

1 Samuel 16:21-23; 18:1-16; 19:1-7; 20:12-17

Aim of Lesson

To show the value of true friendship, which can survive even in the face of severe difficulties.

Background study

Read 1 Samuel 18 to 26 in order to get an overall picture of events, and the developing relationships of the characters.

Suggested outline of lesson

Ask the children to recall David's triumph over Goliath and lead on to show how that event was to mark the beginning of a changed way of life for David. He was about to leave behind him his family, his friends and his life as a shepherd in Bethlehem. When the battle was over David was summoned to the presence of the king, who honoured him for his bravery and skill. Standing with king Saul was his son, Jonathan the prince, who was filled with admiration. David's great courage and, above all, his unshakeable faith in God, appealed strongly to Jonathan. Here was a kindred spirit. As they talked, David responded to Jonathan's clear signs of friendship, and the two recognized immediately their mutual affinity. Jonathan felt impelled to demonstrate his feelings of admiration and affection by bestowing gifts. In doing so, he not only honoured the young shepherd as an equal, but also, by implication, acknowledged David's right to the position of military leader. The princely robe would have contrasted strongly with the simple tunic, and the precious iron weapons (rare in Israel) were very different from his familiar sling and pebbles.

From that day David entered the service of the king. He soon earned a reputation as a military hero, and everywhere the people cheered him. As the number of his successes grew and his popularity increased, Saul's admiration of David turned to jealousy. Let the children read 1 Samuel 18:6-9, and help them to appreciate the understandable reaction of the once proud king whose superiority was now undermined. From that time on Saul became violent and unpredictable in his moods, as a result of his bitter hatred of the man who had captured the hearts of the people.

Ironically, it was David's task, as a skilled musician, to soothe the troubled king. The children will probably appreciate that music can affect people's moods and, when played softly and expressively, can induce calm and even sleep. Convey the shock that David experienced on the day following his triumphal homecoming, when suddenly Saul hurled his javelin at him, so that he had to leap for his life. From that day, the king was openly hostile, and David was continually on his guard.

Jonathan was saddened and alarmed by his father's menacing attitude towards David. Consider what it must have been like for Jonathan to live in an atmosphere of jealousy and hatred and to be torn between loyalty to his father and love for his friend. No one had more reason to resent David than he. But, despite David's success and his increasing favour with the people, and despite his challenge to his own secure position, Jonathan's friendship for David grew even stronger.

Jonathan did his utmost to bring about a reconciliation and to avert his father's murderous hatred. Read together in class the words of Jonathan (19:4-5) and stress the wisdom and godliness of the young man. He was so persuasive and diplomatic that Saul had to recognize the truth of his words and, for a while, peace was restored. This state of affairs was short-lived, however, and very soon David fled for his life. Then Jonathan became the go-between in a very stressful situation. Because he was a man of honour he stood by his father and king; because of his enduring love for David he continued to seek his good and protect him from his father's unreasonable, and angry outbursts.

Before David finally went into exile, describe the poignant scene, as the close friends sadly took leave of each other. It would seem that Jonathan understood that David had been chosen to replace him as the next king of Israel. Because of his faith in God and his love for David, he accepted the situation humbly, without the jealousy and resentment that had destroyed the character of his father.

Relevance to the children's lives

The friendship of Jonathan and David was very precious to both of them. What do you look for in your friends? How do you show that you are someone's friend? What can you do to make your friendships grow?

Worksheets

The solution to the riddle: FRIENDS.

Prayer

Dear Lord God, please help us to be kind and loyal to our friends, as David and Jonathan were to each other. Help us to remember that in Jesus we have the perfect friend. Amen.

Memory verse

"The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul" (1 Samuel 18:1).