes, and force him to grind grain in prison—a humiliating reversal for Israel's judge. This reflects God's discipline: Samson's disregard for boundaries, his arrogance, and his repeated compromise led him to the consequences of sin. The Hebrew word often used for "discipline" in the Old Testament (*mûsār*) carries the sense of "correction or training," not just punishment. Samson's suffering was not God abandoning him, but God allowing him to face the consequences of his decisions.

Yet, even in discipline, God's hope shines through. Like a cliffhanger at the end of a TV episode, verse 22 quietly but powerfully notes, "But the hair on his head began to grow again." This detail signals the possibility of restoration. In Hebrew storytelling, such a line serves as a hinge—though Samson was broken, *God was not finished with him*. Hope emerges in God's willingness to use him again, pointing to His character as both just and merciful. This balance of discipline and hope reflects God's covenant nature: He corrects His people when they wander but never abandons them entirely (Lamentations 3:31-33).

God is holy and will not ignore sin, but He's also gracious and works redemptively through flawed people. Even in our failures, God's discipline is meant to lead us back to Him (Romans 2:4), and His hope assures us that He can restore and use us again. This combination of justice and mercy is at the heart of God's character.

9. Read *Judges 16:26-30*. What can we learn about God's willingness to hear us—even after we have failed?

In Judges 16:26-30, Samson, now blind and humiliated, is brought into the Philistine temple to be mocked. Standing between the pillars, he prays, "Sovereign Lord, remember me. Please, God, strengthen me just once more." Despite his repeated sins (breaking his Nazirite vow, pursuing forbidden relationships, relying on his own strength, etc.), God hears his prayer and grants him power to defeat the Philistines. This moment highlights God's grace: even when Samson's life had been marked by compromise, his cry of faith was met with divine response. The Hebrew verb *zākar* is often translated "remember," but the word isn't simply about recollection—it's about God actively turning toward someone with covenant faithfulness. By using that word, Samson appeals to God's love, and God responds.

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Theologically, this shows us that failure never disqualifies us from God's grace. Samson's story illustrates a broader biblical pattern: people like David, Peter, and Paul all experienced God's willingness to forgive and restore after their moments of weakness or sin. God does not ignore the consequences of disobedience—Samson still died in the collapse of the temple—but He redeems even the broken pieces of our lives for His purposes. Historically, this act was also a deliverance for Israel, as Samson killed more Philistines in his death than in his life.

Our sin may bring discipline and loss, but God delights in our repentance. Like the father of the prodigal son, God runs to us and warmly embraces us when we return to Him. This passage assures us that God's grace runs deeper than our sin.

10. In the video lesson, what do you think Alma meant when she said, "I'm enough, but only when I'm walking with Jesus"? What would your life look like if you consistently depended on Jesus' strength more than your own?

On our own, we are limited, broken by sin, and unable to live out God's calling in our strength alone (John 15:5). However, when we walk with Jesus, His presence and Spirit in us make us sufficient. Paul echoes this in 2 Corinthians 3:5, "Not that we are competent in ourselves... but our competence comes from God." The phrase highlights the tension between our inadequacy apart from God and our sufficiency in Christ.

To depend consistently on Jesus' strength means shifting from self-reliance to daily surrender. Practically, this could look like starting the day with prayer, inviting God into decisions, choosing obedience even when it's costly, and finding rest in His promises instead of striving in our own efforts. It also means that in moments of weakness or failure, we lean into God's grace rather than shame or performance.

In other words, Alma's statement is not about self-esteem but about Christ-esteem: we are "enough" not because of our own abilities, but because Jesus' presence transforms and empowers us. A life lived in that reality is one of confidence rooted in grace, humility, and the security of knowing our worth comes from Him.

Allow your Life Group members to share their ideas, but below are some more examples of how to walk with Jesus each day (besides reading the Bible, prayer, and fasting):

- **Practice Daily Repentance**

Just like we are to pray and read the Bible each day, repenting of our sins should be a daily practice. (Lamentations 3:40; Matthew 6:12; Luke 9:23; Hebrews 3:13)

- **Gratitude in the Ordinary**

Thank God for small blessings like a meal, a conversation, or even the beauty of creation. Gratitude re-centers your heart on His goodness.

- **Silence and Listening**

Take brief moments during the day to turn off noise, be still, and listen for God's voice rather than rushing from task to task.

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- **Seeing Interruptions as Opportunities**

When plans change or people “get in the way,” ask, “How might Jesus want me to respond right now?”

- **Stay Connected to Community**

Walking with Jesus isn’t meant to be solo. Surround yourself with other believers who will encourage, correct, and pray for you. Accountability partners or your Life Group connections help you guard against drifting into self-reliance.

- **Obey Promptings of the Spirit**

Pay attention to the quiet nudges to serve, forgive, or show kindness. Obedience, even in small things, trains us to depend on Him.

Witness

This week, each Life Group member should post or share a short personal story on social media about how God showed up during a time of hardship. Spend this time talking about what people could say in their social media post.

PLEASE DO NOT skip over this section. Make sure you discuss it as a Life Group and give your Life Group members plenty of time to brainstorm and share their ideas. Just as many of our Life Groups have been meeting in public, this week’s WITNESS assignment is a chance for us to display our faith publicly.