

A King's the Thing

Lesson 6

LESSON AIM

To help kids know that ★ *no matter what others do, God wants us to follow him.*

OBJECTIVES

Kids will

- ✓ obey instructions in conflicting ways,
- ✓ participate in a cue and response account about Saul, Israel's first king,
- ✓ explore the Bible point with the "Follow God!" booklet, and
- ✓ name ways they'll follow God this week.

BIBLE BASIS

1 Samuel 8:1–13:14

A young man named Saul went out in search of his father's missing donkeys. Before he returned, he ran into the aging prophet Samuel, who proclaimed him Israel's first king. Wow, God *does* like to surprise us!

It had been a long time since Israel had a strong military leader. The Philistines were encroaching on their territory on one side, the Ammonites on the other. Still without the benefit of iron and bronze, the Israelites couldn't even sharpen their farming tools without going to their enemies and paying hefty prices. At one point the Philistines even stole the Ark of the Covenant! But

You'll need...

- scissors
- glue sticks
- pens or pencils
- copies of the "Follow God!" handout (p. 75)

it brought such great suffering upon whichever city had it that they sent it back to Israel of their own free will—along with offerings to the God of Israel.

The Israelites didn't connect their suffering as a nation to their continued disobedience of God. Instead they blamed their struggles on the lack of strong leadership. They went to the aging Samuel, Israel's last judge, and demanded a king—like all the other countries had.

From this perspective, the childishness of that demand seems obvious: *We want what everybody else has!*

In some ways it's amusing, in others, it's tragic. Throughout Israel's history, God had maintained a special relationship with that nation as Israel's heavenly sovereign. But it was very hard for God's people to follow the One they could not see. From the time they left Egypt and its visible false gods to this struggle with the false gods of the Canaanites, the Israelites willfully pulled toward the material world, away from the Holy One whose great miracles had formed them and saved them time after time throughout their long history. And now they were at it again, rejecting a special relationship with an unseen God in favor of an earthly king, flawed as he might be.

Saul himself was a conundrum. Though he was tall and handsome, he began with an appealing humility—*who me? I'm a nobody from the smallest tribe!* Later, when lots were cast with all the people present to choose a king and it fell to Saul, he was found hiding among the luggage. Then, once affirmed as king, Saul made no undue moves to throw his weight around. All good so far.

Sadly, this auspicious beginning quickly took a negative turn that struck a fatal blow to Saul's young monarchy. The Philistines posed a serious threat. Under Samuel's orders, Saul mounted an army at Gilgal and waited seven days for Samuel to join them and make the appropriate sacrifices before battle. Seeing the strength of the Philistines, Saul's army began to melt away in fear. On the seventh day, when Samuel still had not yet arrived, Saul feared the rest of his army might desert as well, so he took the matter of the sacrifice into his own hands. Only this was not kingly business—it was priestly business. Saul was only a military leader, *not* the intercessor between the people and God.

Just as Saul finished the inappropriate sacrifice, Samuel arrived, greatly aggrieved to see how quickly the new king had disobeyed God. The prophet announced that because of Saul's disobedience, his kingdom must end, and that God had already appointed another king to follow him, a man after God's own heart.

And so Saul becomes a tragic, tormented figure sandwiched

between Samuel and David. He's a king demanded by a disobedient people who preferred to be like other nations rather than follow their unique heritage as people attached solely to the living God.



Romans 12:1-2

Presenting ourselves as a “living and holy sacrifice” and allowing God to change our thinking is tough—day in and day out. God has plans for us to be one way, but we live in a world that’s another way. The world’s way is all around us, constantly bombarding us. We have to *seek* God’s way, *choose* it, become *disciples* of it. Unless we turn our faces to God daily, God’s ways can slip through our fingers.

The people of God made a bold choice to turn away from his sovereignty in favor of earthly monarchs. We too make choices each day. Stop and think. Ask for God’s transforming power. God loves to give it!

UNDERSTANDING YOUR KIDS

“But everybody else has one.”

“But everybody else gets to watch that show.”

“But all my friends are wearing those.”

“But *why* can’t I go?”

Kids may see nothing but limitations as we train them to make God-honoring choices. The truth is, being transformed into God’s likeness is a process that begins with our first steps of faith and never ends. As God changes us, we reflect more and more of the perfect love in which we were created.

It’s hard to turn our backs on the attractive things of the world and choose instead the holy things of God, whether it involves following an earthly king or choosing a modest outfit or a show that avoids sexual content. Use this lesson to teach your kids that choosing God’s way is always the right thing to do.

ATTENTION GRABBER

Who You Gonna Follow?

Greet children warmly. As they arrive, casually assign them to two groups. Explain that you'll be depending on both groups to carry out your instructions, so you'll need to step outside the room for a moment of coaching with each of them.

Outside the room, say to Group 1:

I'm counting on you to be the leaders during this activity. Pay close attention and do exactly what I say. I know I can trust you to stick right with me, even if other kids mess up a little. Are you with me?

Give high fives to everyone in Group 1.

Then call Group 2 outside the room for their briefing.

Say: **I'm giving you a challenging job this morning! Your job is to mess up my instructions, but not too much. For instance, when I say to do 10 jumping jacks, do just 5 and then quit. When I tell you to touch your toes, touch the top of your head instead. When I say to hop on one foot, bounce on both feet. When I say to hop on the other foot, keep bouncing on both feet. Pretend like your hearing is just a little bit off, OK? If anyone tries to correct you, just keep doing what you're doing.**

Ask the kids in Group 2 to repeat your instructions, pass around high fives, and then return to the room.

Say: **We're all going to need a good warm-up for today's lesson. Let's form one big circle and get started.**

Let's start with 10 big jumping jacks. Count aloud with me.

Group 1 will stay with you; Group 2 will stop at five. Ignore the discrepancy and move on.

Say: **Good job! Now shake out a little, and then reach down and touch your toes.**

Group 1 will touch their toes; Group 2 will touch the tops of their heads. Again, ignore what's happening and go on.

Say: **Now for a little hopping fun. Pat your left leg. Now hop on your left foot.**

Group 1 will hop on their left feet; Group 2 will bounce on both feet.

Say: **Time to switch. Pat your right leg. Hop on your right foot.**

Teacher Tip

Leave an assistant or trusted, older child in charge when you step out of the room with each group.

Teacher Tip

As everyone forms a large circle, make sure kids from both groups are intermixed.

Again, Group 1 will hop on their right feet; Group 2 will bounce on both feet.

Say: **OK. Join me in a huddle and let's talk about what just happened.**

Ask:

- **What was it like when not everyone was following my instructions?**

- **Would you have rather followed my instructions or done something else—and why?**

Say: **You see, I asked Group 2 not to follow my instructions exactly. That created quite a bit of confusion. Today we're going to learn that ★ *no matter what others do, God wants us to follow him.* Just as with this experience, it can be hard to follow when people all around are doing whatever they please. Let's find out what happened when God's people, the Israelites, decided they wanted to do what everyone else was doing rather than following God.**

BIBLE EXPLORATION

.....

We Want a King! (1 Samuel 8:1–13:14)

Have kids join you in a story circle.

Ask:

- **Describe what you think the expression “between a rock and a hard place” means.**

Say: **The Israelites found themselves *between a rock and a hard place* at the beginning of today's Bible passage. The rock on the one side was Philistia, the land of the Philistines. The hard place on the other side was Ammon, the land of the Ammonites. Let's see what that looks like. Groups 1 and 2, would you please stand up again?**

Choose a small child from one of the groups. Have that child stand in the middle of the groups. Direct the groups each to form a large clump that presses (not too hard!) around the child.

Put your hand on the head of the child in the middle and explain that he or she represents the land of Israel, squished between the more powerful nations of Philistia and Ammon.

Have the kids take their seats in the story circle again.

Say: **That's what I meant when I said that Israel was caught between a rock and a hard place. God only promised to keep blessing the Israelites if they obeyed him.**

Unfortunately, many of the Israelites disobeyed God by worshipping false gods—idols of wood or stone that they could see rather than the great God they couldn't see—the God who made all the heavens and the earth. And so God allowed these great enemies, the Philistines and the Ammonites, to make life hard for his people.

But did the Israelites stop to think, *this must be happening to us because we've disobeyed God?* No! That was the last thing on their minds! But before I tell you what they were thinking, I need to get you involved with the passage. I'm going to repeat a few important words as our passage continues. Each time I say one of these important words, you need to give a certain response. Let's take a moment to learn the cues and responses.

Practice these cues and responses with the kids. Each time you teach a response, model it and have kids do it with you.

- ✓ Whenever I say "Israelites," say, "the people of God."
- ✓ Whenever I say "enemies," make a terrible scary face.
- ✓ Whenever I say "the prophet Samuel," bow and say, "a man of God."
- ✓ Whenever I say "king," use your hands to make a crown on your head.
- ✓ Whenever I say "God," point to the sky and shout, "Almighty!"

Call out the cue words in random order to make sure the kids have the responses down. Rehearse until you're satisfied that the kids are confident with their responses.

In the passage below, each of the cue words is underlined for your convenience. Emphasize the cue words, pausing to let children respond with vigor.

Say: **The *Israelites* felt pressed in on all sides by their *enemies*. The always powerful *Philistines* lived on the coast of the *Mediterranean Sea*. They had chariots and weapons made of iron. The *Israelites* had no such weapons.**

Across the Jordan valley lived the *Ammonites*. They were cruel people who made terrible threats! I promise you this: You wouldn't want to have the *Ammonites* for *enemies*!

Together, the *Philistines* and the *Ammonites* made life hard for the *Israelites*. Finally the *Israelites* went to the *prophet Samuel* and said, "We want a *king*! After all, look

at all the strong nations around us. They have a *king*. Why shouldn't we?"

The prophet Samuel felt his heart break when he heard the people demanding a *king*. You see, the *Israelites* had always had a special relationship with *God*. They needed no earthly *king* because *God* himself ruled them, watched over them, and sent prophets and judges to guide them. But the people decided to turn away from *God*. They wanted to be like other nations and have an earthly leader instead. They didn't understand that ★ *no matter what others do, God wants us to follow him*. It was a sad day, but *God* decided to give the people what they wanted. And here's how it happened.

A young man named Saul set off on an errand to find his father's missing donkeys. On the way, he met *the prophet Samuel*. *God* told *the prophet Samuel*, "This is the one I have chosen to be *king*." So *the prophet Samuel* poured special oil on Saul's head and told him that he would be the first *king* of the *Israelites*.

Saul was tall and handsome, but this new job was a total surprise to him. He went home to his father and did nothing about it.

Finally, when Israel's *enemies* pressed for war, Saul called together an army for battle. *The prophet Samuel* told Saul to wait seven days. On the seventh day the prophet would come and make a special sacrifice before battle. But there was a problem. As Saul and his army waited, the Philistine army got closer and closer. When Saul's army saw how powerful the Philistines were, some of the *Israelites* began to run away.

Saul was afraid that if he waited for *the prophet Samuel*, his army would all run away, so instead of waiting, Saul made the sacrifice himself—not good. That was not a job for a *king*, it was a job for a priest! *The prophet Samuel* arrived just as the *king* finished making the sacrifice, and was the prophet ever angry! Already the new *king* had disobeyed *God*. He hadn't trusted that *God* could take care of the *Israelites' enemies*.

That was it for Saul. *The prophet Samuel* gave him the sad news that his reign would not last. In fact, *God* had already chosen someone else to be *king*—someone who loved and trusted *God* with all his heart.

Congratulate kids for their great work in helping tell the passage. Then ask:

- Describe whether you'd rather have God or an earthly king for a ruler—and why.
- What did the Israelites learn about a king being able to solve their problems?
- How did King Saul show that his faith was not in God?

Say: **The Israelites were supposed to be God's special people, but they chose to be like all the other nations. When we put our faith in Jesus, we become God's special children.**

Ask:

- How do we sometimes choose not to act like God's special children, but like everyone around us?
- What's one way we can choose to act like God's special children?

Say: ★ **No matter what others do, God wants us to follow him. Let's see what that might look like in our lives this week.**

Prep Box

Prepare a "Follow God!" craft for kids to examine. Set out scissors, glue sticks, pens or pencils, and copies of the "Follow God!" handout (p. 75).

LIFE APPLICATION

Follow God!

Lead kids to your craft table.

Say: **Today we're going to put feet on our Bible point!**

Check this out.

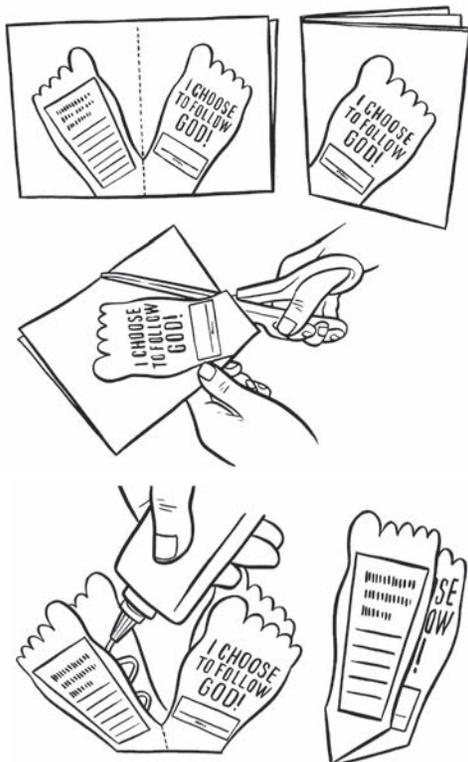
Hold up your folded sample "Follow God!" feet.

Say: **Ready to hit the road? Here we go! See the dotted lines in the middle of the feet? Fold the page carefully in half horizontally on those lines. Make a hard crease.**

Keeping the page folded, fold it in half the other way, again using the center lines. Now you're ready to cut out all four feet at once.

After kids have done their cutting, show them how to glue the blank sides of the feet together to form a four-page booklet joined at the bottom of the feet. Have them fold the booklet so that the page entitled *Times When It's Hard to Follow God* is on top.

Say: **Would you look at that! Now let's get deeper into understanding that ★ no matter what others do, God wants us to follow him.**



Follow God!



COMMITMENT

Follow God Moments

Lead kids through the booklet page by page, beginning with the page *Times When It's Hard to Follow God*. Let kids talk about times they're tempted to be like everyone else, the way the Israelites were when they wanted a king because all the other nations had one.

Move on to Romans 12:2. Have a willing child read it aloud. Invite kids to discuss how this can become a reality in their lives.

The page kids can sign is an opportunity for them to willingly take on this challenge. **Say ★ *No matter what others do, God wants us to follow him. That's a big challenge for anyone. We need God's help and the support of our Christian brothers and sisters to do it. Are you ready for the challenge? Think about it before you sign this page. If you'd rather not sign the page right now, that's fine. That means you're taking this challenge seriously and want to give it more thought.***

On the last page, let kids brainstorm ways they'll follow God this week in potentially difficult situations.

Say: **Great thinking, everyone! I have confidence that you'll be great God-followers!**

CLOSING

A Prayer for God-Followers

Have kids join you in a circle for your closing prayer.

Pray: **Dear God, we know that ★ *no matter what others do, you want us to follow you. We want to follow you, but it's hard sometimes. Please change us from the inside out so we're more like you each day. In Jesus' name, amen.***

Teacher Tip

Do your best to create an atmosphere where kids feel free to sign or not to sign the booklet. Make it OK for kids who would like to talk over their decision with their parents and potentially sign later.