

FIRST SAMUEL

FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL YOUTH



TEACHER NOTES

13 Sessions | Quantum Reality Programming LLC | Ron Whittam

How to Use These Notes

Welcome! This study walks through the book of 1 Samuel in thirteen sessions, each built for a 45-minute middle school meeting. The big question running through the whole book is: **What kind of people does God honor, and what kind of leaders does He reject?** Along the way students meet women and men who loved God and loved people, defended the weak, and encouraged others, and also leaders who were disobedient, proud, jealous, or cruel. Every session points to Jesus Christ, the Anointed King from David's family, born in Bethlehem.

Each session in these notes contains:

- **Big Idea and Memory Verse** (New King James Version).
- **Jesus in the Story:** how the passage points to Christ.
- **A 45-minute session plan** with timing for each part.
- **The story to tell** in language middle schoolers understand. Read the Bible text first, then tell it in your own words.
- **God Admires / God Warns:** the godly qualities and the ungodly choices in the passage.
- **Discussion questions with suggested answers.**
- **Background notes** on the history, culture and geography, so you can answer questions with confidence.
- **Think, Feel, Do** questions for personal application (the same three used in the web app).

Companion materials

Student Handouts (PDF): one page per session; print one for each student. **Podcast MP3s:** thirteen short audio lessons with two voices, a nice way to review at home or in the car. **Web app:** the sessions, discussion questions, handouts, audio, and a private Think/Feel/Do reflection for each session.

A few teaching tips

- Pray before you teach. Ask God to help you see the story the way He sees it.
- Read the passage aloud from the NKJV. Let students read, too.
- Be gentle with the hard parts (the death of Eli, the killing of the priests of Nob, the end of Saul). Tell the truth plainly, without graphic detail, and always point to God's justice, mercy, and plan.
- When a student asks something you do not know, say so, and tell them you will find out.
- Watch for the student who feels like David on the hillside: unnoticed. Make sure they know God sees them.
- If a student shares something that suggests they are being hurt, or are thinking about harming themselves, speak with them privately, involve your pastor and their parents, and follow your church's safety policy.

Overview of 1 Samuel

What is 1 Samuel about?

1 Samuel tells the story of Israel’s change from the time of the judges to the time of the kings, about 1100 to 1010 BC. It follows three main men: Samuel the prophet, Saul the first king, and David the shepherd who would become king. It also tells of the women and men who loved God and loved people, and of the leaders who did not.

Who wrote it?

The book does not name its author. Jewish tradition connects it with Samuel, Nathan, and Gad (1 Chronicles 29:29). Originally 1 and 2 Samuel were one book.

Key themes

God lifts up the humble and brings down the proud (1 Samuel 2:7-8). God looks at the heart (16:7). Obedience matters more than religious show (15:22). The true King is the LORD’s Anointed, who points us to Jesus Christ.

Where is Jesus?

The word ‘anointed’ (Messiah) first appears for a coming king in Hannah’s song (2:10). David the shepherd-king from Bethlehem is a picture of Jesus the Good Shepherd, born in the same town and called the Son of David.

The 13 Sessions at a Glance

#	Session	Passage	Key Verse
1	A Woman Who Prayed	1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11	1 Samuel 1:27
2	A Boy Who Listened	1 Samuel 2:12 – 3:21	1 Samuel 3:10
3	The Ark, the Idol, and the Stone of Help	1 Samuel 4 – 7	1 Samuel 7:12
4	We Want a King!	1 Samuel 8 – 9	1 Samuel 8:7
5	Saul the Rescuer	1 Samuel 10 – 12	1 Samuel 12:24
6	Brave Jonathan and Saul’s Costly Choices	1 Samuel 13 – 15	1 Samuel 15:22
7	God Looks at the Heart	1 Samuel 16	1 Samuel 16:7
8	David and Goliath: The Battle Is the LORD’s	1 Samuel 17	1 Samuel 17:47
9	A Friend Who Loved Like Jesus	1 Samuel 18 – 20	1 Samuel 18:3
10	The Cave of Adullam and the Murder at Nob	1 Samuel 21 – 22	1 Samuel 22:23
11	Mercy for an Enemy	1 Samuel 23 – 24 and 26	1 Samuel 24:6
12	A Wise Woman Named Abigail	1 Samuel 25	1 Samuel 25:33
13	The Fall of a King and the Strength of a Shepherd	1 Samuel 27 – 31	1 Samuel 30:6

Session 1: A Woman Who Prayed

1 Samuel 1:1 – 2:11

Big Idea: When life hurts, God’s people pour out their hearts to Him in prayer, keep their promises, and trust Him to lift up the humble.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “For this child I prayed, and the LORD has granted me my petition which I asked of Him.” (1 Samuel 1:27)

Jesus in the Story

Hannah’s song ends by naming God’s “anointed” (1 Samuel 2:10). The Hebrew word is Messiah, and it is the very first time the word is used for a coming King. Hannah looks ahead to Jesus Christ, the Anointed One, who lifts up the poor and humbles the proud. Hundreds of years later, Mary the mother of Jesus sang a song that sounds just like Hannah’s (Luke 1:46-55).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Gift-box question. Pray together. Give a two-minute overview of 1 Samuel: it is the story of a nation that wanted a king, and of the men and women God honored and the leaders He rejected.
15	Bible Story	Tell the story of Hannah (read 1:9-18 and 1:27-28 aloud from the NKJV).
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Look at Hannah, Elkanah, and Eli on the board. What does God admire in each?
5	The Warning Side	Peninnah’s teasing. How do words wound? Briefly introduce Hophni and Phinehas as a coming warning.
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students write one thing they will ‘pour out’ to God this week. Close in prayer.

Opening activity: Hold up a gift-wrapped box. Ask: “If someone gave you something you wanted for years, would you give it away?” Take a few answers, then say, “Today we meet a woman who did exactly that.”

The Story to Tell

Our story begins in a dark time. The book of Judges ended with these sad words: “everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” Israel had no king, and many people had forgotten God. But in the middle of that dark time, God was quietly working through one hurting woman.

Her name was Hannah. She lived in the hill country of Ephraim with her husband Elkanah. Elkanah had a second wife named Peninnah, and Peninnah had many children. Hannah had none. In those days that was a very heavy sorrow. Worse still, Peninnah teased Hannah about it, year after year, especially when the family went up to worship at Shiloh, where the Tabernacle stood. Hannah would cry and not even eat.

Her husband Elkanah loved her. He asked, “Hannah, why do you weep? Why is your heart grieved? Am I not better to you than ten sons?” He could not fix her problem, but he stayed close and tried to encourage her. That is what a good friend does.

One day at Shiloh, Hannah got up and went to pray. She was in deep distress and wept bitterly. She made a promise: if God would give her a son, she would give him back to the LORD all the days of his life. She prayed silently, only her lips moving. Eli the priest was watching from his seat, and he thought she was drunk! He scolded her. Hannah answered gently, “I am a woman of sorrowful spirit... I have poured out my soul before the LORD.” Eli realized he had made a mistake. He blessed her: “Go in peace, and the God of Israel grant your petition.” Hannah went away, ate something, and “her face was no longer sad.” Her problem was not yet solved, but she had put it in God’s hands.

God remembered Hannah. She had a baby boy and named him Samuel, which sounds like “heard by God.” And Hannah kept her promise. When Samuel was just a little boy, probably about three years old, she took him to Shiloh and gave him to Eli to serve the LORD. Think how hard that must have been! But Hannah did not hold on to the gift. She gave it back to the Giver.

Then Hannah prayed a song of joy. She said, “No one is holy like the LORD, for there is none besides You, nor is there any rock like our God.” She sang that God lifts up the poor, feeds the hungry, and brings down the proud. And at the very end she sang about a coming King, God’s “anointed.” That is a clue that points straight to Jesus.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Hannah	Prayed from a broken heart, kept her promise to God, and gave her very best back to Him	1 Samuel 1:10-28
Elkanah	Loved and encouraged his hurting wife: “Am I not better to you than ten sons?”	1 Samuel 1:8
Eli	Heard Hannah’s side, admitted he was wrong, and blessed her	1 Samuel 1:17

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Peninnah	Teased and provoked Hannah year after year because Hannah was hurting and could not answer back	She used her words to make a hurting person hurt more. God notices how we treat people who are struggling.
Hophni and Phinehas	Eli’s sons were priests who did not even know the LORD (1 Samuel 2:12). They are introduced here as a storm cloud on the horizon.	God’s judgment on them is coming in the next sessions.

Discussion Questions

1. What did Hannah do with her sadness? What can you do with yours?

Suggested answer: She took it to God, pouring out her soul in prayer. We can pray honestly, tell God everything, and leave the problem with Him.

2. How was Elkanah a good encourager even though he could not fix Hannah’s problem?

Suggested answer: He noticed her tears, asked caring questions, and reminded her that she was loved. Encouragement is often just being present and kind.

3. Why do you think Peninnah’s words hurt so much? Have you ever seen someone treated that way?

Suggested answer: She targeted something Hannah could not change. Guide students toward standing up for hurting classmates and not joining in teasing.

4. Hannah gave Samuel back to God. What is something you could give back to God: time, talent, or something you love?

Suggested answer: Open answers. Help students think of tangible things: serving, sharing, praying, giving.

5. How does Hannah's song point to Jesus?

Suggested answer: She sings of God's "anointed" King (Messiah). Jesus is the Anointed One who lifts the lowly.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Setting. 1 Samuel opens near the end of the period of the Judges, roughly 1100 BC. Israel was disorganized and spiritually weak. The Tabernacle was at Shiloh in the hill country of Ephraim, about 20 miles north of Jerusalem. Families traveled there each year for sacrifices and festivals (Deuteronomy 16).
- Marriage and children. In the ancient Near East, a woman's standing in the family and her security in old age often depended on bearing sons. Having more than one wife, though practiced, is never presented as God's design; Peninnah's cruelty and Hannah's tears show the pain it caused. Be gentle here: some of your students come from complicated families.
- A promise like a Nazirite vow. Hannah promised that no razor would touch Samuel's head (1:11), which echoes the Nazirite vow of Numbers 6. Samuel's life would be set apart for God.
- Weaning. In that culture children were nursed for about two to three years. Samuel was likely about three when he went to Shiloh. He was not abandoned; Hannah visited each year and brought him a little robe (2:19).
- The name Samuel. It sounds like the Hebrew for "heard of God" or "name of God." The point: God hears.
- Hannah's song (2:1-10). It is the theme song of the whole book: the LORD brings down the proud and lifts the humble. It is echoed in Mary's Magnificat (Luke 1:46-55). In verse 10 the word "anointed" is the Hebrew *mashiach*, the root of Messiah.
- Eli and Hannah. Eli's first response was a mistake, but when Hannah explained, he listened and blessed her. Note this about Eli: he could be gentle and a good listener. His failure in the coming sessions is not hardness but passivity toward his sons.
- Care in teaching. Avoid suggesting that prayer is a formula to get what we want. Hannah's peace came before her answer. God does not always answer the way we ask, but He always hears.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: What does Hannah's story teach you about what to do with a problem that seems too big?

Feel: How do you feel when you know God hears every prayer, even silent ones like Hannah's?

Do: Who is someone who is hurting that you can encourage this week, the way Elkanah encouraged Hannah?

This week's challenge: Pray an honest 'pour out your heart' prayer each day this week. Find one person who is hurting and encourage them with a kind word or a note.

Session 2: A Boy Who Listened

1 Samuel 2:12 – 3:21

Big Idea: God honors the person who listens and obeys, even when they are young, and He judges leaders who know better and refuse to do what is right.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Then the LORD came and stood and called as at other times, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.”” (1 Samuel 3:10)

Jesus in the Story

“And the child Samuel grew in stature, and in favor both with the LORD and men” (1 Samuel 2:26). Luke says nearly the same thing about Jesus as a boy: “Jesus increased in wisdom and stature, and in favor with God and men” (Luke 2:52). Samuel is a faithful prophet who speaks God’s Word. Jesus is the perfect Prophet, and He is the Word of God made flesh (John 1:14).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Voice game. Quick recap of Hannah and Samuel.
14	Bible Story	Tell the contrast: the corrupt priests vs. the faithful boy. Read 3:1-10 aloud.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Samuel’s qualities. What did he do right? Note: Samuel had no perfect role models, but he was faithful anyway.
6	The Warning Side	Hophni, Phinehas and Eli. Discuss leaders who know better but do nothing. God holds people accountable.
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students pray ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears’ and choose a time this week to listen to God through His Word.

Opening activity: Play ‘Whose voice is it?’ Have a volunteer close their eyes while another student says ‘Good morning!’ Can they tell who it is? Then ask: how do you recognize the voice of someone you know well? How might we learn to recognize God’s voice?

The Story to Tell

Last time we met Hannah, who gave her little boy Samuel to serve God at Shiloh. Now we see what Samuel’s new home was like, and it was not a good place to grow up!

Eli was the high priest, but his two sons, Hophni and Phinehas, were priests, too. The Bible says bluntly, “Now the sons of Eli were corrupt; they did not know the LORD.” When people brought animals to offer to God, these two bullies took the best meat for themselves, even grabbing it by force. They also treated women who served at the Tabernacle shamefully. People began to hate going to worship because of how the priests behaved.

Eli heard about it and said, “Why do you do such things?” But he only talked. He never took away their jobs. A man of God came to Eli and said, “You honor your sons more than Me.” God was serious about it. A priest is supposed to help people come near to God, and these men were driving people away.

But look at the contrast. In the same place, a little boy was quietly growing. “The child Samuel ministered to the LORD.” He wore a little linen ephod, a priest’s apron, and Hannah made him a new little robe each year. Samuel

grew taller, and he grew in favor with the LORD and with people. He was a good kid in a bad situation. You can too.

Now, the Bible says that in those days “the word of the LORD was rare.” God was not speaking much, because few people were listening. One night, Samuel was lying down near the Ark of God. Eli’s eyes were so dim he could barely see. Then Samuel heard a voice call, “Samuel!” He ran to Eli: “Here I am, for you called me.” Eli said, “I did not call; lie down again.” It happened a second time. And a third. Finally, Eli realized that it was the LORD, and he gave Samuel wise advice: “If He calls you, you shall say, ‘Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears.’”

So Samuel went back and lay down. The LORD came and stood and called, “Samuel! Samuel!” And Samuel answered, “Speak, for Your servant hears.” Then God told Samuel something very hard. Eli’s family would be judged, because Eli had known his sons were doing wrong and had not stopped them.

In the morning, Samuel was afraid to tell Eli. But Eli called him and said, “Do not hide it from me.” So Samuel told him everything. Eli answered quietly, “It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him.” From that day on, the LORD was with Samuel and “let none of his words fall to the ground.” Everyone from Dan to Beersheba, the whole land, knew that Samuel was a true prophet of the LORD.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Samuel	Served God faithfully as a child, came running when called, listened to God, and told the truth even when it was hard	1 Samuel 3:1-18
Hannah	Kept caring for her son from a distance, making him a little robe every year. God then blessed her with more children.	1 Samuel 2:19-21
Eli (at the end)	When Samuel finally told him the hard message, Eli humbly said, “It is the LORD. Let Him do what seems good to Him.”	1 Samuel 3:18

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Hophni and Phinehas	As priests they grabbed the best of the sacrifices by force, treated the LORD’s offering with contempt, and sinned shamefully at the very door of the Tabernacle.	God announced they would both die on the same day (2:34).
Eli	He heard what his sons were doing and scolded them, but he never stopped them. God said he honored his sons more than Him.	God’s judgment fell on Eli’s family because “his sons made themselves vile, and he did not restrain them” (3:13).

Discussion Questions

1. Samuel lived in a place where the leaders were wicked. How did he stay faithful?

Suggested answer: He kept serving God, stayed humble, and kept listening. He chose not to copy the bad example around him.

2. Why did Samuel run to Eli each time he heard his name? What does that tell us about Samuel?

Suggested answer: He was willing, obedient, and eager to help. He did not grumble about being woken.

3. What was Eli’s big mistake as a father and as a leader?

Suggested answer: He knew about the sin and talked about it but never acted. Good leaders protect what is right.

4. Samuel was afraid to tell Eli the message. When is it hard to tell the truth? What gives us courage?

Suggested answer: Truth that will hurt, or truth to someone older. Courage comes from knowing God asked us to speak it, and speaking with respect and love.

5. How do we hear God speak today?

Suggested answer: Mainly through His written Word, the Bible, along with prayer, godly counsel, and the Holy Spirit's prompting. God will never contradict Scripture.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- The Tabernacle at Shiloh. Eli served as priest at the Tabernacle (called the 'temple' in 1:9 and 3:3, which here means the sanctuary). The Ark of the Covenant was inside the Most Holy Place. Samuel slept in the area near it, likely as an attendant.
- The sacrificial system. Under the Law (Leviticus 7), the priests received a defined portion of certain offerings. Hophni and Phinehas demanded far more, and even insisted on taking the meat before the fat had been burned to the LORD (2:15-16). Burning the fat was an act of giving God His portion first. Taking it was stealing from God and robbing the worshipers. 'Men abhorred the offering of the LORD' (2:17).
- Eli's passivity. Eli was 98 years old by chapter 4 and had grown heavy (4:18). He did rebuke his sons verbally. But the Law gave the high priest authority to remove unfit priests, and he did not use it. God's accusation is that Eli 'honored' his sons above Him (2:29). Teach students that love without correction is not true love.
- 'The word of the LORD was rare.' Prophets were few because the nation was not listening. When God wants to speak, He looks for someone with a listening ear.
- Samuel's age. Jewish tradition and many scholars place him around 12 years old at his calling. Josephus says twelve. The text calls him a 'boy' (Hebrew na'ar), a flexible term. The exact age matters less than the point: God speaks to the young.
- Dan to Beersheba. This phrase marks the whole land from north to south. Samuel's authority as a prophet was recognized everywhere, which prepares for his role as the one who will anoint Israel's first two kings.
- A note on discernment. Be careful to teach that God's voice is recognized through Scripture. Samuel did not know the LORD yet (3:7), meaning he had not yet had this kind of direct experience of His voice; he learned through Eli's guidance. Encourage students to learn from godly mentors, like Eli's one good piece of advice.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Samuel stayed faithful in a bad environment. What does this teach you about your own school or friend group?

Feel: How would it feel to have to deliver a hard message to someone older? What would help you be brave?

Do: When this week will you set aside five quiet minutes to say, "Speak, LORD, for Your servant hears," and read a Bible verse?

This week's challenge: Read one chapter of a Gospel (Mark 1 is a good one) in a quiet place and pray Samuel's prayer first. Write down one thing God showed you.

Session 3: The Ark, the Idol, and the Stone of Help

1 Samuel 4 – 7

Big Idea: God is not a lucky charm. He wants hearts that turn back to Him, and when His people return, He helps them. “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Then Samuel took a stone and set it up between Mizpah and Shen, and called its name Ebenezer, saying, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.”” (1 Samuel 7:12)

Jesus in the Story

The Ark of the Covenant had a golden lid called the mercy seat, where blood was sprinkled to cover the people’s sin. The New Testament says Jesus is our mercy seat: God put Him forward as the One whose blood pays for our sin (Romans 3:25). Israel thought the Ark was a good-luck box. Jesus is God truly with us (Matthew 1:23), not a charm but a Savior.

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Lucky charm discussion. Quick recap: Samuel is growing, Eli’s sons are wicked.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapters 4-6 quickly and vividly (the falling idol and the cows are favorites!). Read 7:3-6 aloud.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Samuel’s leadership: calling people back to God, praying for them, giving God the credit.
6	The Warning Side	Using God as a lucky charm. What is the difference between religion and a real relationship with God?
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions. Make an ‘Ebenezer’ list on the board of ways God has helped.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Each student picks a small stone or draws one to write ‘Thus far the LORD has helped me.’ Prayer of thanks.

Opening activity: Show a rabbit’s foot, a four-leaf clover, or a picture of a horseshoe. Ask: ‘What do people believe about these? Does God work like this?’ Then ask: ‘Can you use God to get what you want?’

The Story to Tell

The Philistines were Israel’s fierce enemies from the coast. They attacked and Israel lost four thousand men. The elders asked, “Why has the LORD defeated us?” But they never asked, “What have we done wrong?” Instead they had a plan: “Let us bring the ark of the covenant of the LORD... that it may save us.” They treated God like a lucky charm. Hophni and Phinehas brought the Ark to the battle, still living in sin.

At first, when the Ark came into camp, the Israelites shouted so loudly the ground shook. The Philistines were scared! But they fought harder anyway. Israel was crushed: thirty thousand foot soldiers fell. Hophni and Phinehas were killed, and the Philistines captured the Ark of God.

A runner raced to Shiloh with the news. Old Eli was sitting by the road, trembling for the Ark. When the messenger said, “The ark of God has been captured,” Eli fell backward off his seat, broke his neck, and died. He was 98 years old and had led Israel for 40 years. His daughter-in-law, the wife of Phinehas, went into labor when she heard the

news. She named her son Ichabod, which means “no glory,” saying, “The glory has departed from Israel, for the ark of God has been captured.”

Now the Philistines carried the Ark into the temple of their idol Dagon and set it next to him. The next morning Dagon was lying face down in front of the Ark! They set him back up. The next morning Dagon had fallen again, with his head and hands broken off. And God sent painful tumors on the people of Ashdod. They moved the Ark from city to city, and the sickness followed. The Philistine leaders finally decided, “Send it back!” They loaded it on a cart pulled by two cows who had never pulled a cart and who had just had calves. If the cows walked straight toward Israel, away from their babies, it would prove the LORD did this. The cows went straight to Beth Shemesh, lowing as they went.

The Ark stayed at Kirjath Jearim for twenty years. During those years Israel lamented and slowly began to long for the LORD. Then Samuel spoke to all the people: “If you return to the LORD with all your hearts, then put away the foreign gods... and prepare your hearts for the LORD, and serve Him only; and He will deliver you.” They did! They gathered at Mizpah, fasted, and confessed, “We have sinned against the LORD.”

When the Philistines heard Israel was gathered, they attacked. The people said to Samuel, “Do not cease to cry out to the LORD our God for us.” Samuel offered a lamb, and as he prayed, the LORD thundered with a loud thunder against the Philistines and confused them. Israel won! Samuel took a stone and set it up as a memorial, calling it Ebenezer, which means “stone of help.” He said, “Thus far the LORD has helped us.” And all the days of Samuel, the hand of the LORD was against the Philistines.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Samuel	Called the nation to turn from idols and return to God with all their hearts; prayed for them; gave God the credit	1 Samuel 7:3-12
The people of Israel at Mizpah	Confessed their sin honestly (“We have sinned against the LORD”) and put away their idols	1 Samuel 7:4-6
Eli’s daughter-in-law	In her heartbreak, what mattered most to her was that God’s glory was gone. She named her baby Ichabod: “The glory has departed from Israel.”	1 Samuel 4:19-22

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Hophni and Phinehas	They treated the Ark of God like a good-luck charm, carrying it into battle while living in sin	Both died the same day, just as God had said. The Ark was captured.
Israel’s idolaters	They worshiped the Baals and Ashtoreths (false gods) while trying to use the LORD when it was convenient	Twenty years of oppression until they truly returned to God.
Eli	He sat watching by the road, afraid for the Ark, but had not stopped his sons from sin	He fell backward from his seat when he heard the Ark was taken, and he died. He had judged Israel for 40 years.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Israel lose even though they brought the Ark?

Suggested answer: Their hearts were not right with God. They tried to use the Ark like magic instead of turning back to God.

2. What does it mean to treat God like a lucky charm? How might we do it today?

Suggested answer: Only praying or going to church when we need something, or believing certain items or rituals protect us without trusting God.

3. What did Samuel tell the people to do? Why does turning back to God take more than words?

Suggested answer: Put away idols and serve the LORD only with all their hearts. Repentance is a changed life, not just feeling sorry.

4. What does “Ebenezer” remind us to do?

Suggested answer: To remember and thank God for the ways He has helped us in the past.

5. How does Jesus fulfill what the Ark’s mercy seat pictured?

Suggested answer: He is our mercy seat; His blood covers our sin so we can come to God (Romans 3:25).

Background Notes for the Teacher

- The Ark of the Covenant. A gold-covered wooden chest with a solid gold lid (the mercy seat) topped by two cherubim. It held the stone tablets of the Ten Commandments (Hebrews 9:4). It was the symbol of God’s throne on earth. To treat it like a battle weapon showed contempt.
- The Philistines. Sea peoples who settled the southern coast of Canaan around 1200 BC. They had five main cities: Ashdod, Gaza, Ashkelon, Gath, and Ekron. They had iron weapons and chariots, which gave them military advantage over Israel (13:19-22). Dagon was their grain god, often pictured with a man’s body and a fish or grain symbol.
- Dagon and the Ark. Having a fallen idol with head and hands broken (6:4-5) was a stunning sign. The threshold of Dagon’s temple remained a place where priests would not step (5:5). The tumors may have been related to bubonic plague (the ‘mice’ of 6:4-5 suggest rodents); the point is that God, not chance, sent them (6:9).
- The cows. The test in 6:7-12 was designed by Philistine priests: untrained cows nursing calves would naturally stay with their young. By going straight to Israel, they proved that God was in control.
- Kirjath Jearim and the twenty years. The Ark remained there until David brought it to Jerusalem in 2 Samuel 6. The twenty years (7:2) probably describes how long Israel languished before turning back to the LORD.
- Ichabod. Hebrew for ‘no glory’ or ‘where is the glory?’. The tragedy was not just a lost box; God’s visible presence was missing because the people had ignored Him.
- Samuel as judge. Samuel is the last judge and the first of the prophets. He circuited Bethel, Gilgal, Mizpah and Ramah (7:16-17). He combined three roles: judge (leader), prophet (God’s spokesman), and priest (offering sacrifices and praying). That prefigures Jesus, who is Prophet, Priest, and King.
- A pastoral note. Do not leave students with the idea that God only helps when we are perfect. The people had twenty years of struggle first, and then returned. God is rich in mercy to anyone who truly turns.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Is there anything I am treating like a ‘lucky charm’ instead of trusting God Himself?

Feel: How do you feel when you remember something God has helped you through? What would an Ebenezer stone be for you?

Do: What is one idol (something that takes God’s place) you will put away this week?

This week’s challenge: Make your own ‘Ebenezer’: find a small stone, write on it one way God has helped you, and keep it somewhere you will see it. Write the words ‘Thus far the LORD has helped me.’

Session 4: We Want a King!

1 Samuel 8 – 9

Big Idea: Wanting to be like everyone else can lead us to reject God Himself, but God is gracious, listens to our cries, and still works out His plan.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “And the LORD said to Samuel, “Heed the voice of the people in all that they say to you; for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me, that I should not reign over them.”” (1 Samuel 8:7)

Jesus in the Story

Israel asked for a king “like all the nations,” but what they truly needed was God Himself as King. Jesus said, “My kingdom is not of this world” (John 18:36). Saul would look impressive and fail. Jesus is the King who never fails, and He rules with humility and love. Every earthly king points to our need for the perfect King.

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Peer-pressure question. Recap: Ichabod and Ebenezer. Samuel is now old.
14	Bible Story	Tell the story. Read 8:4-9 and 9:15-17 aloud.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Samuel praying, the humble servant, and God listening to a cry for help. How does a godly leader respond when he is hurt?
6	The Warning Side	Bribes and dishonesty (Joel and Abijah). Following the crowd (the elders). What happens when leaders ignore the weak?
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students name one area where they feel pressure to ‘be like everyone else.’ Pray to put God first.

Opening activity: Ask: ‘Have you ever wanted something just because everyone else had it? A phone, a brand of shoes?’ Then ask: ‘Is it always bad? When does it become a problem?’

The Story to Tell

Samuel was now an old man. He had faithfully led Israel for many years, but his sons, Joel and Abijah, were not like him. When Samuel made them judges at Beersheba, they “turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice.” That means if you were poor, you got no fair hearing, and if you had money, you could buy a good result. This is exactly the kind of thing that hurts the weak and the helpless, and God hates it.

The elders of Israel came to Samuel at Ramah with a request: “Now make us a king to judge us like all the nations.” Samuel was displeased, and he prayed. God told him, “They have not rejected you, but they have rejected Me.” God was their King already! Wanting to be “like all the nations” was really saying, “We do not want to be different. We do not trust You to lead us.”

God told Samuel to warn them. Samuel told them exactly what a king would do: take their sons to fight and work his fields, take their daughters to be cooks and bakers, take the best of their fields and vineyards, take a tenth of their grain and their flocks. “And you will be his servants.” He warned, “You will cry out in that day because of your king... and the LORD will not hear you.” But the people refused. “No, but we will have a king over us, that we also may be like all the nations.” So God told Samuel, “Heed their voice, and make them a king.”

Now the story turns to a man named Saul, from the tribe of Benjamin. His father Kish was a wealthy man. The Bible says Saul was “a choice and handsome” young man, and “from his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.” One day, Kish’s donkeys were lost! He sent Saul and a servant to search. They searched for three days and found nothing. Saul said, “Let’s go back; my father will start worrying about us.”

Here is where the servant shines. He said, “There is in this city a man of God... let us go there; perhaps he can show us the way.” Saul worried they had no gift to give, but the servant said, “I have here at hand one fourth of a shekel of silver. I will give that to the man of God.” The servant was humble and wise, and he gave what he had.

A day earlier, the LORD had told Samuel, “Tomorrow about this time I will send you a man from the land of Benjamin, and you shall anoint him commander over My people Israel, that he may save My people from the hand of the Philistines; for I have looked upon My people, because their cry has come to Me.” God had heard. When Samuel saw Saul, the LORD said, “There he is, the man of whom I spoke to you.” Samuel treated Saul with honor, seating him at the head of the feast and giving him the choicest portion. Saul was surprised: “Am I not a Benjamite, from the smallest tribe of Israel?” That is a humble beginning. We will see what happens next.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Samuel	When the people’s request hurt him, he took it to God in prayer and then faithfully warned them of the truth	1 Samuel 8:6-9
Saul’s servant	A humble, wise helper. He suggested asking the man of God, and he offered his own small silver coin to pay for it.	1 Samuel 9:6-10
God Himself	He heard His people’s cry for help and chose a deliverer for them, even though they had rejected Him	1 Samuel 9:16

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Joel and Abijah (Samuel’s sons)	As judges, they turned aside after dishonest gain, took bribes, and perverted justice. Poor and weak people could not get a fair hearing.	Their corruption gave the elders an excuse to demand a king, and it ended any hope of their leadership.
The elders of Israel	They demanded a king “like all the nations” instead of trusting God’s rule. They followed the crowd.	God gave them what they asked for, and they learned the high cost of a human king.

Discussion Questions

1. Why was it so wrong for Samuel’s sons to take bribes?

Suggested answer: Bribes meant justice went to the highest bidder. The poor and weak lost out, and God cares deeply about justice for the vulnerable.

2. What was the real problem with asking for a king?

Suggested answer: Their reason was wrong: they wanted to be like the nations and no longer trusted God to lead them.

3. What did Samuel do when he was hurt by the people’s request? What can we learn?

Suggested answer: He prayed. When we are hurt or disappointed, we can take it to God first.

4. What qualities did you see in Saul’s servant?

Suggested answer: Humility, wisdom, helpfulness, generosity. Small acts of service can change history.

5. God gave them what they asked for. Is getting what we want always a good thing?

Suggested answer: No. Sometimes God lets us have our way and we learn the cost. We should pray, ‘Your will be done.’

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Historical setting. About 1050 BC. Israel was a loose group of twelve tribes without a central government, constantly threatened by the Philistines, Ammonites, and others. The need for a more unified leadership was real. God had even anticipated Israel’s request for a king in Deuteronomy 17:14-20 and set rules for him: not to multiply horses, wives or gold, and to write out and read the Law daily. So the problem was not kingship itself, but the motive and the timing, and rejecting God as the true King.
- Beersheba. Samuel appointed his sons as judges at Beersheba, far in the south, which means that there was distance and little oversight. Bribes in the ancient world were common and are condemned throughout the Law (Exodus 23:8; Deuteronomy 16:19).
- Samuel’s warning (8:11-18). The Hebrew verb for ‘take’ appears repeatedly. A king would draft sons, tax produce, and seize land, a pattern that later happened under Solomon and his son Rehoboam (1 Kings 12).
- Saul. His name means ‘asked for,’ a reminder that he was the people’s choice. He came from Gibeah in Benjamin, the smallest tribe, which had almost been wiped out in Judges 19-21. His humble origin and handsome appearance are both important for the story that follows.
- The servant’s silver. A quarter shekel was a small sum, perhaps a few days’ wages. It would have been a normal courtesy to bring a gift to a prophet.
- God’s initiative. Notice 9:16: God Himself chose Saul to save His people. God used even the lost donkeys. Jews have long seen this as an example of divine providence working through ordinary events.
- Discussion caution. Students may ask if God made a mistake. The answer: God knew what would happen and used Saul to teach Israel what a king could and could not do, and to lay the way for David and, finally, Jesus. God’s plan for a King from Judah was already announced in Genesis 49:10.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: In what ways do I try to ‘be like everyone else’ when I know God wants me to stand out?

Feel: How do you feel when you see people being treated unfairly, as the poor were by Samuel’s sons?

Do: What is one small way you can serve or help someone this week, like the humble servant?

This week’s challenge: Notice one moment this week when you feel pressure to follow the crowd. Stop and pray, ‘LORD, You are my King.’ Do one act of quiet service for someone without being asked.

Session 5: Saul the Rescuer

1 Samuel 10 – 12

Big Idea: A godly leader defends the weak, gives God the credit, shows mercy to critics, and keeps praying for the people he serves.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you.” (1 Samuel 12:24)

Jesus in the Story

When the people of Jabesh Gilead were helpless, Saul rose to defend them, and “the Spirit of God came upon Saul.” Jesus is the greater Rescuer. He sees us when we are helpless, defeats our enemy, and shows mercy. Saul said, “Today the LORD has accomplished salvation in Israel” (11:13), and the name Jesus means “The LORD saves.” Samuel’s farewell, in which he promised never to stop praying, also pictures Christ, who always lives to make intercession for us (Hebrews 7:25).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Bully question. Recap: Saul has been chosen but nobody knows it yet.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapters 10-12. Use a map to show Jabesh Gilead across the Jordan. Read 11:6-13 aloud.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Saul’s early qualities: humility, self-control, bravery for the weak, giving God credit, mercy. Samuel’s integrity and prayerfulness.
6	The Warning Side	Nahash’s cruelty to the vulnerable. The mockers. Foreshadow: what could go wrong with a humble man given power?
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students write the name of one person they will defend or pray for. Close by praying for each other.

Opening activity: Ask: ‘Have you ever seen someone being bullied and had to choose whether to step in? What did you do?’ Share one real example (without names). Then tell the class that today’s story is about a leader who stepped in.

The Story to Tell

Saul had only come looking for lost donkeys, but now Samuel poured a flask of oil on his head, kissed him, and said, “Is it not because the LORD has anointed you commander over His inheritance?” To anoint means to pour oil on someone to set them apart for God’s work. God then gave Saul signs to prove it was true, and “God gave him another heart.” The Spirit of God came upon him, and he prophesied.

Later Samuel gathered all Israel at Mizpah to announce the king. The lot fell on Saul son of Kish. But where was he? He was hiding among the baggage! They ran and brought him out, and he stood a head taller than everyone else. “Long live the king!” the people shouted. But some “worthless men” said, “How can this man save us?” and “despised him; but he held his peace.” Saul did not strike back. That was a leader with self-control.

A month later, a cruel king named Nahash of Ammon surrounded the city of Jabesh Gilead. The people offered to serve him, but he said, “On this condition I will make a covenant with you, that I may put out all your right eyes, and bring reproach on all Israel.” The people asked for seven days to look for help. Messengers came to Gibeah, Saul’s town, and everybody wept. Saul was coming in from the field behind his oxen. “What troubles the people, that they weep?” he asked.

When he heard, “the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and his anger was greatly aroused.” He took a yoke of oxen, cut them in pieces, and sent them across Israel with a message: “Whoever does not go out after Saul and after Samuel, so shall it be done to his oxen.” The fear of the LORD fell on the people. They came out as one man: three hundred thousand men of Israel and thirty thousand men of Judah. They sent word to Jabesh: “Tomorrow, by the time the sun is hot, you shall have help.” The next morning, Saul divided the men into three companies, attacked the Ammonites, and they were scattered.

Then the people wanted to punish those who had said, “Shall Saul reign over us?” Listen to what Saul said: “Not a man shall be put to death this day, for today the LORD has accomplished salvation in Israel.” He gave God the credit! And he showed mercy to people who had insulted him. At this point in the story, Saul looks like the kind of leader God wants.

Samuel then gave his farewell speech at Gilgal. He asked, “Whose ox have I taken, or whose donkey have I taken? Whom have I cheated?” and the people answered, “You have not cheated us or oppressed us.” Then he reminded them of how God had rescued them again and again. He said, “Do not fear. You have done all this wickedness; yet do not turn aside from following the LORD.” And then he made a beautiful promise: “Moreover, as for me, far be it from me that I should sin against the LORD in ceasing to pray for you; but I will teach you the good and the right way.” His last words of advice: “Only fear the LORD, and serve Him in truth with all your heart; for consider what great things He has done for you. But if you still do wickedly, you shall be swept away, both you and your king.”

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Saul (at the start)	Humble (hid when chosen); stayed silent when mocked; rescued helpless Jabesh Gilead; gave God the credit; showed mercy to those who had despised him	1 Samuel 10:22, 10:27, 11:6-13
Samuel	A leader of integrity who could say, “Whose ox have I taken?”; reminded the people of God’s faithfulness; promised to keep praying for them	1 Samuel 12:1-5, 12:23
The men of Jabesh Gilead	Faced a terrible threat but asked for help and cried out together; they trusted a rescuer	1 Samuel 11:1-4

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Nahash the Ammonite	A cruel king who offered the people of Jabesh Gilead peace only if they let him put out every right eye, to bring shame on all Israel	He was crushed by Saul’s army. God defends the weak against bullies.
The “worthless men”	Despised Saul, asking “How can this man save us?” and refused to honor him	Saul showed great restraint; he held his peace and later refused to punish them (11:12-13).

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Saul hid among the baggage when he was chosen?

Suggested answer: Perhaps humility or fear. It shows that at this point he did not seek power. Compare to how easy it is to let power go to our heads.

2. What gave Saul the courage to rescue Jabesh Gilead?

Suggested answer: The Spirit of God came upon him. God's power, not his own, made the difference.

3. How did Saul show mercy to those who had mocked him?

Suggested answer: He refused to punish them and gave God the credit. Mercy to critics is a mark of true leadership.

4. Samuel said he would never stop praying for the people. Who are you praying for regularly?

Suggested answer: Open answers. Challenge students to keep a prayer list.

5. How can we be defenders of the weak at school?

Suggested answer: Stand next to the left-out student, speak up against bullying, tell a trusted adult, and include others.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Anointing. Oil poured on the head set a person apart for a role, as with priests (Exodus 29) and kings. The word 'Messiah' (Hebrew mashiach) means 'anointed one,' and 'Christ' (Greek christos) is the same word. Saul is called 'the LORD's anointed' repeatedly in the following chapters, which sets up David's respect for him.
- The lot. In Mizpah (10:20-24), Israel used the casting of lots, tribe by tribe, family by family, as an ancient way to see God's choice (Proverbs 16:33). Notice that Saul's modesty is on display: hiding among the baggage (equipment).
- Jabesh Gilead. A city east of the Jordan River. Nahash's cruel demand to gouge out right eyes would have blinded the right eye of a soldier holding a shield (the shield covers the left eye), making them useless in battle. It was meant to humiliate the whole nation. The seven days gave Israel time to organize.
- Saul's reaction. The oxen cut into pieces was a customary summons, like the one in Judges 19:29-30. The numbers (330,000) may be large; some scholars suggest 'thousand' can also mean 'military units' or clans. Either way, the whole nation answered as one.
- Spirit of God. In the Old Testament, the Spirit came on certain people for a specific task. Notice that Saul's rescue was truly empowered by God. This is also a warning: gifts and calling do not guarantee that a person will stay faithful.
- Gilgal and kingship renewed. Gilgal was where Israel had first camped in the Promised Land (Joshua 4-5). Renewing the kingdom there reminded them that the LORD gave them the land.
- Samuel's farewell. It follows the form of a covenant lawsuit: he states his own record of integrity, recites God's saving acts, then warns of consequences. The thunder in the wheat harvest (12:17-18) was a miracle, since rain in late spring was unusual. It showed the people that God was speaking.
- Implication for teaching. This is the 'high point' of Saul. God's gifts are good, but they do not replace a heart that keeps obeying. Preview that next session shows what happens.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Who is someone around me who needs a defender? What could I do to stand up for them?

Feel: How do you feel when someone makes fun of you? What would it take to respond like Saul, with silence and then mercy?

Do: Whose name will you write on your prayer list this week, and how often will you pray for them?

This week's challenge: Look for someone being left out or picked on and be their friend this week. Start a prayer list of three people. Pray for them every day.

Session 6: Brave Jonathan and Saul's Costly Choices

1 Samuel 13 – 15

Big Idea: God wants obedience more than impressive religion. Faith steps out boldly, but pride and half-hearted obedience cost a king his throne.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams.” (1 Samuel 15:22)

Jesus in the Story

Saul failed to obey God completely. Jesus is the King who obeyed perfectly: “He humbled Himself and became obedient to the point of death, even the death of the cross” (Philippians 2:8). Where Saul blamed others, Jesus took the blame for us. Where Saul made excuses, Jesus said, “Not My will, but Yours, be done” (Luke 22:42).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	The obedience game. Recap: Saul started humbly at Jabesh Gilead.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapters 13-15, highlighting Jonathan's cliff climb. Read 13:13-14, 14:6-7 and 15:20-23 aloud.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Jonathan, his armorbearer, the people's courage, and Samuel's honest grief. What does faith look like in action?
6	The Warning Side	Saul's pattern: fear, excuses, blame, and caring more about appearances than obeying. Hard truth: partial obedience is disobedience.
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions. Be gentle about the Amalek command (see teacher notes).
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students identify one area where they obey halfway. Pray for a heart that obeys fully.

Opening activity: Give students a simple instruction like ‘Everyone stand, clap three times, then sit.’ Notice who does it fully, who does part of it, and who does it differently. Ask: ‘Is partial obedience obedience?’

The Story to Tell

Saul had been king for only a short time when the Philistines gathered a huge army, “as the sand which is on the seashore in multitude.” Israel's men hid in caves, in thickets, and among the rocks. Israel had no blacksmiths, so only Saul and his son Jonathan had a sword or spear. The Philistines were ready, and the army of Israel was shaking.

Samuel had told Saul to wait seven days at Gilgal until he came to offer the sacrifice. Saul waited, but Samuel did not come on time. The soldiers began to drift away. Saul panicked and said, “Bring a burnt offering here to me.” He offered it himself, even though only priests were permitted to do this. Just as he finished, Samuel arrived. “What have you done?” Saul made excuses: “The people were scattering... you did not come... I felt compelled.” Samuel said, “You have done foolishly. You have not kept the commandment of the LORD your God... Now your kingdom shall not continue. The LORD has sought for Himself a man after His own heart.”

Then comes one of the great stories of courage. Jonathan, Saul's son, said to the young man who carried his armor, "Come, let us go over to the garrison of these uncircumcised; it may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few." The armorbearer said, "Do all that is in your heart. Go then; here I am with you, according to your heart." The two of them climbed up a steep cliff on hands and feet, with the Philistines at the top. They struck down about twenty men, and God sent an earthquake and panic. The whole Philistine camp melted in confusion!

But Saul made a foolish decision. He swore an oath: "Cursed be the man who eats any food until evening." His army was tired and hungry. Jonathan did not hear the oath, and he dipped his stick in some honey and ate. "His countenance brightened." When Saul found out, he said Jonathan must die. But the people said, "Shall Jonathan die, who has accomplished this great deliverance in Israel? Certainly not! As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground." The people rescued Jonathan.

In chapter 15, God gave Saul a clear command. The Amalekites had long ago attacked the weakest and most tired Israelites from behind as they left Egypt (Deuteronomy 25:17-18). For hundreds of years God had been patient, but now His judgment had come. He told Saul, "Utterly destroy all that they have, and do not spare them." Saul won the battle, but he spared Agag the king and kept "the best of the sheep, the oxen, the fatlings, the lambs." He destroyed only what was "despised and worthless."

God said to Samuel, "I greatly regret that I have set up Saul as king." Samuel was grieved and cried out to the LORD all night. In the morning he found Saul, who was putting up a monument to himself. Saul said proudly, "Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD." Samuel said, "What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?" Saul blamed the people: "They spared the best... to sacrifice to the LORD." And then Samuel spoke words every student should memorize: "Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice." Samuel said Saul was rejected as king. Saul said, "I have sinned," but he was more worried about how he looked in front of the people than about his heart. He grabbed Samuel's robe and it tore. Samuel said, "The LORD has torn the kingdom of Israel from you today." And Samuel mourned for Saul.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Jonathan	Courageous faith: "It may be that the LORD will work for us. For nothing restrains the LORD from saving by many or by few."	1 Samuel 14:6
Jonathan's armorbearer	A loyal helper who said, "Do all that is in your heart... I am with you, according to your heart."	1 Samuel 14:7
The people of Israel	They stood up for Jonathan and would not allow him to be put to death: "As the LORD lives, not one hair of his head shall fall to the ground."	1 Samuel 14:45
Samuel	Told the king the truth to his face even when it hurt, and then grieved and prayed all night for him	1 Samuel 13:13; 15:11

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul at Gilgal	He grew impatient and offered the sacrifice himself, a job only priests were allowed to do, because "the people were scattering from me." He acted out of fear.	Samuel told him, "Your kingdom shall not continue," and God sought a man after His own heart.

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul's rash oath	He ordered his exhausted army not to eat all day, harming his own soldiers, and was ready to execute his own son	The people were faint and ate meat with the blood still in it. Jonathan was nearly killed for tasting a little honey.
Saul and Amalek	God commanded Saul to destroy Amalek completely, but Saul spared the king and the best of the animals, and then blamed the people	"Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king."

Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think Saul offered the sacrifice himself? What should he have done instead?

Suggested answer: He was afraid and impatient and wanted to control the situation. He should have waited and trusted God and obeyed Samuel's instruction.

2. What made Jonathan's faith so strong? What did his armorbearer add?

Suggested answer: Jonathan believed God can save by many or by few. His armorbearer encouraged and supported him. Faith is stronger when friends encourage each other.

3. What excuses did Saul give? Do we ever do the same?

Suggested answer: He blamed the people and said the animals were for sacrifice. We often blame others, hide behind good-sounding reasons, or say 'I only did part of it.'

4. What does 'to obey is better than sacrifice' mean?

Suggested answer: God cares more about a heart that does what He says than about religious activities. Our church attendance, offerings, and songs mean nothing without obedience.

5. How did the people protect Jonathan? When do we need to protect someone from an unfair punishment?

Suggested answer: They spoke up together, refusing to let him die. We should speak up when someone is being treated unjustly.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Gilgal and the priesthood. Under the Law only priests offered sacrifices (Numbers 18:7). Even a king could not do this, as King Uzziah later learned (2 Chronicles 26:16-21). Saul's sin was not just impatience but taking over God's role. Samuel's delay was a test of trust.
- Philistine advantage. Archaeology confirms the Philistines were early users of iron, and they controlled smithing (13:19-22). Israel sharpened plows and tools at the Philistine smiths for a fee. That is why only Saul and Jonathan had swords.
- Michmash. A steep, rocky pass about 7 miles north-east of Jerusalem, with two sharp cliffs named Bozez and Seneh (14:4-5). Jonathan's climb was truly daring.
- Jonathan. His name means 'The LORD has given.' He is introduced as a model of faith. He would later become David's closest friend.
- Saul's oath. His oath (14:24) was about winning and personal glory more than God's honor. It left the army weak and caused them to sin by eating meat with the blood (Leviticus 17:10-14). Often, rash vows hurt others. Jesus warns about careless oaths in Matthew 5:33-37.
- Amalek (15:2-3). The Amalekites attacked Israel's weak and exhausted at Rephidim (Exodus 17:8-16) and God promised their judgment (Deuteronomy 25:17-19). They were a nation of raiders who had hundreds of years to repent. This was a one-time command for a specific judgment at a specific time in history and does not make violence acceptable for believers today. If students are troubled, assure them it is a good question, show that God is both just and patient, and point to Jesus, who tells us to love our enemies. Saul's real sin was not mercy; it was disobedience while claiming to

obey.

- ‘God regrets.’ In 15:11 the Hebrew word for ‘regret’ describes God’s real sorrow at what Saul chose. God does not change His mind about His character or purposes (15:29), but He truly feels sorrow over sin. Use this with students as a sign that God is not distant, but cares.
- A man after His own heart (13:14). It does not mean a perfect man; it describes a person whose heart seeks God and responds to Him. It looks ahead to David and finds its fulfilment in the perfect Son of David, Jesus (Acts 13:22-23).

Think, Feel, Do

Think: What is one area where I often obey God only halfway or make excuses?

Feel: How do you feel when you read that God is truly sad over our sin? What does that tell you about Him?

Do: What is one brave step of faith, like Jonathan’s, that you will take this week?

This week's challenge: Pick one command of Jesus (for example, ‘love one another’) and obey it completely this week with no excuses. Ask a friend to encourage you, like the armorbearer.

Session 7: God Looks at the Heart

1 Samuel 16

Big Idea: People judge by outward appearance, but God looks at the heart. He chooses and uses the humble who are faithful in small things.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “But the LORD said to Samuel, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”” (1 Samuel 16:7)

Jesus in the Story

David was born in Bethlehem, the city of David, and was a shepherd. Hundreds of years later another Son of David was born in Bethlehem and was called the Good Shepherd (John 10:11). The word Messiah means “anointed one,” and David was anointed here in front of his brothers. Jesus was also anointed, with the Holy Spirit (Luke 4:18), and the people of His day also misjudged Him by appearance: “He has no form or comeliness... no beauty that we should desire Him” (Isaiah 53:2). God valued His heart.

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Wrapped-box game. Recap: God rejected Saul as king.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapter 16. Have students line up as the seven brothers and call David from ‘out in the field.’ Read 16:6-13.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Samuel’s obedience, David’s faithfulness in the small place. What did God see in David’s heart?
6	The Warning Side	Judging by appearance. Saul’s troubled spirit when he rejected God’s word.
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Write ‘God sees my heart’ on a card. Pray for hearts that love God.

Opening activity: Show a wrapped box with something surprising inside (like a plain old rock with a gold coin or note inside). Ask: ‘Can you tell what is inside from the outside?’ Talk about how first impressions can be wrong.

The Story to Tell

Samuel was heartbroken over King Saul. He mourned for him. Finally, God said, “How long will you mourn for Saul, seeing I have rejected him?... Fill your horn with oil, and go; I am sending you to Jesse the Bethlehemite. For I have provided Myself a king among his sons.” God had a plan, even when His people’s king had failed.

Samuel was afraid: “How can I go? If Saul hears it, he will kill me.” Notice that he went anyway. God told him how: take a heifer, invite Jesse to the sacrifice, and “I will show you what you shall do.” So Samuel went to Bethlehem. The elders of the town trembled when he arrived. “Do you come peaceably?” They were afraid, because Samuel did not often visit.

Samuel consecrated Jesse and his sons and invited them to the sacrifice. When Eliab, the oldest, walked in, Samuel looked at him, tall and impressive, and thought, “Surely the LORD’s anointed is before Him.” But God said, “Do not look at his appearance or at his physical stature, because I have refused him. For the LORD does not see as man

sees; for man looks at the outward appearance, but the LORD looks at the heart.”

Jesse called Abinadab, and Samuel said, “The LORD has not chosen this one.” Then Shammah. “Neither has the LORD chosen this one.” Seven sons passed by, and none of them was chosen. Samuel asked, “Are all the young men here?” Jesse said, “There remains yet the youngest, and there he is, keeping the sheep.” Nobody had even invited him. He was the one on the hillside, doing the unnoticed work of caring for sheep.

“Send and bring him,” said Samuel. “We will not sit down till he comes here.” David arrived. The Bible says he was “ruddy, with bright eyes, and good looking.” And the LORD said, “Arise, anoint him; for this is the one!” Then Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him in the midst of his brothers. “And the Spirit of the LORD came upon David from that day forward.”

Meanwhile, “the Spirit of the LORD departed from Saul, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him.” Saul’s servants said, “Let our master now command his servants to seek out a man who is a skillful player on the harp.” One young man said, “I have seen a son of Jesse the Bethlehemite, who is skillful in playing, a mighty man of valor, a man of war, prudent in speech, a handsome person; and the LORD is with him.” So David came to the palace to play the harp for Saul. “And Saul loved him greatly, and he became his armorbearer.” When David played, Saul felt better and the distressing spirit left him. David was anointed as the future king, yet he served the current king with humility.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Samuel	Obedied God even though he was afraid that Saul would kill him; humbly listened when God corrected his own opinion about Eliab	1 Samuel 16:1-13
David	Faithful in a small, unseen job (shepherding); a humble heart that sought God; a musician who played for God’s glory	1 Samuel 16:11, 16:18
Jesse	A father who brought his sons when asked and told the truth about his youngest	1 Samuel 16:10-11
A young servant of Saul	Noticed the king was troubled and spoke up with a helpful solution, recommending David	1 Samuel 16:15-18

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul	He rejected the LORD’s word. Now God’s Spirit left him, and a distressing spirit from the LORD troubled him.	A king without God’s Spirit was tormented by fear and anger. Disobedience brings a restless heart.
Judging by appearance	Even Samuel almost chose Eliab because of his height and looks. Many in the world judge people by how they look, what they have, or how popular they are.	We miss what God sees: faithfulness, humility, a heart to love and follow Him.

Discussion Questions

1. Why did Samuel almost choose Eliab? Why did God say no?

Suggested answer: Eliab looked like a king. But God sees the heart. Looks, talent, and popularity are not the standard.

2. Why do you think David was out with the sheep? What does that say about him?

Suggested answer: He was faithful in an unnoticed, humble job. God often finds people who are faithful in small things.

3. Samuel was afraid but obeyed. When is it hard to obey God?

Suggested answer: When it is scary, costly, or unpopular. God provides what we need to follow Him.

4. How does knowing that God looks at the heart help us when we feel unnoticed or not good enough?

Suggested answer: God values you for who you are in Him, not for your looks, skills or popularity.

5. How does David's story point to Jesus?

Suggested answer: Both were born in Bethlehem, both were shepherds, both were anointed by God, and both were underestimated by people.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Bethlehem. A small town about 6 miles south of Jerusalem in the territory of Judah, which sits in the hills. It was the setting of the story of Ruth, David's great-grandmother (Ruth 4:17-22). Micah 5:2 would later prophesy that the Messiah would come from Bethlehem.
- The horn of oil. A ram's horn was used as a container for the anointing oil. Oil was a symbol of the Holy Spirit and of being set apart. Anointing David did not make him king right away. It was a sign of God's calling; David would wait many years to become king; he was thirty when he began to reign (2 Samuel 5:4).
- Samuel's fear. Saul was jealous and known to be quick to violence. Samuel's concern was real. God gave him a cover story (a sacrifice), which was truthful: he did offer a sacrifice. This is not lying, but wise action to avoid unnecessary harm.
- Sons of Jesse. Eliab, Abinadab, and Shammah (also called Shimea) are named. By 17:12-14 we learn there were eight sons, with David as the youngest. David was the youngest of eight brothers, likely about 15 to 20 years old at the time of his anointing, though the Bible does not say.
- Shepherd work. A shepherd had to protect sheep from predators, find water and pasture, and stay with them day and night. The shepherd was often treated as the lowest job in the family. Throughout Scripture, a shepherd is a picture of a leader who cares (Psalm 23; Ezekiel 34; John 10).
- The distressing spirit. 16:14 says it was 'from the LORD.' In the Old Testament, God is understood as sovereign even over troubling forces; He allowed this torment as a consequence of Saul's rebellion. Do not over-explain. Emphasize that rejecting God leads to restlessness and that real peace is found in Him.
- Music. David's harp (lyre) playing was a gift he used to serve. Many of the Psalms are his songs. The Psalms of the Messiah, which you may have taught earlier, include his writing.
- Be sensitive. Some students struggle with looks, weight, or being the 'overlooked one.' Affirm that God sees them and values them deeply.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Do I judge people by how they look or what they have? How can I start seeing people the way God does?

Feel: How does it feel to know God looks at your heart, not just your outside?

Do: What 'small, hidden job' can you do faithfully this week, like David's shepherding?

This week's challenge: Do something kind for someone nobody usually notices. Do one chore at home without being asked and without telling anyone. Pray, "LORD, make my heart like Yours."

Session 8: David and Goliath: The Battle Is the LORD's

1 Samuel 17

Big Idea: God gives courage to the one who trusts Him and cares about His name. David defended the flock and the honor of God, and the battle belongs to the LORD.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands.” (1 Samuel 17:47)

Jesus in the Story

David stepped forward as a champion for a frightened people who could not defend themselves, and his victory became theirs. That is a picture of Jesus. Jesus is our Champion who stepped out to face our greatest enemies, sin, death, and the devil, and won the victory for us (Colossians 2:15; Hebrews 2:14-15). David came from Bethlehem and was a shepherd. Jesus is the Good Shepherd who lays down His life for the sheep (John 10:11).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Giants-in-our-life board. Recap: David was anointed and serves Saul with his harp.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapter 17 with action: Goliath’s boasts, David’s words, the stone. Read 17:45-47 aloud together.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	David’s God-centered courage, his faithful work as a shepherd (defending the weak), and his honor for God’s name.
6	The Warning Side	Goliath’s pride, Saul’s fear, and Eliab’s jealous discouragement. How do other people sometimes make it harder to do right?
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students write their ‘giant’ on a note, pray over it, and trust the LORD for victory.

Opening activity: Put a bag of five smooth stones on a table, or a toy sling. Ask: ‘What is the biggest problem or fear you can think of that feels like a giant?’ Collect answers on the board. Say ‘We will see how David faced his giant.’

The Story to Tell

The Philistines gathered their army on one side of the Valley of Elah. Saul and the Israelites lined up on the other side. Between them was a valley and a problem. Out of the Philistine camp walked a champion named Goliath of Gath. He was over nine feet tall. He wore a bronze helmet and a coat of armor that weighed about 125 pounds, and his spear’s iron point alone weighed about 15 pounds. Every morning and evening for forty days he shouted: “Choose a man for yourselves, and let him come down to me. If he is able to fight with me and kill me, then we will be your servants.” And the Bible says Saul and all Israel were “dismayed and greatly afraid.”

Three of David’s older brothers were in Saul’s army. David went back and forth between the palace and Bethlehem to tend his father’s sheep. One day Jesse said, “Take this ephah of dried grain and these ten loaves to your brothers at the camp. And carry these ten cheeses to the commander. See how your brothers are doing.” David got up early,

left the sheep with a keeper, and went. He arrived just as the army was going out to battle, and Goliath came out with his daily challenge. The men ran away from him in fear.

David asked, “Who is this uncircumcised Philistine, that he should defy the armies of the living God?” He was not asking about size. He was upset that God’s name was being dishonored. His oldest brother Eliab heard him and burned with anger: “Why did you come down here? And with whom have you left those few sheep in the wilderness? I know your pride and the insolence of your heart.” David answered, “What have I done now? Is there not a cause?” and went on to ask others.

Word got to Saul, who called for David. David said, “Let no man’s heart fail because of him; your servant will go and fight with this Philistine.” Saul said, “You are not able... you are a youth, and he a man of war from his youth.” David then told his story: “Your servant used to keep his father’s sheep, and when a lion or a bear came and took a lamb out of the flock, I went out after it and struck it... The LORD, who delivered me from the paw of the lion and from the paw of the bear, He will deliver me from the hand of this Philistine.” David had been faithful in the dark and lonely work of defending sheep, and that prepared him for this day.

Saul tried to put his own armor on David, but it was too heavy and David said, “I cannot walk with these.” So David took off the armor, picked up his staff, chose five smooth stones from the brook, put them in his shepherd’s bag, and with his sling in his hand he approached the giant. Goliath was disgusted. “Am I a dog, that you come to me with sticks?” he said, and cursed David by his gods. David said:

“You come to me with a sword, with a spear, and with a javelin. But I come to you in the name of the LORD of hosts, the God of the armies of Israel, whom you have defied... that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel. Then all this assembly shall know that the LORD does not save with sword and spear; for the battle is the LORD’s, and He will give you into our hands.” David ran toward the giant, slung a stone, and it sunk into Goliath’s forehead. The giant fell on his face to the ground. David did not have a sword in his hand, so he took Goliath’s own sword and finished the fight. When the Philistines saw their champion was dead, they fled, and Israel chased them and won a great victory.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
David	Courage rooted in God; faithful in defending the sheep from lion and bear; zealous for God’s honor; humble; gave God all the credit	1 Samuel 17:34-37, 45-47
Jesse	Sent David to bring food to his brothers and to check on their well-being: a caring father	1 Samuel 17:17-18
David (as a servant)	Left the sheep with a keeper before he went, rising early to do the job right	1 Samuel 17:20

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Goliath	Proud, boastful, and mocked God’s armies for forty days. He trusted in his size and armor, and he cursed David “by his gods.”	“Whom have you defied?” He fell on his face, struck by a single stone.
King Saul and the army	Saul and the whole army were “dismayed and greatly afraid.” They saw the giant instead of God.	Fear froze the army for forty days until a shepherd boy stepped up.
Eliab (David’s brother)	He got angry and accused David of pride and a wicked heart. He was jealous and discouraged him.	David did not respond with anger but kept his focus on God (17:29-30).

Discussion Questions

1. What gave David the courage to face Goliath when no one else would?

Suggested answer: David trusted God and remembered how God helped him in the past (the lion and the bear). He cared about God's honor more than his own safety.

2. How did David's work as a shepherd prepare him?

Suggested answer: He was faithful in unseen, risky work defending weak sheep. God was training him. Small faithfulness prepares us for big challenges.

3. How did Eliab and Saul make things harder for David?

Suggested answer: Eliab accused and discouraged him; Saul doubted him and tried to make him use armor that did not fit. We can choose to ignore discouraging voices and follow God.

4. What are some 'giants' in your life? What 'stones' does God give you to face them?

Suggested answer: Open answers. Stones may be prayer, God's Word, wise friends, and the testimony of what God did before.

5. In what ways is Jesus like David, and in what ways greater?

Suggested answer: Both were from Bethlehem and shepherds. Both defeated an enemy for the people. Jesus' victory over sin, Satan, and death is greater and is for everyone who trusts in Him.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- The Valley of Elah. About 15 miles west of Bethlehem, a wide valley with a brook running through the middle. It was the road from Philistine territory up to the hill country of Judah. Each side camped on a hill, with the valley between.
- Goliath. The Hebrew text says 'six cubits and a span' (about 9 feet 9 inches). Some ancient manuscripts (the Septuagint and a Dead Sea Scroll) say 'four cubits and a span' (about 6 feet 9 inches), still very tall for that day. Either way he was a fearsome warrior. He came from Gath, one of five Philistine cities, and a place where descendants of the Anakim, a tall people, were known to live (Joshua 11:22). His armor weighed about 125 pounds (5,000 shekels), and his spearhead about 15 pounds (600 shekels).
- Single combat. Champions represented armies in ancient warfare to settle a conflict with fewer deaths. Goliath's challenge offered each side as servants to the winner. For forty days no one answered, which shows how fearful Israel was.
- The sling. The sling was an effective weapon in the ancient world. Judges 20:16 says Benjamite slingers could hit a hair and not miss. A stone launched from a sling could travel over 100 mph. David was a trained expert, not an accident. The five stones may have been for a backup, or Goliath's brothers (2 Samuel 21:22).
- Eliab's response. Eliab was the one God had passed over in chapter 16. Pointing to jealousy is fair: his reaction is often how people respond when a younger person is noticed. David stayed calm: 'Is there not a cause?'
- Saul's armor. Saul was a tall man (10:23), so his armor would have been far too large for David. David's refusal was not stubbornness; he fought with the weapons he knew. Encourage students to serve God with the gifts He gave them.
- God's name. David's key words: 'the living God' (17:26, 36), 'the name of the LORD of hosts' (17:45), 'that all the earth may know that there is a God in Israel' (17:46). The goal is God's glory, not David's fame.
- Misuse caution. This story is not a promise that every problem disappears if we have faith. It is a testimony that God is with His people when they stand for Him. The ultimate Giant-Killer is Jesus.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: What 'giant' feels too big for me right now, and how could remembering God's past help change my view?

Feel: How do you feel when people discourage you from doing something brave and right?

Do: What ‘small, unseen’ faithful thing can I do this week to be ready for bigger tests?

This week's challenge: Write down three times God helped you in the past (your ‘lion and bear’ stories). Share one with a friend or family member. Pray about your giant every day.

Session 9: A Friend Who Loved Like Jesus

1 Samuel 18 – 20

Big Idea: True friends love selflessly, defend each other, and keep their promises even at great cost. Jealousy, on the other hand, poisons the heart and leads to destruction.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Then Jonathan and David made a covenant, because he loved him as his own soul.” (1 Samuel 18:3)

Jesus in the Story

Jonathan took off his own robe, armor, sword, and bow and gave them to David (18:4). He gave up his own right to be the next king. Jesus said, “Greater love has no one than this, than to lay down one’s life for his friends” (John 15:13). Jesus gave up His glory in heaven, clothes us in His righteousness (Isaiah 61:10), and calls us His friends (John 15:15). Jonathan shows us a small picture of that kind of love.

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Good-friend list. Recap: David defeated Goliath.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapters 18-20. Use two students to act out the robe-giving. Read 18:1-4 and 20:41-42.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Jonathan’s friendship. What did it cost him? How did he show love to David in words, gifts, and actions?
6	The Warning Side	How jealousy grew in Saul: first a song, then a look, then a spear. Name signs of jealousy and how to deal with it.
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students write a note of encouragement to a friend. Pray for friends and for hearts free from jealousy.

Opening activity: Ask: ‘What makes a good friend?’ List the answers on the board (loyal, honest, kind, etc.). Then ask: ‘What would you give up for a friend?’ Tell them today’s story has the best example of friendship in the Old Testament.

The Story to Tell

After David defeated Goliath, he was brought to Saul. And there a friendship began. “The soul of Jonathan was knit to the soul of David, and Jonathan loved him as his own soul.” Jonathan was the king’s son, the heir to the throne. He had every reason to be jealous of David! But instead, he made a covenant with David, a solemn promise of friendship. And he did something amazing: Jonathan took off the robe he was wearing and gave it to David, along with his armor, his sword, his bow, and his belt. It was like giving away his own place as the prince. Jonathan was saying, “You are more important to me than my own position.”

David led Saul’s armies in battle after battle, and he was successful everywhere. “David behaved wisely in all his ways, and the LORD was with him.” He was loved by all the people. But when the army came home, the women came out dancing and singing, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands.” Saul was very angry. “What more can he have but the kingdom?” The Bible says, “Saul eyed David from that day forward.” Jealousy had taken root.

The next day, while David was playing the harp for Saul, Saul threw his spear at David, saying, “I will pin David to the wall!” David escaped twice. Saul became afraid of David because “the LORD was with him, but had departed from Saul.” Saul tried to get rid of David by sending him on dangerous missions and promising his daughter in marriage. His younger daughter Michal loved David. But every plan Saul made backfired. David came out more successful, and the people loved him even more.

Finally, Saul told Jonathan and his servants to kill David. But Jonathan loved his friend, and he warned David to hide. Then Jonathan spoke up for David to his father: “Let not the king sin against his servant David, because he has not sinned against you, and because his works have been very good toward you. For he took his life in his hands and killed the Philistine, and the LORD brought about a great deliverance for all Israel.” Saul listened and swore, “As the LORD lives, he shall not be killed.” But it did not last. The spear flew again.

That night Saul sent men to David’s house to kill him in the morning. Michal warned him, “If you do not save your life tonight, tomorrow you will be killed.” She lowered David through a window, and put a statue in the bed to look like him. When Saul’s men came, she said, “He is sick.” David escaped.

In chapter 20, David secretly met Jonathan. “What have I done? What is my iniquity?” Jonathan promised, “Whatever you yourself desire, I will do it for you.” They arranged a signal using arrows to find out whether Saul was still angry. At the feast, David’s seat was empty. When Jonathan defended David, Saul exploded and threw his spear at his own son! Jonathan left the table in fierce anger and grieved for David. The next morning Jonathan shot arrows and shouted to the boy, “Is not the arrow beyond you?” That was the sign: David must flee. The two friends wept together and kissed one another. Jonathan said, “Go in peace, since we have sworn... saying, ‘May the LORD be between you and me, and between your descendants and my descendants, forever.’”

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Jonathan	Loyal, selfless love; a covenant friend who gave up his own position; spoke up for David in front of Saul at risk to himself; kept his promise even when his father raged	1 Samuel 18:1-4; 19:4-5; 20:1-42
David	Behaved wisely, remained humble and loyal to the king even when Saul tried to kill him, honored his friend and covenant	1 Samuel 18:5, 18:14, 20:41-42
Michal	Loved David, and at great risk to herself helped him escape through a window (though later in the story she also showed a more troubled side)	1 Samuel 19:11-17

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul	Became jealous when the women sang, “Saul has slain his thousands, and David his ten thousands,” and “eyed David from that day forward.” Jealousy grew into rage, scheming, and murder attempts. He twice threw a spear at David and later at his own son.	A king who could not rejoice in someone else’s success became tormented and lost his friends and family.
Saul’s scheming	He tried to use his own daughters as bait and sent David into dangerous battles hoping the Philistines would kill him	God was with David, and David became more successful, which made Saul even more afraid.

Discussion Questions

1. Jonathan was the prince who should have been next king. Why wasn't he jealous of David?

Suggested answer: Jonathan trusted God's plan and loved David unselfishly. Love and humility push out jealousy.

2. What did Jonathan give David, and what did it mean?

Suggested answer: His robe, armor, sword, bow and belt. It showed he honored David and gave up his own place and rights as prince.

3. How did Saul's jealousy grow? How can we stop jealousy early?

Suggested answer: It began with a song, then looking at David with suspicion, then anger and murder attempts. We can stop jealousy by admitting it to God, celebrating others' successes, and being thankful.

4. How did Jonathan defend David? Who needs someone to speak up for them?

Suggested answer: He spoke well of David to Saul at personal risk. We can defend those who are being gossiped about or bullied.

5. How is Jesus a friend like Jonathan, only greater?

Suggested answer: Jesus gave up everything, even His life, for us, and calls us friends (John 15:13-15).

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Covenant friendship. A covenant was a serious, binding agreement, sealed with oaths before God. Jonathan's gift of the robe and weapons was a public sign that he honored David as the future king. This is remarkable: a crown prince giving his royal robe to a shepherd. Jonathan seems to have understood that God had chosen David (see 23:17).
- The women's song (18:6-7). Victory celebrations were customary, with singing and dancing, tambourines, and joy. Praising David with a bigger number sounded to Saul like a loss of honor. The Bible shows jealousy beginning in the heart, not the situation.
- Saul's spear. The spear was the symbol of Saul's royal authority (22:6; 26:11). That he reached for it so quickly shows how much rage ruled him. David's refusal to fight back is notable.
- The distressing spirit (18:10). Compare 16:14. The Hebrew describes it as 'from God,' which shows God's sovereignty over even troubled conditions. Do not blame all anger on spirits; Saul's decisions were his own responsibility.
- Michal and teraphim (19:13). A teraphim was a household idol, likely life-sized or a large figure. That Michal had one in her house raises questions about her faith, but her love for David led her to protect him. Have your students think about how people can be complicated: Michal helped David, yet later her relationship with David went wrong (2 Samuel 6:16-23).
- Bride price (18:25). Saul set a gruesome and dangerous price for his daughter, hoping David would die. David instead delivered double. Briefly mention this; the point is Saul's deceit.
- New Moon feast (20:5, 18). A monthly celebration with sacrifices and a meal. David's absence would be noticeable. The arrow signal was a way to communicate without being seen.
- Psalms. Psalm 59 was written when Saul sent men to watch David's house (see the title). It shows David praying while in danger. Psalm 11 and Psalm 142 may come from similar times.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Is there someone whose success makes me jealous? What would it look like to celebrate with them instead?

Feel: How do you feel knowing that Jesus calls you His friend and gave His life for you?

Do: Who is one friend you can encourage or defend this week, and how will you do it?

This week's challenge: Write a note, text, or card to a friend telling them what you admire in them. If you feel jealous of someone, pray for them by name and thank God for what He has given them.

Session 10: The Cave of Adullam and the Murder at Nob

1 Samuel 21 – 22

Big Idea: The Lord’s anointed became a refuge for the distressed, while a jealous king murdered the innocent. Godly people protect the vulnerable, even at great cost, and refuse to obey a wicked command.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe.” (1 Samuel 22:23)

Jesus in the Story

In the cave of Adullam, David welcomed “everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented” (22:2). Jesus is the true King who says, “Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest” (Matthew 11:28). Jesus also pointed to David eating the holy bread to teach that mercy and meeting human need matter more than rigid rules (Matthew 12:3-8), and He calls Himself “the bread of life” (John 6:35).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Outsider question. Recap: Saul has tried to kill David, and Jonathan said goodbye.
14	Bible Story	Tell chapters 21-22. Be careful with the massacre; describe it plainly without graphic detail. Read 22:1-2 and 22:22-23.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	David welcoming the distressed, caring for his parents, protecting Abiathar. Ahimelech’s honesty and the guards’ courage to say no.
6	The Warning Side	Saul’s paranoia, self-pity and violence. Doeg’s cruel betrayal. How a jealous, bitter heart ends in tragedy. Note David’s own failure: he lied to Ahimelech (see notes).
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Pray for outsiders and hurting people at school. Students name one person to include this week.

Opening activity: Ask: ‘Have you ever felt like you were on the outside, with no one to turn to? What did it feel like?’ Gently collect responses. Say, ‘Today’s story is about a cave where the outsiders found a home.’

The Story to Tell

David was running for his life. He arrived at Nob, where the Tabernacle was then located and where Ahimelech the priest served. Ahimelech trembled when he saw David alone. David told him he was on a secret mission for the king, which was not true. He asked for food. All the priest had was the holy bread, the bread of the Presence, which only priests were allowed to eat. Ahimelech gave it to David and his men after making sure they were ceremonially clean. He also gave David the sword of Goliath, which had been kept there as a memorial.

But a man named Doeg the Edomite, Saul’s chief shepherd, was there that day and saw everything. And David, still afraid, fled to Gath, the home of Goliath, and when he realized they recognized him, he pretended to be insane, scribbling on the doors and drooling. The king of Gath said, “Do I lack madmen?” and let him go. David later wrote Psalm 34 about this time: “This poor man cried out, and the LORD heard him, and saved him out of all his

troubles.”

From there, David escaped to the Cave of Adullam. His brothers and his father’s household came to him there. And then something surprising happened. “Everyone who was in distress, everyone who was in debt, and everyone who was discontented gathered to him. So he became captain over them. And there were about four hundred men with him.” These were the left-out and the hurting. David took them in and led them. David also made sure his own parents were safe: “Please let my father and mother come here with you, till I know what God will do for me,” and he took them to the king of Moab.

Meanwhile, King Saul was sitting under a tamarisk tree at Gibeah with his spear in his hand, surrounded by his servants. He called out, “Hear now, you Benjamites! Will the son of Jesse give every one of you fields and vineyards? All of you have conspired against me; there is no one who reveals to me that my son has made a covenant with the son of Jesse; and there is not one of you who is sorry for me.” He was feeling sorry for himself and blaming everyone else. Then Doeg the Edomite spoke up and told Saul that David had gone to Ahimelech, who had given him food and Goliath’s sword.

Saul sent for Ahimelech and all the priests of Nob. Ahimelech answered honestly and bravely: “And who among all your servants is as faithful as David, who is the king’s son-in-law, who goes at your bidding, and is honorable in your house?” He said he knew nothing wrong. But Saul said, “You shall surely die, Ahimelech, you and all your father’s house!” Then he told his guards to kill the priests. They refused: “But the servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD.” So Saul said to Doeg, “You turn and kill the priests!” And Doeg killed eighty-five men who wore the linen ephod. He also destroyed Nob, the city of the priests, with men, women, children, and animals.

One son of Ahimelech, Abiathar, escaped and ran to David. David said, “I have caused the death of all the persons of your father’s house. Stay with me; do not fear. For he who seeks my life seeks your life, but with me you shall be safe.” David took responsibility and became a refuge. It is a picture of a king who protects the vulnerable.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
David (as a leader)	Welcomed the hurting and the outcasts; cared for his elderly parents by finding them safety; took responsibility for Abiathar and promised to protect him	1 Samuel 22:1-5, 22:20-23
Ahimelech the priest	Was kind to a hungry stranger, gave David the holy bread and Goliath’s sword, and honestly defended David before the king, though it cost him his life	1 Samuel 21:1-9; 22:14-15
Saul’s guards	When ordered to kill the priests, they refused: “The servants of the king would not lift their hands to strike the priests of the LORD.” It is right to refuse an evil command.	1 Samuel 22:17
Abiathar	Escaped the massacre and stayed faithful to David and the LORD	1 Samuel 22:20

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul	Sitting with his spear in his hand, he accused his own servants of plotting against him, felt sorry for himself, and ordered the killing of eighty-five priests	He had murdered the LORD’s own priests, and the whole town of Nob was destroyed. Jealousy led to bloodshed.

Who	What they did	What happened
Doeg the Edomite	He saw David at Nob and informed Saul, twisting the facts. When others refused to kill the priests, he did it himself.	A man who used his power to hurt the innocent. The Bible later records God's judgment on liars and betrayers (Psalm 52).

Discussion Questions

1. Who joined David in the cave? What does that tell us about the kind of leader he was?

Suggested answer: The distressed, the indebted, and the discontented. He welcomed the people others did not want. A godly leader makes room for the weak and hurting.

2. Why was it brave for the guards to refuse Saul's order?

Suggested answer: Disobeying a king could cost their lives. They chose to fear God more than man. We must say no to wrong commands from anyone.

3. What does David's lie to Ahimelech teach us? How did it cost others?

Suggested answer: Even godly people fail when they act out of fear. David's lie led Doeg to Saul and brought terrible consequences, and David took responsibility (22:22). We should be honest and trust God.

4. How did David treat Abiathar? What can we learn about taking responsibility?

Suggested answer: He admitted his part and promised protection. When we are part of a harm, we should own it and help.

5. How is Jesus like David in the cave, and how is He greater?

Suggested answer: Jesus welcomes the weary and hurting. He is a safe refuge who gave His life for us and will never fail.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Nob. A priestly town near Jerusalem where the Tabernacle was moved after Shiloh's fall (probably after the Philistine destruction). The 'showbread' or 'bread of the Presence' was twelve loaves set out each Sabbath (Leviticus 24:5-9) and eaten only by priests. Jesus used this event in Matthew 12:3-4 to show that meeting real human need takes priority over rigid ritual, not that law is unimportant.
- David's lie. David told Ahimelech he was on the king's secret business (21:2). This was a failure of faith, not a model. Later David admits his guilt (22:22). The Bible shows its heroes honestly. Use this to teach students that godly people can still make mistakes and must repent.
- Doeg the Edomite. An Edomite (descendant of Esau) who became Saul's chief herdsman. He was 'detained before the LORD' (21:7), perhaps for a vow or purification. His actions are condemned in Psalm 52, written by David about this event: 'Why do you boast in evil, O mighty man?'
- Gath. The home of Goliath. David's decision to go to the Philistine city was desperate and not wise. His acting insane was a humiliating moment, yet God rescued him. Psalm 34 and 56 relate to this time.
- Adullam. A cave area in the foothills of Judah, about 10 miles from Bethlehem. David's family (brothers) came because they were no longer safe in Bethlehem, since Saul would punish them. The 400 outcasts later became the core of David's 'mighty men' (2 Samuel 23).
- Moab. David's great-grandmother Ruth was a Moabite (Ruth 4:13-22), which may explain why he trusted the king of Moab with his parents.
- The eighty-five priests. This was a horrible crime: Saul killed God's priests. It also fulfilled God's earlier word against the house of Eli (1 Samuel 2:31-33), though that does not make Saul innocent. Abiathar, Eli's descendant, escaped. Be sober with students; the Bible shows the real horror of sin.

- Teaching tip. Do not rush this session. Students may be affected by the violence. Emphasize that God sees injustice and that He is a refuge. Remind them that they can tell a trusted adult if they ever see someone being hurt.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Who at my school or in my neighborhood feels like they are in ‘the cave’, on the outside? How could I welcome them?

Feel: How do you feel when someone takes responsibility and promises to protect you, as David did for Abiathar?

Do: What is one situation where I may need to say, ‘No, I will not go along with that,’ like Saul’s guards?

This week's challenge: Invite someone who is usually left out to sit with you or join your group this week. Practice what you would say if someone asked you to join in something wrong.

Session 11: Mercy for an Enemy

1 Samuel 23 – 24 and 26

Big Idea: God honors the person who refuses to take revenge, shows mercy to enemies, trusts God to be the Judge, and encourages others to keep trusting God.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “And he said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed, to stretch out my hand against him, seeing he is the anointed of the LORD.”” (1 Samuel 24:6)

Jesus in the Story

Jesus said, “Love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you” (Matthew 5:44). On the cross He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34). David had the chance to kill his enemy but chose mercy and left justice to God, which points us to Jesus, who did not retaliate when He was insulted but “committed Himself to Him who judges righteously” (1 Peter 2:23).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Revenge question. Recap: Saul killed the priests and David protects Abiathar.
14	Bible Story	Tell the stories of Keilah, Jonathan’s visit, En Gedi, and Saul’s camp. Read 23:16-18 and 24:4-7.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	David’s mercy, self-control, and trust in God as Judge; Jonathan’s encouragement; David asking God before acting.
6	The Warning Side	Saul’s shallow repentance, the Ziphites’ betrayal, and Abner’s failure. How can we tell real repentance from empty words?
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students write the name of someone who has hurt them. They pray for that person and ask God for strength to forgive.

Opening activity: Ask: ‘If someone is really mean to you, and you get a chance to get back at them, what do you do?’ Let students answer honestly. Then ask: ‘What would Jesus want?’ Say, ‘Today David has the chance. Twice.’

The Story to Tell

David was on the run, and still he cared about people. The Philistines were raiding a town called Keilah, stealing their grain. David asked the LORD, “Shall I go and attack these Philistines?” and the LORD said, “Go.” When his men were afraid, David asked again, and God said again, “Arise, go down to Keilah. For I will deliver the Philistines into your hand.” David rescued the town. But David also asked God, “Will the men of Keilah deliver me?” God said they would. So David left, and he escaped Saul again. Notice that David asked God before he acted, over and over.

Saul kept hunting. David hid in the wilderness of Ziph. And there something beautiful happened: “Then Saul’s son Jonathan arose and went to David in the woods and strengthened his hand in God.” Jonathan said, “Do not fear, for the hand of Saul my father shall not find you. You shall be king over Israel, and I shall be next to you. Even my father Saul knows that.” They made a covenant before the LORD again. It was the last time they ever saw each other. Jonathan gave David courage to keep trusting. That is what a true encourager does: he points you to God.

But the people of Ziph betrayed David. They went to Saul and said, “We will hand him over to the king.” Saul chased David up and down a mountain, and was just about to catch him when a messenger arrived: “Hasten and come, for the Philistines have invaded the land!” Saul had to turn away. God had protected David again.

In chapter 24, Saul took three thousand chosen men to look for David near the rocks of the Wild Goats at En Gedi. Saul went into a cave to relieve himself, not knowing that David and his men were hiding in the back of that very cave. David’s men whispered, “This is the day of which the LORD said to you, ‘Behold, I will deliver your enemy into your hand.’” David quietly crept up and cut off a corner of Saul’s robe. But “David’s heart troubled him because he had cut Saul’s robe.” He said to his men, “The LORD forbid that I should do this thing to my master, the LORD’s anointed.” And “David restrained his servants with these words, and did not allow them to rise against Saul.”

After Saul left the cave, David followed him out and called, “My lord the king!” David bowed with his face to the ground. He held up the piece of cloth: “Look... I cut off the corner of your robe, and did not kill you. Know and see that there is neither evil nor rebellion in my hands... Let the LORD judge between you and me, and let the LORD avenge me on you. But my hand shall not be against you.” Saul wept: “Is this your voice, my son David? You are more righteous than I; for you have rewarded me with good, whereas I have rewarded you with evil.” He said he knew David would be king. But a short time later, Saul was hunting David again.

In chapter 26, the Ziphites betrayed David again, and Saul came with three thousand men. David and his nephew Abishai crept into Saul’s camp at night and found everyone asleep because “a deep sleep from the LORD had fallen on them.” Saul’s spear was stuck in the ground by his head. Abishai whispered, “God has delivered your enemy into your hand this day. Now please, let me strike him.” David said, “Do not destroy him; for who can stretch out his hand against the LORD’s anointed, and be guiltless?... The LORD shall strike him, or his day shall come to die, or he shall go out to battle and perish.” David took only the spear and the water jug, climbed a hill, and shouted to Abner, “Why have you not guarded your lord the king?” Saul answered, “I have sinned. Return, my son David... I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.” David said, “The LORD delivered you into my hand today, but I would not stretch out my hand against the LORD’s anointed.”

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
David	Asked God before acting, rescued the town of Keilah, spared Saul twice, trusted God to be Judge, honored God’s anointed, and had a tender conscience even for cutting Saul’s robe	1 Samuel 23:1-5; 24:4-7; 26:9-11
Jonathan	Traveled into the woods to find David and “strengthened his hand in God,” reminding him that God’s plan would stand	1 Samuel 23:16-18
Abishai	A brave and loyal soldier who followed David into Saul’s camp at night. (He needed to learn mercy: he wanted to take revenge, but David stopped him.)	1 Samuel 26:6-9

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul	Hunted David with an army of 3,000 men even though David had never wronged him. He wept and said “I have sinned” but quickly went back to hunting.	He admitted “I have played the fool and erred exceedingly.” Words without lasting change are not true repentance.

Who	What they did	What happened
The Ziphites	Twice betrayed David's hiding place to Saul, hoping to win the king's favor	They chose to help the powerful hurt the innocent.
Saul's soldier Abner	Failed in his duty to guard the king, and slept soundly	David called out, "You deserve to die, because you have not guarded your master."

Discussion Questions

1. David's men said, 'God has delivered your enemy into your hand!' Why was David right to say no?

Suggested answer: He knew God had not told him to take revenge, and that Saul was God's anointed. Opportunity does not equal permission. Vengeance belongs to God (Romans 12:19).

2. Why was David's conscience troubled by cutting a piece of Saul's robe?

Suggested answer: He had a tender heart toward God. He respected God's anointed even in a small matter. A sensitive conscience is a gift.

3. How did Jonathan encourage David? Who needs encouragement from you?

Suggested answer: He went to David, reminded him of God's promise, and made a covenant. He strengthened David's hand in God. Encouragers point people back to God.

4. What is the difference between real repentance and Saul's repentance?

Suggested answer: Saul said the right words but did not change his behavior. True repentance turns from sin and changes how we live.

5. What is hard about loving an enemy? How does Jesus help us?

Suggested answer: It goes against our feelings. Jesus forgave us first and gives us His Spirit to love and forgive others.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Keilah. A town in the lowlands of Judah (23:1-5). It would have been rich in grain, making it a Philistine target. David's rescue of Keilah shows he was acting as a defender of ordinary people, even while a fugitive.
- The ephod. Abiathar brought the priestly ephod to David (23:6), including the Urim and Thummim, which David used to ask God yes-or-no questions (23:9-12). David consistently sought the LORD's direction.
- Horesh (23:15-18). In the wilderness of Ziph, a dry region in southern Judah. This was the last meeting of David and Jonathan. Jonathan's words show he understood God's plan and accepted second place. It is some of the most moving encouragement in the Bible.
- En Gedi. An oasis with a spring and waterfall on the western shore of the Dead Sea, surrounded by caves and cliffs, a place where wild goats (ibex) still live. Many caves large enough to hide hundreds of men are there.
- 'To cover his feet' (24:3). A polite expression for relieving himself. Do not turn this into a joke, though students may laugh. Remind them it shows how helpless Saul was.
- 'The LORD's anointed.' David uses this phrase repeatedly (24:6, 10; 26:9, 11, 16, 23). Saul was still God's chosen king until God removed him. David believed it was not his place to remove him. He waited on God's timing.
- Kinsmen. Abishai was a son of David's sister Zeruiah (1 Chronicles 2:16), so David's nephew, and the brother of Joab. He was loyal but quick to violence. Compare how David restrains him.
- Not passive. David's mercy was not weakness. He kept protecting himself and his people, and he did not return to serve Saul. Mercy does not mean letting yourself be abused; it means refusing to take revenge. Tell students that if someone is hurting them, they should talk to a trusted adult.
- Psalms. Psalm 57 and 142 are linked in their titles to David in the cave; Psalm 54 to the Ziphites' betrayal.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: Who has hurt me recently? What would it look like to leave justice to God instead of getting even?

Feel: How do you feel when someone encourages you to keep trusting God, as Jonathan did for David?

Do: What is one thing I can do this week to show mercy to someone who is not nice to me?

This week's challenge: Pray each day this week for someone who has hurt or annoyed you. Do one kind act for them if it is safe. Also, send an encouraging message to a friend who needs a lift, 'strengthening their hand in God.'

Session 12: A Wise Woman Named Abigail

1 Samuel 25

Big Idea: A wise and humble peacemaker can stop a disaster. God admires courage, wisdom, generosity, and a heart that takes the blame to bring peace, and He despises the stubborn fool.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed and from avenging myself with my own hand.” (1 Samuel 25:33)

Jesus in the Story

Abigail stood between an angry king and the guilty people and said, “On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be” (25:24). She is a small picture of Jesus, our Mediator, who stands between a holy God and guilty people and takes the blame on Himself (1 Timothy 2:5; 1 Peter 2:24). Jesus also said, “Blessed are the peacemakers, for they shall be called sons of God” (Matthew 5:9).

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Anger question. Recap: David spared Saul twice. Mention that Samuel died (25:1).
14	Bible Story	Tell the story, perhaps with different students playing Nabal’s servant, Abigail, and David. Read 25:23-33.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	Abigail’s wisdom, courage, generosity, and humility. What did she do, in order? The servant’s honesty.
6	The Warning Side	Nabal’s foolishness and ungratefulness. David’s near-disaster. How does pride and anger blind us?
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Students write one situation where they can be a peacemaker. Pray for wisdom and for control over anger.

Opening activity: Ask students to think of a time they were really angry and almost did something they would regret. Ask: ‘What stopped you?’ Take two or three stories. Say, ‘Today a wise woman stops a very angry man.’

The Story to Tell

The chapter begins with a sad note: “Then Samuel died; and the Israelites gathered together and lamented for him.” The great prophet who had served God from boyhood was gone. Meanwhile, David was in the wilderness of Paran, near the hills of Maon, where a very wealthy man named Nabal lived. He had three thousand sheep and a thousand goats. His name means “fool,” and the Bible says he was “harsh and evil in his doings.” His wife, Abigail, was “a woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance.”

David and his men had been camping near Nabal’s shepherds and had protected them from raiders. It was sheep-shearing time, a time of feasting and sharing. David sent ten young men to greet Nabal kindly and ask for any food he could spare. Nabal answered rudely: “Who is David, and who is the son of Jesse? There are many servants nowadays who break away each one from his master. Shall I then take my bread and my water and my meat... and give it to men when I do not know where they are from?” He insulted David and sent the men back empty-handed.

David heard the report and exploded. “Every man gird on his sword!” Four hundred men went with him. He swore that by morning not one male of Nabal’s house would be left alive. That was anger out of control, and it was about to become a terrible sin.

Meanwhile, one of Nabal’s young men ran to Abigail and told her what had happened. He said, “David sent messengers from the wilderness to greet our master; and he reviled them... Yet the men were very good to us... They were a wall to us both by night and day, all the time we were with them keeping the sheep. Now therefore, know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him.”

Abigail did not waste a minute. She quickly took two hundred loaves of bread, two skins of wine, five dressed sheep, five seahs of roasted grain, one hundred clusters of raisins, and two hundred cakes of figs, and loaded them on donkeys. She told her servants, “Go on before me; see, I am coming after you.” She did not tell Nabal. As she rode down a hidden part of the mountain, David and his men were coming down toward her. David had just said, “Surely in vain I have protected all that this fellow has in the wilderness.”

When Abigail saw David, she quickly got off her donkey and bowed down before him. “On me, my lord, on me let this iniquity be! And please let your maidservant speak in your ears.” She asked David to forgive her, reminded him that the LORD was fighting his battles, and that God would make him a sure house and prince over Israel. She said that when the LORD has done everything good for David, “this will not be a grief to you, nor offense of heart to my lord, either that you have shed blood without cause, or that my lord has avenged himself.” David answered, “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me! And blessed is your advice and blessed are you, because you have kept me this day from coming to bloodshed.” He accepted her gift and said, “Go up in peace to your house.”

When Abigail returned, Nabal was holding a feast like a king, and was very drunk. She told him nothing until morning. When she told him, “his heart died within him, and he became like a stone.” About ten days later, the LORD struck Nabal and he died. When David heard it, he praised God for keeping him from taking revenge. Later David asked Abigail to be his wife, and she said, “Here is your maidservant, a servant to wash the feet of the servants of my lord.” She was humble and strong.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
Abigail	“A woman of good understanding.” She acted quickly, brought generous gifts, humbly took the blame, spoke wisely about God’s plan, and prevented bloodshed	1 Samuel 25:3, 18-35
The young servant	Honestly reported the problem to Abigail and spoke up to protect the household from harm	1 Samuel 25:14-17
David (when corrected)	Heard wise counsel, humbly stopped his plan, and praised God: “Blessed be the LORD God of Israel, who sent you this day to meet me!”	1 Samuel 25:32-35
David’s men	Protected Nabal’s shepherds and flocks, “a wall to us both by night and day”	1 Samuel 25:15-16

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Nabal	His name means “fool.” The Bible calls him “harsh and evil in his doings.” He was rich, stingy, ungrateful, and rude. He refused to repay kindness and insulted David: “Who is David?” and he held a feast like a king while drunk.	“About ten days later... the LORD struck Nabal, and he died.” The fool’s pride ended in judgment.
David (almost)	In anger David said, “Every one of you, strap on his sword!” and planned to kill every male in Nabal’s household. He nearly took revenge into his own hands.	God used Abigail to keep him from guilt. Even a godly man can fall into rage if he does not guard his heart.

Discussion Questions

1. What qualities did Abigail show? Which one do you most want to grow?

Suggested answer: Wisdom, speed, courage, generosity, humility, and peacemaking. Let students choose.

2. Why did David want to attack? How could he have handled his anger differently?

Suggested answer: He was insulted and ungratefully treated. He could have prayed, waited, and left justice to God as he did with Saul.

3. Abigail took the blame though she had done nothing wrong. How does this point to Jesus?

Suggested answer: Jesus took our blame and our punishment on the cross, though He was innocent.

4. Why did a servant tell Abigail rather than just keeping quiet? When should we speak up?

Suggested answer: He cared about the household and knew harm was coming. We should speak up to the right person when someone may be hurt.

5. What can we learn from Nabal about pride and ingratitude?

Suggested answer: Being rich, rude, and ungrateful leads to ruin. Wise people say thank you and treat others with respect.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Samuel’s death (25:1). He was probably around 70 to 80 years old. All Israel lamented, which shows the esteem in which he was held. He was buried at his house in Ramah. This marks the end of the era of the judges and prophets-as-leaders until Nathan, Gad, and the others.
- Sheep-shearing. A festive time of joy, hospitality and generosity, like harvest time. David’s request for provisions was customary and polite. A wealthy man was expected to share. Nabal’s refusal was a serious insult.
- The name Nabal. ‘Fool’ in Hebrew does not mean unintelligent. In the Bible, a fool is someone who ignores God and lives as if he is accountable to no one (Psalm 14:1; Proverbs 10). Nabal is a Calebite (25:3), a descendant of faithful Caleb, which makes his behavior even sadder.
- Abigail’s gifts. The amount of food, perhaps enough for 400 men, was a large and costly gift, offered on her own initiative. A woman acting without her husband’s permission was unusual and risky, yet she acted because lives were at stake and she was right. Her action does not teach that wives should disobey, but shows that sometimes God calls people to act courageously to prevent evil.
- Abigail’s wisdom (25:28-31). She said David was fighting the LORD’s battles, and she trusted the LORD to give David the kingdom. She also reminded him of his future conscience. Notice that she never excused Nabal’s behavior. She spoke honestly and respectfully.
- ‘Bundle of the living’ (25:29). A phrase meaning David’s life would be secure in God’s care. It is often seen on Jewish headstones today.

- David's marriages. David married Abigail and also Ahinoam (25:42-43). Polygamy was practiced, but it is never presented as God's ideal and caused trouble in David's house later. Keep your focus on Abigail's example rather than David's marriages.
- Psalms and Proverbs. Compare the Proverbs about wise women (Proverbs 31:10-31; 14:1). Abigail is a living example.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: When I feel angry or insulted, what is one wise thing I can do before I react?

Feel: How do you feel when someone steps in to stop a fight or a bad plan? Who has done that for you?

Do: Where can I be a peacemaker this week, in my home, school, or group of friends?

This week's challenge: Practice 'Abigail's pause': when you feel angry this week, stop, pray, and wait before responding. Do one thing to make peace between two people or bring a gift of kindness to someone.

Session 13: The Fall of a King and the Strength of a Shepherd

1 Samuel 27 – 31

Big Idea: A leader who turns from God ends in darkness and defeat, but one who strengthens himself in the LORD, cares for the weak, and shares fairly finds help and hope. God’s true King is still coming.

Memory Verse (NKJV): “Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” (1 Samuel 30:6)

Jesus in the Story

Saul fell, and Israel’s first king died in defeat. The story points forward to a King who will never fall. Jesus is the “Son of David” (Matthew 1:1), the Good Shepherd, who loves the weak and the weary. When David’s men were ready to stone him, David found strength in the LORD. In the Garden of Gethsemane, an angel strengthened Jesus (Luke 22:43). Hannah’s song at the start of 1 Samuel ended with God’s anointed King (2:10). Now the book ends with a question: where is the King who will never fail? The answer is Jesus.

45-Minute Session Plan

Min	Segment	What to do
5	Welcome and Opener	Loss-and-hope question. Recap the road: Hannah, Samuel, Saul, David, Jonathan, Abigail.
14	Bible Story	Tell Saul’s last night, David’s rescue, and the end at Gilboa. Read 30:1-8, 30:21-25.
8	Godly Qualities Spotlight	David strengthening himself in the LORD, kindness to the weak slave, fair sharing, and Jabesh Gilead’s gratitude.
6	The Warning Side	Saul’s path: disobedience, jealousy, fear, the occult, no true repentance. Warn kindly against occult practices.
7	Discussion	Use the discussion questions and review the Who’s Who chart of the whole book.
5	Think / Feel / Do and Prayer	Review what was learned. Students choose one quality from the book to grow in. Pray together.

Opening activity: Ask: ‘Have you ever lost something so important you felt like giving up? How did you cope?’ Let a couple of students share. Say, ‘Today we see David lose everything, and what he did next.’

The Story to Tell

David had been running from Saul for years. Finally, he decided, “Now I shall perish someday by the hand of Saul.” So he moved with his 600 men and their families to Philistine territory and lived in a town called Ziklag. It was not an easy choice, and it put David in some complicated positions. But God was still watching over him.

Meanwhile, the Philistines gathered a huge army at Shunem. Saul saw them and “his heart trembled greatly.” He prayed, but “the LORD did not answer him, either by dreams or by Urim or by the prophets.” He had refused God for so long, and now God was silent. Saul had once removed the mediums and spiritists from the land. Now, in desperation, he disguised himself and visited a medium at Endor at night. God had clearly forbidden this (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). The medium was shocked when God allowed Samuel’s spirit to appear and give a

message: “The LORD has departed from you and has become your enemy... tomorrow you and your sons will be with me. The LORD will also deliver the army of Israel into the hand of the Philistines.” Saul fell on the ground in terror. The woman, to her credit, showed him kindness and prepared a meal for him before he left.

Meanwhile, David’s story took a darker turn. When David and his men returned to Ziklag, they found the city burned to the ground. Their wives, sons, and daughters had been taken captive by the Amalekites. “Then David and the people who were with him lifted up their voices and wept, until they had no more power to weep.” And his men, in their grief, talked about stoning him. “But David strengthened himself in the LORD his God.” He asked the priest Abiathar to bring the ephod and inquired of the LORD: “Shall I pursue this troop? Shall I overtake them?” God said, “Pursue, for you shall surely overtake them and without fail recover all.”

David set out with 600 men. When they came to the Brook Besor, two hundred men were too exhausted to cross, so they stayed behind to guard the supplies. David went on with four hundred. They found a young Egyptian slave in the field, starving and sick. His Amalekite master had abandoned him three days earlier because he was ill. David did not ignore him. They gave him bread, water, a piece of fig cake, and two clusters of raisins, and “his spirit came back to him.” David promised not to hand him over, and the slave led them to the raiders’ camp. They found the Amalekites scattered across the land, eating, drinking, and dancing. David attacked from twilight until the evening of the next day, and “David recovered all that the Amalekites had carried away... Nothing of theirs was lacking, either small or great, sons or daughters, spoil or anything which they had taken from them.”

On the way back, some wicked men with David said that the two hundred who stayed behind should not get any of the plunder. David said, “You shall not do so, my brethren, with what the LORD has given us, who has preserved us and delivered into our hand the troop that came against us... as his part is who goes down to the battle, so shall his part be who stays by the supplies; they shall share alike.” That became a rule in Israel from that day on. David also sent gifts to the elders of Judah, his friends, saying, “Here is a present for you from the spoil of the enemies of the LORD.”

Then comes the final tragic chapter. The Philistines attacked Israel at Mount Gilboa. Israel’s army fled. Saul’s three sons, including Jonathan, were killed. Saul was badly wounded, and the battle ended in defeat for the king who had refused God’s word. He died that day, along with his sons. The Philistines hung their bodies on the wall of Beth Shan. But when the people of Jabesh Gilead heard, their brave men marched all night, took the bodies, and gave them an honorable burial. They remembered what Saul had done for them in chapter 11, and they fasted seven days. And so the book ends: a fallen king, a faithful friend gone, and a shepherd who would soon become king. God’s plan was still moving forward.

Qualities God Admires

Who	What God admired	Where
David	Strengthened himself in the LORD when everything was lost; inquired of God before acting; showed kindness to a sick, abandoned slave; ruled fairly and shared the spoil with everyone, including those who had stayed behind	1 Samuel 30:6-8, 11-16, 21-25
The 200 men who stayed by the supplies	Too exhausted to continue but loyal and faithful in guarding the baggage. David said they would share equally.	1 Samuel 30:10, 21-24
The Egyptian slave	Though weak and abandoned, he told the truth and led David to the raiders. He was treated with kindness.	1 Samuel 30:11-15

Who	What God admired	Where
The men of Jabesh Gilead	Remembered what Saul had done for them forty years before. They marched all night, risked their lives, and gave Saul and his sons an honorable burial.	1 Samuel 31:11-13

Warnings: Leaders and Choices God Despises

Who	What they did	What happened
Saul	Terrified before the battle, with no answer from God (because he had refused to listen to Him), he turned to a medium, a practice God forbids and that Saul himself had banned. He never truly repented.	Samuel's message: "The LORD will also deliver Israel with you into the hand of the Philistines." Saul and his sons died the next day at Mount Gilboa.
The wicked and worthless men with David	They did not want to share the plunder with the 200 tired men who had stayed behind	David corrected them: "You shall not do so, my brethren, with what the LORD has given us."
The Amalekites	They raided Ziklag, took the women and children, and left a sick slave to die in the field because he was no longer useful	David's 400 men found them, scattered, partying, and rescued everything.

Discussion Questions

1. When everyone was ready to stone David, what did he do? What does that mean for us?

Suggested answer: He strengthened himself in the LORD, by turning to God, remembering His promises and asking for guidance. In hard times we can pray, read God's Word, and ask God for help.

2. Why do you think David helped the sick Egyptian slave? How did that help the mission?

Suggested answer: David was kind and merciful to the weak. The slave led them to the raiders. Kindness is right in itself, and God can use it.

3. What do you think of David's rule that everyone shares in the spoil? Why did he insist?

Suggested answer: He knew that the victory was from God, not from the men. The ones who guard the supplies are just as important. Fairness honors God.

4. Why did Saul turn to a medium? Why should we avoid anything like that?

Suggested answer: He was desperate and God was silent because he had ignored Him. God forbids it. If we want to know God's mind, we should go to the Bible and prayer.

5. What lessons from 1 Samuel do you want to take with you?

Suggested answer: Open answers. Review: pray like Hannah, listen like Samuel, trust like David, befriend like Jonathan, make peace like Abigail, obey fully, and let God see your heart.

Background Notes for the Teacher

- Ziklag. A town in the Negev desert on the southern edge of Judah. Achish, king of Gath, gave it to David and his men (27:6). It became David's base for 16 months, and it became part of Judah's territory. David raided Israel's old enemies from there, but he lied to Achish about it (27:8-12), which is a mark against this chapter of David's life.
- The medium of Endor (28). The Law forbade consulting mediums (Leviticus 19:31; Deuteronomy 18:9-14). Saul had banned them (28:3, 9) but broke his own law. The text strongly suggests that God, not the medium's power, caused Samuel to appear (note the woman's shock, 28:12). We must warn students plainly: do not use Ouija boards, horoscopes, séances, or anything claiming to contact the dead. God gives us His Word and His Spirit instead.

- The Amalekites again. They are the same people Saul failed to destroy in chapter 15. Because Saul did not finish the job, they were back, raiding. The consequences of partial obedience can last for years.
- The Brook Besor (30:9-10). A seasonal stream in the Negev. The 200 men stayed to guard the baggage. David's rule (30:24-25) established a lasting statute and fairness for those who stayed behind. This is a good lesson for those with different roles, like a team: the person in the background matters, too.
- Gilboa. A mountain range on the eastern edge of the Jezreel valley. The battle was fought in a flat valley good for chariots, while Israel's army was weak and scattered. The three sons, Jonathan, Abinadab, and Malchishua, died. Mention gently that Jonathan, the faithful and brave friend, died along with his father.
- Saul's death. The Bible reports that Saul, badly wounded and afraid of being tortured by the Philistines, took his own life (31:4). Treat this very carefully. Do not give details. Use it only as a sober ending to a life that turned away from God. If any student is struggling with hopelessness or thoughts of self-harm, speak with them privately and with compassion, bring in your pastor and the student's parents, and in the United States share that they can call or text 988, the Suicide and Crisis Lifeline, any time. Point them to the hope of Christ: God does not leave people in their darkness.
- Jabesh Gilead. Saul's very first act as king was to rescue this city (11:1-11). Forty years later, the people remembered and risked their lives to give him dignity in death (31:11-13). David later praised them (2 Samuel 2:4-7). Gratitude has a long memory.
- Looking ahead. 2 Samuel picks up with David lamenting for Saul and Jonathan (2 Samuel 1:17-27) and becoming king. Eventually, the story leads to a Son of David who will reign forever (2 Samuel 7:12-16; Luke 1:32-33).
- Wrap-up. Use the Who's Who chart in the final pages to review all 13 sessions with the class.

Think, Feel, Do

Think: When I am discouraged or in trouble, do I run to God first, or to other things? What would it look like to 'strengthen myself in the LORD'?

Feel: How do you feel knowing that Jesus is the true King who will never fall or fail?

Do: Which quality from 1 Samuel (Hannah's prayer, Samuel's listening, Jonathan's loyalty, Abigail's peacemaking, David's mercy) will I practice this week?

This week's challenge: Each morning this week, strengthen yourself in the LORD: read a short psalm, pray, and tell God your worries. Look for the 'person in the background' and say thank you to someone who works behind the scenes.

Appendix: Who's Who in 1 Samuel

Use this chart in Session 13 to review the whole book. Green means God admired the person's heart and actions; red means a choice or character God warns against.

Person	Session		Why
Hannah	1	Admired	Prayed from a broken heart and kept her promise
Elkanah	1	Admired	Loved and encouraged his hurting wife
Peninnah	1	Warning	Teased and hurt a grieving woman
Samuel	2, 3, 5	Admired	Listened, obeyed, told the truth, kept praying
Hophni and Phinehas	2, 3	Warning	Corrupt priests who stole from God and abused the weak
Eli	2, 3	Warning	Knew about the sin and never stopped it
Joel and Abijah	4	Warning	Took bribes and denied justice to the poor
Saul's servant	4	Admired	Humble, wise helper
Saul (early)	5	Admired	Humble, brave defender of Jabesh Gilead, merciful
Nahash the Ammonite	5	Warning	Cruel to the helpless
Saul (later)	6 to 13	Warning	Fear, excuses, jealousy, disobedience, murder, the occult
Jonathan	6, 9, 11	Admired	Courageous faith, loyal friend, encourager
Jonathan's armorbearer	6	Admired	Loyal companion: 'I am with you'
David	7 to 13	Admired	Faithful shepherd, courage in God, mercy to enemies, strengthened in the LORD
Goliath	8	Warning	Proud mocker of the living God
Eliab	8	Warning	Jealous and discouraging
Michal	9	Admired	Risked her life to save David
Ahimelech	10	Admired	Kind to the hungry and honest before the king
Saul's guards	10	Admired	Refused to obey a wicked order
Doeg the Edomite	10	Warning	Betrayer and murderer of the priests
The Ziphites	11	Warning	Betrayed an innocent man for favor
Abigail	12	Admired	Wise peacemaker who took the blame and prevented bloodshed
Nabal	12	Warning	Ungrateful, stingy, proud fool
The 200 who guarded the supplies	13	Admired	Faithful in a behind-the-scenes job
The men of Jabesh Gilead	13	Admired	Remembered kindness and honored the fallen