

Dealing with Difficult People

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Leader's Guide

God Is In Control

Having confidence in God can stir loyalty



Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:4–22; 16:1, 7–23; Acts 17:26–27

Based on: “Dealing with the Difficult Person” sermon series builder by Colin Smith, PreachingToday.com

Needed for this lesson: A snack, and disposable and non-disposable plates and cups.

Get Started

Provide a snack at the beginning of the group time. Put out both disposable and non-disposable plates and cups, so that people can take either one.

Encourage each person to get a snack, and then to find one other person and ask them what their favorite possession is—the one thing they would save in a fire.

After about ten minutes, ask people to take their seats so that you can get started. Ask:

[Q] Did you take a disposable plate or a non-disposable one? Why?

[Q] Name all the disposable things you can see in this room.

[Q] What disposable item do you feel like you can't live without?

[Q] What disposable item do you avoid if at all possible?

[Q] What are disposable besides *things* in our society?

Most of us have grown up in a culture that has moved increasingly in the direction of the disposable. The reason? We are in love with pain-free lives.

A pain-free life has become the new god of our society—a god to be pursued at any cost, a god for whom anything else can be sacrificed. That, by the way, is why so many people have turned away from the God of the Bible—because the God of the Bible obviously allows pain. And many people have decided that a God who allows a great deal of pain in some cases is a God that they have not the slightest interest in knowing.

Indeed, when a pain-free life becomes the ultimate goal—becomes the god of a society—then the strategy to pursue becomes very simple. When anything or anyone comes in the way of pain-free living, or where anyone or anything makes my life uncomfortable, then I must get away from them or get rid of them.

Object Lesson

To demonstrate this, ask for volunteers to role play each of the following situations. Assign each volunteer a specific personality, and ask them to explain to the group why they made the decision to dispose of whatever each situation represents.



- * A college student who feels classes are too hard and chooses to drop out.
- * A person who feels their spouse is too difficult and wants a divorce.
- * A person who went to one church for a while, but got mad and left.
- * A person who stayed with a job only three months, then got bored and quit.

Do you see how this mindset develops? The ultimate goal—the ultimate god—is a pain-free life. So anything that causes pain then causes me to move, to separate. Over a period of years, as this has multiplied throughout our land, a culture develops in which more and more people feel rootless. We move to new homes, new jobs, new friends, new places, and new churches. Every time we feel unhappy, the answer is to move on again and again.

So relationships increasingly become a means to an end, something to be enjoyed as long as they are comfortable. We end up with more and more people in a community who simply feel used.

The Book of 1 Samuel plunges us into a world that is completely and utterly different from ours. It is a world where relationships are not disposable. This is something that we, as Christian people, desperately need to discover if we are going to live counter-culturally in a society that is breaking apart.

Dig into Scripture

1) God allows the pain of difficult relationships. Read 1 Samuel 8:4–22.

Israel's first king was Saul, who turned out to be a disaster. The people later realized that they had made a foolish choice when they began to experience the pain of living with their own foolishness. But God entered into that pain. First Samuel 15:35 says, "The Lord was grieved that he had made Saul king over Israel."

The Lord was "grieved." This does not mean that God had made a mistake. God knew precisely what he was doing when he allowed Saul to be the king in response to the people's request. The text simply reminds us that God felt the pain of what he had allowed. That's important to remember. God is not like some cosmic scientist conducting experiments on us. "Oh, I wonder what'll happen if I make him king? Oh, dear, that didn't work out! Let's try something else." No, that's not the God of the Bible. He knows precisely what he is doing. There is no pain in your life that God has not allowed, and there is no pain in your life that God has not also felt. He entered into the pain that came to his people as a result of him allowing Saul to be king, which was the consequence of their foolish choice.



[Q] What makes a relationship hard or easy?

[Q] Share an example of a time that you persisted in a tough situation or relationship in spite of the pain and hardship.

[Q] Should we ever give up on relationships? How do we know when that should happen?

2) God has a plan in the middle of pain. Read 1 Samuel 16:1, 7–23.

The rest of the Book of 1 Samuel follows the relationship between the two kings, Saul and David. Right from the beginning, Saul made David's life miserable.

It all started after David killed Goliath. Saul made David a general in his army, and the young man had even more military success. One day the women came out singing and dancing to meet King Saul. They sang, "Saul has slain his thousands." But then they went on to sing, "And David, his tens of thousands." This made Saul jealous. David now faced a boss who had a bitter attitude toward him.

Over time, things got progressively worse. In 1 Samuel 18, we're told about two occasions when Saul hurled his spear at David. That shows the level to which Saul's jealousy had escalated. David dodged the spear, but he had to go on the run to save his life from Saul.

It's difficult to know how long, but historians believe there was a period of 15 years between the time when David was anointed king and the time when he actually came to the throne after Saul's death. Fifteen years in which he had to struggle with this man who created nothing but difficulties in his life.

David knew that God had anointed him to be king. He knew that Saul was a royal pain in the neck. David even had the support of the people, having slain his tens of thousands. He could have easily seized power. But he was loyal to Saul until the day Saul died, when David even wept for him. It is staggering. In fact, it is so far from the culture in which we live that it's almost impossible for us to understand.

[Q] Who is a "Saul" in your life?

[Q] Look at 1 Samuel 10:1. With this verse in mind, why do you think David put up with Saul?

[Q] How would you define loyalty? What can we learn about loyalty from David?

Not once, but seven times David speaks of the anointing of Saul—1 Samuel 24:6, 24:10, 26:9, 11, and 23, and then later in 2 Samuel 1:14. This line appears again and again: “You are the Lord’s anointed.”

David is saying: I can’t take matters into my own hands. Saul, I can’t harm you. Saul, I can’t even hate you, because I believe and know that God has put you where you are. You’re an absolute pain, but God put you where you are, and I’m convinced that you are part of his purpose in my life.

3) God will use the most difficult of relationships to shape us.

Read Acts 17:26–27.

Once we begin to see that our lives are ordered by the loving hand of God working out his ultimate purpose in us and through us, then we will have an entirely different attitude toward the difficult people in our lives.

[Q] Consider the place you are and the people in your life. What purpose can you see in your present circumstances?

Object Lesson

Find a partner and describe the person in your life who is most difficult—your “Saul.” How has this person “thrown spears” at you? What has been your response up until this point? How could you be like David in the relationship?

Take a few minutes to share how God has “anointed” this difficult person: What gifts or good qualities does this person have? How has God used this person in your life? How has God used this person in the lives of others? Finally, take a few minutes to pray for this person and your relationship with him or her.

Put It into Action

It’s not difficult for some of us to identify the Sauls in our lives. But God will help us use those difficult people to advance the reflected image of the life of Jesus within us and through us. For that is his ultimate purpose, rather than a pain-free life—to reflect the glory of Jesus.

My life is not at the impulse of arbitrary forces. It is in the hand of God. The hand that holds my life is the hand that holds the world.

Choose one or more of the following to do this week:

- Who is your Saul? Think of one act of kindness to show to this person, even though he or she may not deserve it.
- How did this person become your Saul? Take time to write a history of your relationship. When did it start to go bad? Were there any significant events that caused this problem between you? Is there anything you need to ask forgiveness for? If not, how can you forgive this person for the wrong you suffered because of him or her?
- Thank God for your Saul. Make a list of all this person's good points. Thank God for creating this person for a purpose, and ask God to make this person more like Jesus Christ.

Close in prayer: “Oh God, help me to learn what you would teach me, so that I may become more like Jesus Christ and not go through this pain without something that glorifies you coming out of it.”

—By *Colin Smith, with JoHannah Reardon*



Participant's Guide

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Scripture: 1 Samuel 8:4–22; 16:1, 7–23; Acts 17:26–27

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Dig into Scripture

- 1) **God allows the pain of difficult relationships. Read 1 Samuel 8:4–22.**
- 2) **God has a plan in the middle of pain. Read 1 Samuel 16:1, 7–23.**
- 3) **God will use the most difficult of relationships to shape us. Read Acts 17:26–27.**

Find a partner and describe the person in your life who is most difficult: your “Saul.” How has this person “thrown spears” at you? What has been your response up until this point? How could you be like David in the relationship?

Take a few minutes to share ways you see God has “anointed” this difficult person: What gifts or good qualities does this person have? How has God used this person in your life? How has God used this person in the lives of others? Finally, take a few minutes to pray for this person and your relationship with him or her.

Put It into Action

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Leader's Guide

Speak the Truth

Sometimes a loving response requires confrontation



Scripture: 1 Samuel 15

Based on: "Dealing with the Difficult Person" sermon series builder by Colin Smith, PreachingToday.com

Needed for this lesson: Three people who agree to help you with the opening, a snack, and an alarm clock that can increase in volume.



Get Started

Arrange ahead of time for three people that you know are secure socially and emotionally to circulate quietly among the group during the snack time at the beginning. Each person should ask the others in the group a potentially awkward question—something that the questioner knows is true, but may be difficult for someone else to admit. For example: Do you think I need a haircut? Do I need to lose a few pounds? Should I learn to talk less? Should I learn to talk more?

When you gather the group to begin, explain the task you gave the three people. Then ask:

[Q] How did it make you feel when you were asked a question that required you to give an answer that might not be flattering to the person? Were you truthful, or did you fudge the truth? Why?

[Q] Do you find it easy or difficult to confront others about something they are doing wrong? Why?

[Q] What kind of relationship should you have with a person before you confront them?

[Q] Should confrontation be rare or common? Explain.

[Q] It has been said that if it's easy for you to confront others, you shouldn't, but if it's hard for you to confront, you should. Do you think that's true? Explain.

Dig into Scripture

1) Saul ignored God's command. Read 1 Samuel 15:1–11.

The Amalekites were the Al-Qaeda of the Old Testament. They were a marauding tribal group who, from generation to generation, had launched unprovoked attacks on innocent people of all kinds of races. The Jews were just one victim.

God had been very patient with the Amalekites as their violence and plundering went on throughout the years. But now Saul was being sent as the agent of God's judgment toward the Amalekites. That was, incidentally, why the army was not allowed to keep any plunder from their campaign. This was not, as other wars had been before, for territorial gain or territorial defense. This was a war in which Israel was to deal with a centuries-old problem at the express consent of God.



There are only a few times in the Bible when anything like this happens: the flood, Sodom and Gomorrah, and the Amorites are the only other times.

Though Saul and his army agreed to do battle with the Amalekites, they weren't too happy about it. It was a traditional practice for an army to bring back the plunder of the war waged. As already noted, God had specifically told them that there was to be no material gain for Israel from this war. They were to get nothing out of it—they were to only do what God had commanded them to do.

But herein was the difficulty for Saul. He let the army keep the plunder and decided Agag, the king of the Amalekites, would make for good publicity.

[Q] What was the big deal about Saul not doing exactly what God said? He did, after all, do the main thing God asked.

[Q] Why did God say that Saul had “turned away from me”?

[Q] Share a time that you ignored one of God's commands (from Scripture or a nudge from the Holy Spirit). Were there any consequences to that?

[Q] Share a time that you did exactly what God said, even if it didn't make sense at the time. How did it make sense later?

2) Samuel had to confront Saul. Read 1 Samuel 15:12–35.

Samuel had a completely sleepless night when he heard about Saul's disobedience and unfaithfulness to the commission that was given to him. What is the community of God's people to do if it encounters a situation where its own leader will not be faithful to the Word of God? This was a great tragedy.

But there was a bigger reason why Samuel was troubled that night—he knew that come morning, God was calling him to go and look Saul straight in the eye and confront him about his sin. If you've ever had to confront someone about a secret sin that has become exposed, you know why Samuel couldn't sleep.

That's one of the hardest things in all the world to do—speak the truth to someone you love and care about after you've discovered some fundamental unfaithfulness in their lives. But the Bible says that such confrontation is part of loyalty. A loyal person understands God is in control, and a loyal person also speaks the truth.

Being loyal to the Saul in your life does not mean being a doormat. It does not mean that you turn a blind eye to his actions and let him or her carry on irresponsibly. God revealed the truth to Samuel, and Samuel knew that the following morning he would need to meet this man he had prayed for, anointed, loved, and supported for years. He now had to confront him with the painful truth.

[Q] Look at verse 12. How does this show that Saul was not at all repentant?

[Q] How does Saul's greeting in verse 13 show his bravado?

[Q] Who does he blame for his disobedience, and what excuse does he use (v.15)?

[Q] What significance is there in Saul saying "the Lord your God" instead of "the Lord our God"?

Object Lesson

To give us some idea of what this situation would be like today, ask for volunteers to act out the following scenarios, using the kind of excuses Saul made:

- * A church treasurer embezzled money.
- * A husband cheated on his wife.
- * A teenager stole a shirt from the store.
- * An employee took home a large amount of office supplies.

Now ask for a volunteer to confront each person with what they did wrong, and to encourage them to repent. Like Samuel, name the sin and show the person the scale and consequences of their sin.

3) We need to confront our own sin before we can confront the "Sauls" in our lives.

It's interesting that Saul has no idea of the significance of what's going on here. In fact, the only thing that seems to trouble him is whether or not he can retain his position of authority. In 1 Samuel 15:25, Saul wonders aloud if Samuel will come and publicly appear with him during worship. That seems to be all that Saul's bothered about—whether or not he can fool people into thinking everything is all right and thus retain his kingship.

There is no sign of repentance in Saul. He couldn't care less about restoring the blessing of God. He cares only that he won't "lose face."



A person who is more concerned about losing face in front of other people than about losing the blessing of God is a person who's never understood the Christian faith at all. The way you respond to the critical moments of the discipline of God is one of the most revealing things about you.

[Q] When someone confronts you about something you are doing wrong, do you respond to God's mercy or get angry? Why?

God speaks the truth out of his loyalty to you. He will never allow his children to remain in disobedience. However disturbing it is, God will speak the truth to bring you to your senses in order that you may embrace his mercy. A person who doesn't hear the truth is in a very dangerous position.

Object Lesson

Set an alarm clock to go off softly the first time. The second time, make the alarm louder. The third time, make it obnoxiously loud. Then ask: How are these three alarms similar to how God gets our attention when we sin? Give examples of what each alarm might represent.

[Q] Is everything that goes wrong in a person's life somehow the discipline of God? If not, how can we know what is and isn't?

Put It into Action

For some of us, the first alarm is gently ringing, even right now. The Word of God is being preached to you. The Holy Spirit is at work. In your own conscience, God's applying it to something that probably no one else knows about. But you know about it, and he knows about it. Your sin has been there, hidden away, and it needs to be put right. If that's what's happening, don't shut off the alarm. That's the road to spiritual disaster.

Choose one or more of the following to do this week:

Is there an alarm ringing in your life right now? If so, is it the first, second, or third ring? Take time to answer this question and to repent.

Do you see an alarm ringing in someone else's life that they are ignoring? Pray for love and wisdom to talk to them about their sin. Get advice and prayer from someone you trust before you do this.



Do a scriptural search of God's commands on a topic of your choice. Use a concordance to help you find verses on this topic. Ask God to make you a doer of the word, not just a hearer.

Close in prayer: Ask the group if anyone would like to repent of anything publicly. If so, surround them and pray for them. If not, pray that all of us would listen to the first, quiet alarm in our lives before the others are needed.

—By *Colin Smith, with JoHannah Reardon*



Participant's Guide

Speak the Truth

Sometimes a loving response requires confrontation



Scripture: 1 Samuel 15

Based on: "Dealing with the Difficult Person" sermon series builder by Colin Smith, PreachingToday.com



Dig into Scripture

- 1) **Saul ignored God's command. Read 1 Samuel 15:1–11.**
- 2) **Samuel had to confront Saul. Read 1 Samuel 15:12–35.**
- 3) **We need to confront our own sin before we can confront the "Sauls" in our lives.**

Put It into Action

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- Is there an alarm ringing in your life right now? If so, is it the first, second, or third ring? Take time to answer this question and to repent.
- Do you see an alarm ringing in someone else's life that they are ignoring? Pray for love and wisdom to talk to them about their sin. Get advice and prayer from someone you trust before you do this.
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Leader's Guide

Show Grace

We show the same grace God shows us



Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1–12; 24

Based on: "Dealing with the Difficult Person" sermon series builder by Colin Smith, PreachingToday.com

Needed for this lesson: A special snack, pens, and blank sheets of paper



Get Started

Provide a snack at the beginning of the group time that is a little more special than ordinary. Set the table with a nice tablecloth, provide a centerpiece or candlesticks, and use your best dishes. Ask the group to be seated, and for one or two volunteers to help you serve the others.

Encourage everyone to ask the person on their right what is the nicest thing anyone has ever done for them.

After everyone has finished eating, ask:

[Q] When you eat out at a restaurant, do you enjoy sitting and ordering from a menu, or serving yourself, as in fast food or a buffet? Why?

[Q] Have you ever been a waiter or waitress? If so, what kind of customer did you like best and why? Who did you feel deserved your best and who did you feel didn't deserve your time and attention? Explain.

[Q] Share a time when you were kind to someone and they were rude or cruel back. How did it make you feel? Did you remain kind or return their attitude?

[Q] Share a time someone was kind to you when you knew you didn't deserve it.

[Q] Name one biblical character who was kind when another was cruel to him or her.

Most of us have heard the story of David and Goliath. At this point, Saul was leading the army without the blessing of God on his leadership, and his army was stuck in a valley. Saul—the once great leader who had been head-and-shoulders above everyone else in Israel—now suddenly looked rather small and pathetic. He certainly wasn't volunteering to take on the giant!

Then David came along with the Spirit of God upon him and delivered God's people from their enemy. In reaction, Saul was so impressed that he thought: *Wow, I've got to recruit him onto my staff! This is a marvelous fellow to have around.*

So David was brought into the palace. As Scripture informs us, he made Saul look so good that he ended up being quickly promoted. But the more success David had, the more popular he became. Then it suddenly dawned on Saul—the Spirit of God had left him. Saul realized that David was the man who was going to end up getting the kingdom.

At that moment, Saul faced a choice. If he had accepted the word from the Lord, accepting the consequences of his sin and showing true repentance, he could have spent his later years mentoring David. But the tragedy of Saul's life is that instead of accepting the word from the Lord and submitting to it, Saul just became angry.

Here's the extraordinary thing: Saul knew that the blessing of God was on David, yet he spent the later years of his life trying to destroy him. This was an exercise in utter futility, since no one can destroy the purpose of God. So as Saul became older, he became more and more frustrated. Pursuing David turned into an obsession with him—so much so that in the end, Saul seemed to lose touch with reality altogether.

Dig into Scripture

1) Saul caused pain to those around him. Read 1 Samuel 18:1–12.

David is now on the palace staff. As good as David's exploits in leading the army were, he evidently doubled as a solo musician. Saul is listening to David playing the harp. In a moment of fury, Saul sees his spear and thinks to himself, *I'm going to pin him to the wall right now! I'm going to finish him off!*

His anger and frustration are too much to contain; Saul hurls the spear at David, but David sidesteps the javelin and wisely leaves the palace. This happens more than once, and Saul even resorts to using his own daughter and son against David. Talk about a dysfunctional family! This is, by any standards, a family completely out of control. The Spirit of God has departed from Saul. Bitterness and anger are raging within him. No one knows how he's going to erupt next. The man finds himself in the grip of a power that he cannot control and the whole family suffers because of it.

Do you see what is happening in Saul's life? He's angry with God. He's angry with David. He feels power slipping away from him. He doesn't like it. He doesn't know what to do about it. Nothing he tries seems to work. He's increasingly frustrated. So Saul ends up destroying relationships with the very people God has placed around him, even his own son and daughter.

Object Lesson

Break into groups of three or four. Provide each group with pen and paper, and have them make two columns. One should read SAUL, the other should read DAVID. Skim through 1 Samuel 18–20 and list everything that Saul tried to do to David. Then list how David responded to each of those things.



When everyone is finished, have volunteers share what they've written under the SAUL column, then ask:

[Q] What might you have done in response to each of these things if you were David?

[Q] Why do you think David responded so well?

2) David showed grace to Saul. Read 1 Samuel 24.

David had the chance to get even. Saul had 3,000 men out looking for David. By this point in the story, David is a fugitive on the run. He's hiding in a large cave.

As the men search for David, Saul needs to use the restroom. As you can imagine, there aren't a lot of restrooms provided in the desert, so Saul decides that he'll go into a cave to relieve himself. In fact, he goes into the very cave where David, accompanied by a few of his fighting men, is hiding in the darkness.

God allowed an opportunity for David to get even. Picture him in the back of the cave, completely concealed from Saul. Saul, who's been such a pain in his life for years, is now in an utterly defenseless position. What an opportunity to even the odds!

Not only did David have the opportunity to get even, but he also had plenty of encouragement to do it. But David refused.

[Q] How would you define grace?

[Q] Why did David show Saul grace?

Object Lesson

Using a whiteboard or poster board, record all the stories (movies, children's stories, novels) the group can think of that have as their main point the demonstration of grace. Then record all the ones that have their main point as revenge. Ask:

[Q] Which of these stories are your favorite and why?

3) We need to show grace to the difficult people in our lives.

We live in a very broken world, where many people do terrible things. Some of us can identify a Saul in our lives—someone who has hurt us deeply and made life dreadfully difficult. This



individual has tried to take what was rightfully ours. When you have been hurt, there are two ways that you can go. The first is that you can try and get even: Someone has hurt me, so I want to hurt him back. I want to make him pay. I want to make her pay.

What's wrong with that? Shouldn't we Christians be concerned about justice? We absolutely should be, but there is more than one way of getting justice. Look again at what David says in 1 Samuel 24:12.

Saul is the kind of person who always says "I'm sorry" or "Let's start over; I'll be different." We've seen this pattern repeating itself throughout the story. It's very difficult to tell whether he means it sincerely, or whether this is just another repetition of the same line.

How does David deal with this kind of deceptive and difficult person? He says: I'm placing this in God's hands. God knows my heart. God knows my motives. God knows everything I've done and everything I will do. But I'm leaving it in God's hands.

[Q] How does this attitude enable David to show Saul grace?

[Q] Notice that although David shows Saul grace, he doesn't go back with him. How does David's example show us how to handle someone who hurts us and shows no sign of sorrow?

[Q] What kind of balance is there between showing someone like this grace without allowing them to hurt you?

Object Lesson

Advise the following people how to handle the "Sauls" in their lives.

- * Jane's father is physically and emotionally abusive.
- * Matthew's coworker looks for every opportunity to put him down.
- * Rose's neighbor nitpicks at her about everything concerning her house and yard.
- * Bart's aunt steals money and items from his house.

Put It into Action

As you restrain vengeance, you show grace and reflect God's character. You follow Jesus' example, and the Spirit of glory and of God rests on you.

There are plenty of Sauls in the world of business. They are greedy, self-obsessed people—both angry and frustrated—who'll do anything to get their own way. They feel increasingly desperate



when they don't. You probably work among some of them. The world of business needs more Davids. It needs men and women who will restrain the urge to get even and will show grace instead.

There are plenty of Sauls in our families, as well. These are men or women who have been running an argument for years. They won't let it go, and they can't stop talking about it. Our families need more Davids—men and women who will restrain the urge to get even and will show grace instead.

Some of us know wounds that are very deep, but we also know that the calling of Jesus Christ is very high. We don't want to be part of an ongoing hatred in society, and we have offered grace to even the most difficult of people.

Choose one or more of the following to do this week:

- Where you've been wounded, restrain the urge to get even. Show grace and put matters of ultimate justice and the wrongs that have been committed against you into the hands of God. Trust God to judge justly. Instead of getting revenge, look for a way to show grace and blessing to the one who hurt you.

- When you look in the mirror, are you looking at David or Saul? If we were to ask your family or your circle of friends or your colleagues at work to speak honestly about how they experience you, would the reality be that you're bringing a great deal of pain into the lives of other people, or would it be that you're bringing a great deal of grace into the lives of others? If you are causing pain to others, you need to seek real repentance. Not the Saul "lip service" that just says sorry every six months and carries on exactly the same. You need the repentance that says: Oh God, change me!

Close in prayer: "Oh God, change me. My wounds are very deep, but the calling of Jesus Christ is very high. I don't want to be part of the ongoing hatred in society, but I want to offer grace to even the most difficult of people. Thank you for restraining your vengeance against me and showering me with your amazing grace. Show me how to release your grace to those around me."

—By Colin Smith, with JoHannah Reardon



Participant's Guide

Show Grace

We show the same grace God shows us



Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1–12; 24

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Dig into Scripture

1) Saul caused pain to those around him. Read 1 Samuel 18:1–12.

Make two columns. One should be labeled SAUL; the other should be labeled DAVID. Skim through 1 Samuel 18–20 and list everything that Saul tried to do to David. Then list how David responded to each of those things.

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3) We need to show grace to the difficult people in our lives.

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Put It into Action

Choose one or more of the following to do this week:

- Where you’ve been wounded, restrain the urge to get even. Show grace and put matters of ultimate justice and the wrongs that have been committed against you into the hands of God. Trust God to judge justly. Instead of getting revenge, look for a way to show grace and blessing to the one who hurt you.

- When you look in the mirror, are you looking at David, or are you looking at Saul? If we were to ask your family or your circle of friends or your colleagues at work to speak honestly about how they experience you, would the reality be that you’re bringing a great deal of pain into the lives of other people, or would it be that you’re bringing a great deal of grace into the lives of others? If you are causing pain to others, you need to seek real repentance. Not the Saul “lip service” that just says sorry every six months and carries on exactly the same. You need the repentance that says: Oh God, change me!



Show Grace

Close in prayer: “Oh God, change me. My wounds are very deep, but the calling of Jesus Christ is very high. I don’t want to be part of the ongoing hatred in society, but I want to offer grace to even the most difficult of people. Thank you for restraining your vengeance against me and showering me with your amazing grace. Show me how to release your grace to those around me.”

—By *Colin Smith, with JoHannah Reardon*



Leader's Guide

Pledge Love

A loyal person keeps a covenant, no matter the cost



Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1–4

Based on: “Dealing with the Difficult Person” sermon series builder by Colin Smith, PreachingToday.com

Needed for this lesson: Arrange ahead of time for two people to play the parts of Jonathan and David in the opening skit. You’ll also need a snack and enough pencils and paper for each person in your group.

Get Started

As everyone gets their snack, ask them to find one other person and ask: If a genie gave you the opportunity to achieve one thing (great wealth, break the land-speed record, write the great American novel, play pro-football, paint another Sistine Chapel), what would it be?

After everyone has finished their snack, ask them to take their seat and watch a mini-drama of Jonathan and David.

Jonathan: You know, David, I'm not sure I'm going to be king, even though Saul is my father. What do you think?

David: (After a long, uncomfortable silence) Jonathan, can I tell you something that I've never told anyone else?

Jonathan: Yes, tell me. I'm your best friend. You can tell me anything.

David: One day the prophet Samuel came privately to my house. He said that God had told him to anoint a new king. I was out in the fields when he arrived. He met all my brothers and then sent for me. I was absolutely astonished. When I arrived at the house, do you know what he did? He took a flask of oil and poured it over my head and said, "God is anointing you to be the king over his people."

Jonathan: (Looking stunned) Wow, David. You've put me in an impossible position. If my father finds out, he's going to try to destroy you. And I have to choose between him and you. Plus, I have to give up all hope of claiming the throne myself.

David: I know. What are you going to do?

Jonathan: We'll, it seems to me that I either have to accept God's word or reject it.

After "Jonathan" and "David" are seated, ask the whole group:

[Q] What do you find most remarkable about Jonathan?

[Q] What kind of qualities did Jonathan have to be able to do this?

[Q] Has anyone ever given up something important for you? If so, tell us about it. What was it? How hard was it for the other person to give it up? What did it mean to you?

[Q] Think of how you answered the question during the snack time (If a genie gave you



the opportunity to achieve one thing, what would it be?). Now imagine that the genie came back and said, “Sorry, I meant that to go to your neighbor, instead of you. I’ll just take it back.” How would you have felt toward the genie? Toward your neighbor?

Dig into Scripture

1) Jonathan pledged a covenant of loyalty to David.

Read 1 Samuel 18:1–4.

Jonathan made a covenant with David. In other words, Jonathan said to his friend: David, whatever the cost, whatever the future—whatever it takes—I want you to know that you can count on me.

The Hebrews had a particular word for covenant loyalty: *hesed*, which means “steadfast love.” It’s a love that will last—a love that you can count on. It’s sometimes translated in the Bible as *faithfulness*, or you could simply call it *loyalty*. *Hesed* is used in 1 Samuel 20 in verses 8, 13 and 15.

David asks for *hesed* from Jonathan in his present circumstances, and Jonathan asks for the same in the future when David is king. They seal this mutual commitment in verse 23, “the LORD is witness between you and me forever.”

Hesed loyalty will bring you great pain. It’s always costly. It cost Jonathan his kingdom and his life. It cost David the loss of his best friend, the one person he most trusted. David is absolutely heartbroken when Jonathan is killed and writes a lament that is recorded in 2 Samuel 1:17–27.

[Q] How might *hesed* loyalty bring the greatest blessing and deepest sorrow? Give examples from Scripture, history, and contemporary life.

[Q] Share an example of how loyalty has brought you pain.

[Q] Share how it has brought you great blessing.

[Q] How does *hesed* loyalty reflect the heart of God?



Hesed is in God's very nature. The Lord is gracious and compassionate. He's slow to anger. He's abounding in steadfast love (or *hesed*). The steadfast love, the *hesed* of God, never ceases. He made a covenant that he would redeem men and women, whatever the cost. Loyalty to that covenant brought indescribable pain to the heart of God. That's what Jesus' leaving the throne of heaven, coming all the way to a cross, and laying down his life so that we should be lifted up is all about.

Object Lesson

Provide a pencil and blank paper for each person in the group. Instruct them: Create a target with concentric circles. In the center circle write the name of the person who is making your life difficult. In each of the outer circles, write the names of those who are close to you who are affected by this difficult person.

When they've finished making their target, ask them to find a partner and talk about how they can trust God with the difficult person he has put in their life, and how they can show *hesed* love to the others in their circle.

2) We need to make our own pledge of covenant loyalty.

There are some things in life that are so important that we want to put them beyond the range of impulse—to protect them from our swinging moods and feelings.

This is why people get married. We count this relationship to be sacred. We know that honoring it at some point will prove costly, so we don't want it to be open-ended. We don't want it to be just a private understanding between the two of us. We want to raise it to the level of a covenant that is sealed "with God as our witness" to hold us accountable. So we publicly say to this person: You can count on me. You can count on me for better or for worse, for richer or for poorer. I pledge *hesed* to you. Whatever the cost, and whatever the future holds, I pledge a love that you can count on.

It's not just a piece of paper. It is a sacred covenant that gives direction and security to the whole of life. A loyal person is willing to make a covenant promise.

[Q] What public vows have you made in your lifetime (marriage, baptism, dedication, induction, etc.)?

[Q] How do such vows become pillars of your life? How are they foundational to who you are?



Object Lesson

Be sure everyone has paper and pen. Then say: Often the difficult person in our lives also causes difficulty for other people we love. In that case, we often have to love and protect the others. Write out a covenant of your commitment to someone who may need protection from this difficult person.

When everyone is finished, ask:

[Q] What kind of things did you include in your covenant?

[Q] How can you let this person know the commitment you have stated in your covenant? How can you put it into action?

Put It into Action

Why would you not want to come to a love like that? Some of us have known love, but we've not known covenant or *hesed* love. Some of us have given love, but we weren't able to give *hesed* love. God abounds in *hesed* love, and in Jesus Christ he showers *hesed* on all who will come to receive.

Choose one or more of the following to do this week:

Whatever your background or however long you've been hiding from the blessing of God, you can come back. God will receive you with a love that will never let you go. It's a love in which Jesus was ready to go all the way to a cross for you. He invites you now to receive the Spirit that will make you capable—having received *hesed* love—of giving *hesed* love. If you have never received that kind of love from God, ask for it now.

Have you received *hesed* love but never given it? Who may God be calling you to give such love to? If you have a family, have you shown that kind of loyalty to them? If you have friends, have you been that kind of friend? Ask God to make you willing to give to others, even if it means great pain, because it will also mean great blessing.

Close in prayer: Ask each member of the group how they plan to let God fill them with *hesed* love so that they can pass it on to others. Pray for each other in this regard.

—By Colin Smith, with JoHannah Reardon



Participant's Guide

Pledge Love

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Scripture: 1 Samuel 18:1-4

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Dig into Scripture

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Create a target with concentric circles. In the center circle write the name of the person who is making your life difficult. In each of the outer circles, write the names of those close to you who are affected by this difficult person.

2) We need to make our own pledge of covenant loyalty.

Often the difficult person in our lives also causes difficulty for other people we love. In that case, we often have to love and protect the others. Write out a covenant of your commitment to someone who may need protection from this difficult person.

Put It into Action

Choose one or more of the following to do this week:

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- Have you received *hesed* love but never given it? Who may God be calling you to give such love to? If you have a family, have you shown that kind of loyalty to them? If you have friends, have you been that kind of friend? Ask God to make you willing to give to others, even if it means great pain, because it will also mean great blessing.

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