Aim of lesson

To show how self-centredness can gradually destroy a person; even one who begins by serving God with the right spirit.

Bible background

1 Samuel 9; 10; 11; 13:5-14; 15:1-30.

Outline of lesson

'If I were king '

You may like to ask each member the class to complete the sentence 'if I were king I would.........'. Then look at the record of the first king of Israel to see what he decided to do.

Six good steps

Read together in parts 1 Samuel 9:15 – 1 Samuel 10:1, and show what a good beginning there was to Saul's reign. Both in what God gave him and his own attitude. Saul was heading in the right direction. Use the first section in the workbook to help the class bring this out. The following points may be useful:

1. He was chosen by God (1 Samuel 10:1). He didn't decide to be king himself. He accepted God's choice.

2. God was with him (1 Samuel 10:7). God even gave several miraculous signs to show that he was with him.

3. He showed humility (1 Samuel 9:20-21; 10:20-23). He recognised his own unworthiness. If he had kept this attitude, the end of his life would have been different.

4. He stayed still to hear the word of God (1 Samuel 9:27). A vital step before doing anything worth while.

5. He did not retaliate (1 Samuel 10:26-27). At this stage he did not think so much of himself and could keep silent when others spoke badly about him. This was not an easy thing to do.

6. He gave God glory for his victory (1 Samuel 11:12-13). He still recognised that God was in charge and that he was the one who gave victory.

and six bad

You may like to read together or to summarise 1 Samuel 13:5-14 before looking at the second section in the workbook. The first two points are from this chapter and are intended to bring out the following thoughts.

1. Impatience (1 Samuel 13:8-10). It would seem that, on the day that Samuel promised to be there, Saul saw that he was not and immediately decided to take things into his own hands. Samuel then arrived; he was not in fact late, but Saul was not prepared to wait for God.

2. Disobedience (1 Samuel 13:9-12). He knew this was wrong (verse 12), but thought that it was more important to win the battle than to do it God's way. It is unlikely that you will have time to read chapter 15 in class, but it would be useful to read together verses 1-3. You may well need to answer questions on the putting to death of all the people including children. It is worth stressing that God, who sees the future, does have the right to judge. He is always merciful and only wipes out a nation when it is totally corrupt and there is no hope for any child growing up in that society.

3. Greed (1 Samuel 15:3,9). Saul and his armies had no problem with wiping out the people, but the flocks were valuable and they did not want to devote them to God. Saul obeyed only the part that suited him. Anything that was good they kept for themselves.

4. Lying and hypocrisy (1 Samuel 15:13). Although Saul wanted to do things in his own way and to be popular with the people, he also wanted to give the impression that he was doing what God wanted. He was probably trying to convince himself as well by saying that he had done what the Lord commanded.

5. Cowardice (1 Samuel 15:15,21,24). He blamed the people. He was king and knew that he was responsible for the decision about keeping the flocks. However, he blamed others and, in excuse, said that he was afraid of the people.

6. Pride (1 Samuel 15:30). He was not so concerned about God's opinion of his actions as he was that he would be honoured in the sight of the people. Compare Saul's changed opinion of himself in 1 Samuel 15:12-17.

Digging deeper

The witch

Another example of Saul's departure from God is his visit to the witch at Endor. This section deals with the end of Saul's life. It can initiate a discussion about fortune-telling, mediums and horoscopes.

If the young people ask about what the witch actually saw, it is probably best to say that we don't really know, but it was a message from God. The explanation that best fits the scriptural account is probably that Samuel was raised from the dead for a while – hence the witch's astonishment.

God does not want us to turn to anyone but him (Leviticus 19:31), and it is clear that modern forms of fortune telling never actually reveal anything useful and often use trickery.

Relevance to our lives

Both the good points at the beginning of Saul's reign and the faults that he showed when going downhill are very valuable for us. You may find it helpful to bring these out as you discuss them or to go back through them when looking for the lessons for use at the end. The following are some suggestions. Encourage the class to think of parallels for themselves.

- The followers of Christ are chosen by God. Ephesians 1:4.

- God promises to be with those who love him. John 14:23.

- Ask the class how they think they could show humility.

- In practice, how should they 'stay still' to hear the word of God.

- They should be able to think of many situations where the right thing to do is to be silent and not retaliate. For example, when someone at school criticises or even lies about them.

- When things go well and they are successful, do they boast or keep quiet, accepting that it is God who is in charge of our successes.

It may also be profitable to look at Saul's failures in turn to see how we can be guilty of the same faults. You may like to give each member, or pair, one of the faults to think of a present-day example in their own experience and to then relate it to the whole group. If there is insufficient time for this to be done in class, this part could be done during the week.

Prayer

Dear Lord and King, Thank you for choosing us and promising to be with us always, wherever we may be. Help us to serve you with all our hearts and to do things your way without being selfish or disobedient.

Other suggestions for activities

- Samuel 15 could be acted out using the class's own words.

- A discussion could be planned between two Israelites at the time of Saul, discussing whether he was a good or a bad king.