

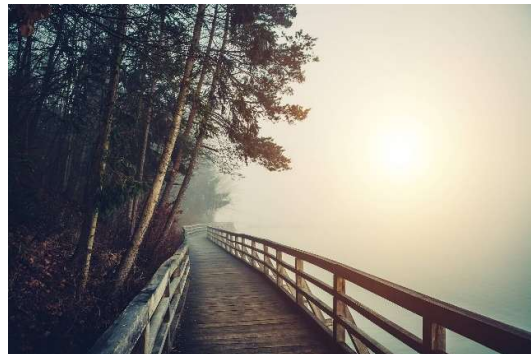


Guarding the avenues of our souls

Week 1	7 September	Fostering a positive mindset
Week 2	4 September	Handling socials- Don't be a slave to likes
Week 3	21 September	Resisting the pressure to conform by listening to conscience and God's guidance
Week 4	28 September	Dysfunctional families can still have righteous children

Welcome to another series: September 2025

The years of youth are years full of challenges as young people try to figure out who they are and where they fit in. And so, the series for this month is intended to help young people understand that their identity comes from being a follower of Christ, rather than conforming to the world's standards. This series seeks to encourage youth to develop spiritual disciplines that will lead to a deeper understanding of God's word and His will for their lives and help them grow in their relationship with God. In the end this will encourage them to live boldly for Christ.



Genesis 2:7 *"The Lord God formed man out of the dust of the ground and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul"*. The way Old Testament uses the word "soul" – a human being becomes alive (that is, "a living being" or "soul") only when the 'breath of God' is breathed into him. The soul then is seen as the life possessing quality of humans, and it is that which makes them living beings. We can say the "soul" is the life-principle, or simply, life. The soul is the self or person. It is said to be the seat of spiritual as well as physical needs and cravings, including one's need for God's presence. It is the state of consciousness itself. The soul can be sad, grieved, weep, rejoice, bless the Lord, be distressed, be anxious and troubled, hate and love. It can stand for the full range of human needs, desires and feelings, including thought, memory and consciousness. The soul is integral to life itself.

The death of the soul then results in the loss of personhood. The soul is not something we possess as such as though the person existed as a person outside the soul. The soul is the person. The soul is what each person is as a human being. So, the word soul stands for the living person as a human being in this life.

Matthew 16:26 *“For what is a man profited, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul, or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?”*

The soul in Scripture is really the person as human being, who has been created by God.

A philosopher by the name of Irenaeus viewed “soul” as the “*seat of knowledge, working in conjunction with the body’s senses to gather information, which it then evaluates and uses to form beliefs and understanding*”. He imagines the process by which the soul arrives at knowledge: First, the soul ‘perceives’ external phenomena through the bodily organs of sense perception – the eyes, ears, and so on. Then, the soul may form a “belief” – *pistis*, the biblical word for “faith” – “judgment,” “conception” or “apprehension” of a given aspect of reality. Furthermore, Irenaeus believed the soul, in its interaction with the Holy Spirit, plays a crucial role in humanity’s journey towards spiritual perfection.

Guarding the soul, therefore, means recognizing God’s presence with and for his people and actively fighting against the forces that dehumanizes and marginalize them. Guarding the soul means resisting forces that dehumanizes and diminish the worth of individuals and communities. It means facing the realities of life by drawing strength from scripture and people’s experiences and working towards a future where all people can experience grace and wholeness.

This emphasizes the significance of the soul as a valuable and vulnerable entity that needs careful attention and protection from negative influences. Our souls are vulnerable they need to be protected from harmful influences. This topic suggests avoiding exposure to anything that could corrupt our minds or lead to negative thoughts and desires. It speaks to the importance of the inner world as the source of our actions and words. It is about mindfulness, right speech and right action. We are encouraged to be discerning about the content we consume through our eyes, whether its media, images, or the actions of others. By guarding our souls, we can cultivate inner peace and reduce negativity in our lives and build stronger and more positive relationships with others.

HOME GROUPS AND CLASSES GUIDE:

1. *Open in Worship and Prayer: this is to invite God into the meeting. For example, you can light a candle, sing together, or use a YouTube Hymn or song.*
2. *Open your Bibles and read the Bible verses for this week (take turns?) see below.*
3. *Reflect on the Bible verses and the reflection written by a Minister or Lay Preacher.*
4. *Connect with each other and take the reflection deeper by answering the Questions.*
5. *Works out: What have we learned that we can apply in our lives in this session? Keep each other accountable for promises made or important steps taken. Pray for and over each other (after taking prayer requests).*

Week 2 - 14 September - Handling socials - Don't be a slave to likes

READINGS:

1 Samuel 13:8-14

Galatians 1:10

John 12:43

WORSHIP SONG: Open the eyes of my heart lord

https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=wutmEjdbedE&list=RDwutmEjdbedE&start_radio=1

HANDLING SOCIALS - DON'T BE A SLAVE TO LIKES

We live in an era of hyperconnectivity, where people are constantly connected to the internet, receiving all kinds of information and influence. All this connectivity has both

pros and cons. Every moment of our lives can be shared with others, too easily. Social media has been used to silence people these days. Cancelling has become a common practice on the internet. Anyone who says or does something wrong is no-platformed instantly, losing their voice, future chances, freedom and more. Also, we see the dangers of seeking validation from others. Social media makes us so concerned about what others think of us. It can lead to being trapped in a cycle of people-pleasing and insecurity.

REFLECTION WRITTEN BY: REV HILTON VOLKWYN

In 1 Samuel 13:8-14 we discover in its context that king Saul wanted the approval of his army in the face of warning and good advice.... He disregarded God's direct command to wait for the prophet Samuel. Yes, Samuel did take a while to get to where Saul and the army was, but that did not give him the right to seek to be liked especially when God had given an instruction.

Maybe in his defence one could argue that Saul was under pressure from the army of the Philistines and his own army was running scared and started deserting. Maybe he felt he was under threat.

The reality though is that he compromised his leadership and brought the kingdom into a place where God would no longer help them. He thought that the soldiers would like him for taking what he thought was initiative. That single act of disobedience, driven by insecurity and pressure, led to devastating, long-lasting consequences for his leadership and those he led.

So instead of waiting out the seven days he was given, while Samuel was delayed, he did his own thing..... This was a test of his faith and his trust in God's timing and promise. The consequence was failure....

A single act of rebellion can have long-lasting repercussions for our lives and the lives of others.

In my years of ministry, I have come to realise that there are people who just thrive on being 'liked'. This is borne out of an almost natural desire for the approval of one's peers. We yearn for acceptance and a need to 'belong.' When we belong, we could think or even inadvertently believe that our self-worth is fed.

However, when being 'liked' is done for personal prestige or agenda and with the intention of showing superiority, it could lead to negative consequences like sacrificing the very self-worth we are looking for. Personal values could come into disrepute. An overwhelming need to be liked can lead to sacrificing one's principles, beliefs, and, or standards. If one is maybe in a leadership role, 'BEING A SLAVE TO LIKES', can compromise and hinder effective guidance.

On the other hand, being liked can be good when it is done in circles where those whose approval we seek are in the realm of healthy relationships. In healthy relationships or among trusted friends one could be shown the problems of excessive 'like'. Of being *the* one, all the time. They will bring us down to earth without letting us fall.

The importance of a "Heart After God": The prophecy about a future king after God's own heart highlights that true leadership begins with an obedient and faithful heart. Likes should be to honour God and not self.

True surrender to God is better than being 'liked' by one's peers and friends.

The apostle Paul reminds us from his personal experience he was not seeking personal approval but rather his sole desire was to honour, and gain likes for God, rather than himself.

GROUP/CLASS QUESTIONS:

1. What would you personally like to be honoured and liked for?
2. Answer honestly if you ever compromised yourself by dishonouring God so that you would be liked.
3. Share either a personal time or that of someone you know who compromised their honour and it created problems for others.
4. Share what you think one must surrender so that God is honoured.

MEMORY VERSES FOR THE WEEK:

Monday: 1 Sam 13:11	<i>"What have you done?" asked Samuel."</i>
Tuesday: Gal 1:10b	<i>"If I were still trying to please people, I would not be a servant of Christ."</i>
Wednesday: John 12:43	<i>"for they loved human praise more than praise from God."</i>
Thursday: John 3:16	<i>"For God so loved the world that he gave his one and only Son, that whoever believes in him shall not perish but have eternal life."</i>
Friday: Micah 6:8	<i>"He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the LORD require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God."</i>
Saturday: Gal 1:10a	<i>"Am I now trying to win the approval of human beings, or of God?"</i>

FAMILY TIME: WRITTEN BY JENNY BLAKE (CHILDREN'S PASTOR)

Week 2: 14 September

Title: *Handling Socials – Don't Be a Slave to Likes*

Scripture: 1 Samuel 13:8–14 (NIV)

He waited seven days, the time set by Samuel; but Samuel did not come to Gilgal, and Saul's men began to scatter. So he said, "Bring me the burnt offering and the fellowship offerings." And Saul offered up the burnt offering. Just as he finished making the offering, Samuel arrived, and Saul went out to greet him. "What have you done?" asked Samuel. Saul replied, "When I saw that the men were scattering, and that you did not come at the set time... I felt compelled to offer the burnt offering." "You have done a foolish thing," Samuel said... "the Lord has sought out a man after his own heart..."

Introduction: The Pressure to Please

Have you ever posted something online and then checked it again and again to see how many likes it got? It's easy to let approval from others shape how we feel about ourselves. But God doesn't want us to live for the applause of people. He wants us to live for *His* approval.

In today's reading, Saul felt pressured by what people were doing—so he disobeyed God just to *look good* in front of others. That cost him everything. The same is true for us: when we care more about people's opinions than God's truth, we lose sight of who we are meant to be.

Key Point: Likes Don't Equal Worth

Social media can be fun—but it can also make us feel like we're not enough if we don't get attention, hearts, or followers. But our worth isn't measured by likes. It's measured by the love of God who made us, sees us, and never stops loving us. Saul's mistake was

letting fear and pressure decide his actions. God is looking for people who care more about what He thinks than about being popular.

Illustration: The Mirror or the Window

Think of two ways to see yourself:

- A **mirror** that reflects how people see you. This is like chasing likes—it only shows you what others think.
- A **window** that lets God’s light in. It shows you how *He* sees you—loved, chosen, and valuable no matter what.

Which one are you looking through most often?

Practical Application

- Before you post, ask: *Is this honouring God or just trying to get attention?*
- Turn off notifications for a while and notice how it changes your thoughts.
- Start your day with God’s Word, not a scroll through your feed.
- Remind yourself daily: *I’m already loved by the One who matters most.*

For Older Children (13–18): Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think social media can make us feel like we have to perform or impress others?
2. Have you ever felt disappointed or frustrated by how a post was received? What did that feel like?
3. What do you think it means to be “a person after God’s own heart” in an online world?
4. What boundaries might help you enjoy socials without being mastered by them?

For Younger Children (5–12): Discussion Questions

1. What makes you feel happy about something you’ve shared (like a picture or drawing)?
2. Do you think God loves us more when lots of people like us?
3. What can we do when we feel left out or ignored online or in real life?
4. How can we help others feel loved without needing likes?

Closing Thought

Social media changes all the time—but God’s love never changes. Saul lost sight of that and acted out of fear. But we can choose to live for God’s approval, not people’s praise. When we seek to please Him first, we find peace and purpose that no number of likes can give.

Prayer

Dear God, help us not to chase likes or be controlled by what others think. Teach us to listen to Your voice and follow Your ways, even when it’s hard. Show us how to be kind online and confident in Your love. Amen.