

Aim of lesson

To show that a life of faithful service to God is not always easy or popular.

Bible background

1 Samuel 2; 3; 7; 8; 12; 15; 16:1-4

Outline of lesson

Explain to the class the background to God’s calling of Samuel. Eli was High Priest, but his sons acted wickedly and although Eli remonstrated with them it seems that he did too little, too late. You may like to discuss with the class the responsibility that parents have for their children’s behaviour.

The boy

Read together 1 Samuel 3, giving the different characters to the various members of your class. Then go through the first section of the workbook together, showing how the task of speaking God’s word to another is not always easy, especially when you know it is not what they want to hear. Eli was much older than Samuel. Samuel was dependent on him and he was afraid (verse 15). Encourage the class to think of themselves in situations where something wrong is suggested, perhaps by their friends at school. Do they find it easy to say that it is wrong, and when asked why, to reply ‘because God says it is’? What might they be afraid of?

The judge

Read together 1 Samuel 7:15-17, then go through the second section in the workbook, discussing with the class what the work of a judge would involve. Encourage them to think what it would be like to teach the people about God, about his ways and his laws, to settle disputes and judge criminals according to God’s law. It is also worth bringing out Samuel’s continual ministry of prayer for the people as seen in 1 Samuel 12:23. He would consider it a sin against the Lord to cease praying for them. Do the class see their responsibility to pray for others as quite so important; for the members of the class, friends at school, or people who are suffering from hunger or from the effects of war? Do they find it easy to pray not only for the needs of others, but also for their own forgiveness? Samuel obviously did pray like that.

The old man

At this point you will need briefly to remind the class that late in Samuel’s life his own sons were appointed to judge Israel, but they acted dishonestly, accepted bribes and perverted justice (1 Samuel 8:1-3). The people decided that they wanted a king, and Saul was chosen. His life is the subject of the next lesson, so there is no need to go into detail.

However, we now jump ahead to the end of Samuel’s life. Read together 1 Samuel 15:12-20; this passage also is suitable for reading by characters.

The last section in the workbook is similar to the first. Samuel showed no fear in reproving the king but he probably did feel a little fearful (1 Samuel 16:2). His reproof would not be popular after such a great victory, so it would have been much easier just to keep quiet. Samuel cared about Saul and did not want him to be rejected. He had prayed and cried to God all night for him, so it was not what Samuel, himself, wanted to say.

In the last box, encourage the class to think of Samuel’s relationship with God. Saul often referred to God as ‘the LORD your God’ but to Samuel he was not just someone else’s God, he was his God. Samuel had been given to God as a child and he always accepted the position of being a faithful servant; one who loved his master and always lived in his company, accepting his decisions.

Digging deeper

Israel’s Enemies

This section looks further at Israel’s enemies at the time of the judges and investigates where their lands were.

The Ark

This section discovers the travels of the ark in Philistine hands, as recorded in 1 Samuel 4-7:

- The Israelites take the ark into battle, but the Philistines capture it.
- The Philistines take the ark to the house of Dagon in Ashdod, then to Gath and Ekron
- The ark is returned to Beth-Shemesh, and thence to Kiriath-jearim.

Relevance to our lives

Ask the class to plan a simple prayer, which they could use during the week when faced with any task that they feel is hard but they ought to do.

Prayer

Dear Lord, creator of everything; please help us when we have to do things that we find hard. Help us always to be your faithful servants and not do just what will make us more popular with our friends.

Other suggestions for activities

The class could write a prayer that Samuel might have prayed during the night before confronting Saul and his sins (1 Samuel 15).

‘Samuel – this is your life’. This could be planned with a chairman introducing the characters of Hannah, Eli, Saul and David to talk about Samuel’s effect on their lives.