

April 2024 – Decision times

Please note Bible stories and themes may occasionally differ from this overview.

As we move into April we pick up the story after God had rejected Saul as king and Samuel anoints David. David then becomes Saul's comforting musician, before jealousy gets the better of Saul and turns into an obsession to destroy David. David's response is to spare Saul's life – which is also what God's Passover allowed for the believing Israelites in the dramatic events of the Exodus. At every moment people have decisions to make.

Leaders please note:

Explore it is a popular resource equipping leaders of young people to facilitate response to a wide variety of Bible stories and teaching. Although subjects may not follow chronologically, the entire three-year curriculum exists to promote a lived experience of day-to-day discipleship, expressing the fruit of the Spirit. Galatians 5:22-3 (ICB) says, 'But the Spirit gives love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, self-control. There is no law that says these things are wrong.'

Our discipleship of children is about experiencing the 'who', more than learning the 'how'. Therefore you will now notice this links to one of these nine qualities each week as children grow in their experience of who Jesus is.

Session 1 April 6/7

Session Aim: To discover the first Passover

Bible Ref: Exodus 12:1-14,21-28,31

Today's fruit

Today's story shows the faithfulness of God to the Israelites and of their leader Moses' faithfulness to God.

Moses' faithfulness

The people of Israel had spent 430 years living in Egypt, where the Pharaoh king had treated them harshly and they had become slaves. He would not let the people of Israel leave his country. But Moses, accompanied by his brother Aaron, had become strong leaders among them.

God instructed Moses and Aaron to tell each Israelite household to kill one lamb and put the blood on the outside of their doorframes. In one night all the firstborn animals and people in Egypt would die, but death would 'pass by' the houses with this sign on them. This was God's 'Passover'.

Moses gathered the Israelite elders to tell them, 'He will not let the one who brings death come into your houses and kill you' (v23). In a way, this was God's faithfulness to free them from Egypt, but they had to trust God to do this.

When it came true, the king granted their freedom immediately: 'During the night the king called for Moses and Aaron. He said to them, "Get up and leave my

people. You and your people may do as you have asked. Go and worship the Lord.” (v31)

Think about

God seems very specific about this meal of lamb, especially what to wear and how to cook it. Do you ever follow details for cooking and why?

Killing the Egyptian first-born seems brutal, nothing like a loving God for everyone. Do you have questions for God today?

Co-operating with God can be called ‘faithfulness’. For Israel, it meant painting a sign. Do you know any religious symbols or signs that show faithfulness?

Session 2 April 13/14

Session Aim: To learn that God sees within a person

Bible Ref: 1 Samuel 16:1-23

Today's fruit

Goodness is evident in the way David used his music to help Saul to stay calm. Goodness is also seen in the way Samuel chose David, not judging by outward appearances.

David's goodness

After Saul was rejected as king, Samuel felt that God was leading him to a man called Jesse who lived in Bethlehem. Jesse had many sons, one of whom would be the new king. But Samuel was worried for his life; what would Saul say when he found out?

Jesse showed Samuel ten of his sons, but none of them was God's chosen one, even though their appearance was impressive. They might have been tall or handsome, but Samuel knew that God looks at the heart – at who someone is on the inside.

David was the youngest son, outside looking after sheep. Samuel felt God direct him that David was the chosen one. As was the custom, Samuel poured olive oil over David as a sign, and God's Spirit was within David from then on.

Meanwhile God's Spirit had left Saul and Saul became angry. His servants suggested listening to music; Saul demanded they find him a harp player, and they recommended David. Saul sent for David and Jesse agreed. David served Saul and his music enabled Saul to remain calm.

Think about

Sometimes following God's direction can make us afraid, like Samuel. Have you ever wondered if you have ‘heard’ God correctly?

Samuel seemed to get directions from God all the time. How did he have this connection and do you ever feel it?

David was the youngest, but he was the one who was chosen. In what ways do we judge people by their outside appearance?

Saul was an angry man. How do you stay calm, or what do you turn to when life feels tough? David became Saul's playlist, and his music was used by God.

Session 3 April 20/21

Session Aim: To see the danger of jealousy
Bible Ref: 1 Samuel 19:1-18

Today's fruit

Self-control was absent from Saul, who even tried to get his children to get rid of David. In contrast, David had remained loyal to Saul, showing self-control until he could no longer stay near the king because he would be killed.

David's self-control

Over time Saul became violently jealous of David. David was successful in battles and people liked him as their leader. Saul even became afraid of him because everything he did seemed to go so well, and David became very popular.

Eventually Saul tried to kill him, running at him with his spear. David escaped several times, so Saul asked his son Jonathan to kill him instead. But Jonathan liked David, so he pleaded with his father because David was innocent.

In the end David had to run away. He had married Michal, one of Saul's daughters, and Michal also helped David to get away by tricking her father by saying that he was ill and in bed.

Finally, David returned to somebody he knew he could trust – Samuel.

Think about

Have you ever felt jealous of somebody else? If so, why? Sometimes it's because of their achievements, how they look or how many friends they have.

Today we see how David became popular, perhaps because he showed self-control. Or perhaps it was because he had God's Spirit in him. What might this look like in you? Do you see it in others?

Like David, it is always right to leave a bad situation behind if we are in danger. Who would you turn to that you can trust?

Session 4 April 27/28

Session Aim: To reflect upon the power of gentleness
Bible Ref: 1 Samuel 24:1-22

Today's fruit

Treating our enemies with gentleness is not easy, but David finds the ability to do that here. It has an impact upon Saul too.

David's gentleness

Saul went looking for David to kill him. David and his men were hiding at the back of a cave when Saul walked in. In the darkness, Saul unknowingly came very close to David. But even though Saul was at his mercy, David didn't attack. Instead he surreptitiously cut off a corner of Saul's robe – showing the self-restraint we learnt about last week.

When Saul left the cave, David came out and told Saul he was not planning any evil against him, showing him the corner of his robe he had cut off in the darkness.

Saul knew that David had been good to him, crying, 'If a man finds his enemy, he won't send him away with goodness, will he? May the Lord reward you because you were good to me today' (v19). These words show the power of David's gentleness upon Saul.

Saul acknowledges that David will be the next king and rule the kingdom of Israel. David's gentleness has brought Saul to a place of peace, and David also promised that he would not kill Saul's descendants, before they went their separate ways.

Think about

How do you feel about showing gentleness to an enemy? Perhaps ask God to give you opportunity to do this if a relationship needs healing.

Is there someone at school or home to whom you could show gentleness this week?

David's actions bring the best out of Saul. Rather than settling scores, God's Spirit in David brings this attitude out of him.

Why did David cut the corner of Saul's robe anyway? It's a little detail you may wish to think about.

27 April: Exploring Leadership Day in The Salvation Army

Saul realised David was a powerful leader, just like the Egyptians did with Moses a few weeks ago. What makes a successful leader? You may want to pray for those who are considering any form of leadership within The Salvation Army.