Which Way to Go?

STEP 1  Connecting with God’s Word
To introduce the idea of the popular way, students will play a version of tic-tac-toe.
- paper, pencils

STEP 2  Studying God’s Word
Using the Bible and Bible Adventures, students will study 1 Samuel 8—10, in which the Israelites demand a king.
- Bible Study: Bible Adventures, p. 2-3, Teaching Aid 1 (from Upper Elementary Creative Teaching Aids), Bibles
- Memory Verse Practice: no materials needed

STEP 3  Interacting with God’s Word
Students will practice the lesson from 1 Samuel by exploring what it means to follow God’s way.
- “Which Way” Worksheet: Bible Adventures, p. 1, pencils
- Popular Way Mix-up: classroom chairs
- Samuel’s Diary: paper, pencil

STEP 4  Applying God’s Word
To apply the lesson to their lives, students will choose an action in which to follow God’s way this week.
- Bible Adventures, p. 4, pencils; Pix for Lesson 1

Memory Verse
Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths.
—Psalm 25:4

Bible Basis:
1 Samuel 8—10
Lesson Focus:
The popular way may not be God’s way.

Understanding the Bible
Samuel had faithfully followed God in leading Israel for many years, ever since his childhood. But now Israel wanted a king. The Israelites’ request came around 400 years after they entered the promised land. Their reasons: Samuel was old, his sons were dishonest (1 Sam. 8:3), and Israel wanted to be like other nations, with a king who would lead them in battle against their enemies (8:5, 20).

When Saul approached Samuel, it was because he thought the prophet would be able to tell him where he could find his father’s lost donkeys. Samuel not only knew where the donkeys were, but also knew that Saul was the one God had chosen as king. The next day Samuel took Saul to the edge of town and anointed him king (9:18-20; 10:1). After his anointing, the Spirit of God came upon Saul, and he began to prophesy.

Saul had no ambitions of being king. When Samuel first told him that he was the “desire” of Israel (a reference to Israel’s desire for a king), Saul protested. Wasn’t his tribe the smallest one? And wasn’t his clan the weakest?

Saul’s humility was a good quality for a king to possess. However, when Samuel was ready to present Saul, Israel’s newly anointed king was hiding among the baggage. When some men brought him out of hiding, Saul reluctantly allowed Samuel to announce him as king (10:20-24). When the people saw Saul, they were impressed, for he was a head taller than everyone else.
Teacher Devo

But everyone else is doing it!” How many times have you heard kids say that infamous statement? (One reason kids may have used those words over the years is because they know that it appeals even to adults’ desire to be like everyone else.) And how many times have you thought that even as an adult—perhaps not in the same words, but the same sentiment?

At times we all seem to have that desire to want to be like the people around us. If the people around us are attempting to follow God’s ways, then that desire is not necessarily a bad thing. But what if what everyone else is doing is contrary to God’s ways?

When is it hardest for you to follow God’s way? When do you feel the most pressure to follow the “popular way” instead?

Read Psalm 25:4. When was the last time you asked God to show you His ways? Ask God to help you discern areas of your life in which you have replaced His ways with the ways of the world.

Make a commitment to pray this verse to the Lord each day this week. Ask Him to help you follow His ways no matter what everyone else is doing.

Early Bird Options

Here are some suggested activities you can set up to occupy children who arrive early. Both activities will help prepare students to think about the idea of the popular way and God’s way.

Favorites - Have kids list their favorites and then compare them with those of other students. On a board, have kids list their favorite Bible story, sports team, candy, food, and any other categories you choose. Tally them to see which favorites are most popular.

Follow the Leader - Have kids play a game of Follow the Leader to start them thinking about how we follow what other people do, even without thinking about it. Kids can take turns being the leader.

When Teaching the Bible to Upper Elementary Students . . .

September, perhaps even more than spring, is a time of beginnings. You may have students new to your class or to the community. Your students may have new teachers or new classmates. You may be taking on new responsibilities at work or outside of work. Perhaps you are new at teaching Sunday school. (If so, welcome!) In the midst of all this change, it’s comforting to know that Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Here are some ways to get this fall quarter off to a great start.

• Plan a short get-acquainted game. For example, ask students to think of two words to describe themselves that begin with their initials.
• Involve your upper-elementary kids in deciding rules for the classroom. This will help them take ownership of the rules and encourage them to be mutually accountable to one another.
  • Build your confidence by preparing early. Note extra materials you may need, make notes and highlight parts of the lesson you want to emphasize, and prepare student materials so you won’t feel frazzled or rushed before your class.
  • Make your classroom a fun, inviting place by decorating it.
  • Pray for yourself, your students, your fellow teachers, and your church. Ask God to help you as you teach your upper-elementary kids.
STEP 1 Connecting with God’s Word

Lesson Focus: The popular way may not be God’s way.

Link to Last Week Last week your students learned the importance of cooperating to do God’s work. How did they follow through in cooperating with others?

To introduce the idea of the popular way, students will play a version of tic-tac-toe.

Materials:
☐ Paper
☐ Pencils

In today’s Bible study, from 1 Samuel 8—10, your students will learn that following the popular way may not be God’s way. To help them get started thinking about the “popular way,” introduce this game to them. It is a variation on tic-tac-toe. Say something like: When “everybody” around us seems to have something that we don’t, it can be hard not to want it too. Let’s play a game to compare what everyone thinks is popular.

Give each of the kids a piece of paper and a pencil. Have them draw a tic-tac-toe grid on their papers. (They should have nine squares.) Have them fill in each square with the name of something that kids their age really like. They should have nine different things written down, one for each square. Tell them to keep their answers from each other. To encourage their thinking, write some different categories on the board such as music, TV, clothes, games, toys, and sports.

After everyone has his or her grid filled in completely, go around the room and let each student take a turn naming one item they have written down. As the items are named, kids should cross out those items that appear on their paper. Go around the room several times. The winner is the student who has the most items crossed out on their paper. (For purposes of the game, kids can name either a specific item, such as a brand-name toy, or an item in the same category, such as “video game.” Either way the students should cross out that item if it appears on their lists.)

After the activity is complete, have students find a partner with whom to discuss these questions. If your class is small, you can keep the group together for the discussion.

1. Which of the things named do you have? Which of the things named do your friends have? Which of the things named do you not have but want? (Allow for all answers. Encourage all students to be honest with each other, and caution them not to be judgmental or to tease as their classmates share answers.)

2. Why do you think kids want these things? (Answers will vary. As you get answers such as “Because they’re cool,” encourage kids to expand their thinking by figuring out why the things are cool or fun.)

3. If none of your friends had these things would you still want them? (Some kids will say yes. Others may realize that if they didn’t know about an item, they probably would not want it.)

Bring your students back into a single group for your transition to the Bible study. You could say something like: How many times have we said, “But everybody else has it,” or “But everybody else is going”? If we are honest, many times the reason we want a certain item or to do a particular thing is because we want to be like the people around us or because we don’t want to be different from everyone else. In our Bible study today, the people of Israel wanted something so they could be like the nations around them. Let’s find out what they wanted.
Using the Bible and Bible Adventures, students will study 1 Samuel 8—10, in which the Israelites demand a king.

Materials:
- Bible Adventures, p. 2-3
- Teaching Aid 1
- Bibles

Distribute Bible Adventures for Lesson 1 to your students. Have students open their Bibles to 1 Samuel 8 and turn to “But Everyone Else Has a King!” the Bible study found on pages 2 and 3 of Bible Adventures. Point out the footnotes that help with pronunciation and give additional Bible facts related to the lesson. Show the map “The Land of Kings,” Teaching Aid 1. Add the first arrow at Ramah. Then read aloud the introduction from the Bible study: The people of Israel were ruled by judges for many years. The prophet Samuel led Israel until he was old, and then he appointed his sons to judge Israel. But Samuel’s sons were dishonest judges and poor leaders.

Choose a student to read the Scripture Spotlight, 1 Samuel 8:4-9.

1. Why did the people want a king? (They wanted to have a king to lead them, such as other nations had. They were probably worried because Samuel’s sons were dishonest; perhaps they thought a king would be a better leader.)

2. Why did asking for a king displease God? (Because God had chosen people to be their leaders, through the judges and the prophets. By asking for a king, it showed that they didn’t trust God to choose good leaders for them.) Point out God may have chosen someone other than Samuel’s sons to lead the people—perhaps another great prophet like Samuel. But the people were unwilling to wait on God’s plan; they took matters into their own hands.

3. Samuel explained to the people the rules for the king to follow. That way both the new king and all the people would understand him. He wrote the rules down and kept them at the tabernacle.

Think about Israel’s history. In what other ways had Israel tried to be like its neighbors? Think about some times when you did things to be like everyone else. Was that good or wrong? God’s way? Is it always wrong to try to be like other people? The people of Israel wanted to be like the nations around them. But the popular way was not God’s way. They got their way, but it was not God’s way.
What would you have done in Samuel's place? (Answers will vary.)

Have one student read the brief transitional paragraph. Then ask a volunteer to look up and read 1 Samuel 8:11-18 from the Bible. The same student should read verse 20 after this question has been discussed.

What warning did Samuel give the people about having a king? (Samuel told them that a king would make their sons serve in his army; he would make their children work for him as farmers, weapon makers, perfumers, cooks, bakers; he would take the best parts of their produce and livestock. Samuel warned that they would cry out for relief from the king's demands and God would not answer them.)

Read verse 20 and discuss this question.

Why did the Israelites want to be like the other nations? (They wanted a king to lead them in their battles, like the other nations around them already had.)

Choose a reader for the transitional paragraphs that give information about the people's response to Samuel and about Saul. Put the second arrow for today at Mizpah. Then have a student look up and read 1 Samuel 10:17-24 from the Bible.

Why did God remind the people of the exodus from Egypt? (He wanted to remind them of His care and leadership. He led them safely out of Egypt, but they didn't seem to trust Him to lead them now. Instead, they were looking to a man, not God, to lead them.)

Why do you think Saul hid? (He may have been shy or felt unworthy of all the attention.) Have students look up 1 Samuel 9:21, which takes place immediately after Samuel has called Saul the “desire of Israel.” Saul was surprised to have been chosen as king.

What was the people's reaction to Saul when they saw him? (They were impressed because he was a head taller than everyone else. They said, “There is no one like him among all the people.” They were excited and shouted, “Long live the king!”)

Have someone read the brief transitional statement. Then discuss these questions. The first question draws on Bible knowledge they may already have.

Think about Israel's history. In what other ways had Israel tried to be like its neighbors? (Help your students think of the times when Israel followed the lead of its neighbors by worshiping the idols of the lands around them. This trend started soon after they left Egypt and continued through much of Old Testament history.)

Think about some times when you did things to be like everyone else. Has that led to doing things God's way? (Allow for honest discussion. Most students will not share personal examples. You may want to share a story from your own life about following the crowd and whether that was a good choice or not.)

Is it always wrong to try to be like other people? (Some students may say yes; others will point out times when being like others may be good. “Positive peer pressure” can help keep kids on track. But often peer pressure leads students to do or try things they know are wrong but seem okay because “everyone else” is doing it.)

Why was it wrong for the people to want a king? (It went against the way God had set up for the Israelites. It showed they didn't trust God to choose good leaders.)

Have a student read the concluding paragraph before moving into the memory verse practice.

Show me your ways, O Lord, teach me your paths. Psalm 25:4
STEP 3
Interacting with God’s Word

Students will practice the lesson from 1 Samuel by exploring what it means to follow God’s way.

In the Bible study today, from 1 Samuel 8—10, your class learned that wanting to be like everyone else may go against God’s way. Each of the activities below will reinforce that truth in a slightly different way. Use as many of these choices as possible, and allow students to choose among them.

‘Which Way?’ Worksheet

- **Bible Adventures, p. 1**
- **Pencils**

To help students explore making choices in light of peer pressure, have them complete this worksheet. First have them read the directions and different choices Robby could make. Then in the last arrow, instruct students to write down what might happen next. After they have completed the page, the kids may discuss what choice they would make if they were Robby.

Samuel’s Diary

- **Paper**
- **Pencil**

To help students review the events of today’s lesson, have them write an imaginary entry in Samuel’s diary for the day the people asked for a king. Encourage them to review the facts from the Bible study and include Samuel’s feelings about the people’s request, his sons’ dishonesty, Saul, and God’s warning to the people about the king.

Popular Way Mix-up

- **Classroom chairs**

Encourage the kids to think about situations where preteens often choose the popular way instead of God’s way. Form a circle with the chairs facing in. There should be one less chair than players. Have one child stand in the middle of the circle and name a popular way to do something (e.g. look at my neighbor’s paper since I forgot to study for the test, tease kids who are different, or blame your sister for the mess you made, etc.). Other kids who know someone who has chosen that popular way should get up and move at least two seats over, while the child in the middle tries to find a seat. The child without a seat should say one way to choose God’s way in that situation and then name another popular way. The child in the middle can also say, “God’s way is the best way.” Then, all students should get up and move over at least two seats.

When the time you have allotted is up, ask your students to clean up the materials and gather back together.
STEP 4  Applying God’s Word

Lesson Focus:
The popular way may not be God’s way.

To apply the lesson to their lives, students will choose an action in which to follow God’s way this week.

☐ Bible Adventures, p. 4
☐ Pencils

After you have gathered students from their various activities and given them time to put away supplies as needed, summarize the lesson by saying something like: In our Bible study, we learned that the popular way may not be God’s way. It’s usually easy to know and follow the popular way. That’s because we see it all around us. However, at times it can seem harder to know and follow God’s way.

Gather students around the classroom table if possible. Ask a student to read aloud the directions to Bible Adventures, page 4. Point out to your students that the words pictured in the pillar of fire on the page are different things they can do to follow God’s way. Go around the room, having students take turns finishing the sentences as directed on the page.

Next, have each student move individually to different parts of the room. You want to give students a quiet, private space in which to fill out their pages. Allow your students to work by themselves filling in the last box. They should write one specific thing they want to do in the coming week to follow God’s way.

After giving students a few minutes to complete their pages, gather them in a circle. Say something like: Sometimes it’s tough to follow God’s way, especially when everyone else around us seems not to be. In our memory verse, Psalm 25:4, David asked God to show him His ways. That should be our prayer, too, in the coming week.

Close in prayer with everyone repeating aloud today’s Key Verse as a prayer. (They can read it from Bible Adventures, page 4.) Also pray specifically for each student in your class by name, asking God to help each one know when the popular way goes against God’s way and to always seek to do things God’s way.

Note: The loose cover wrap from Bible Adventures will be sent home with your students in Lesson 3, since it coordinates with the lesson on David and Goliath. Keep them in a safe place until you hand them out.