

STUDY 5

Growing Through Being in the Middle

SELECTIONS FROM I SAMUEL 18-23

Your son has come up with an exciting plan. As many children do, he goes to Mom first, and she says, "Okay, but check with your father." Then he comes to you, bubbling with enthusiasm. But when you hear his scheme, you hesitate. "But Mom says it's okay," he pleads. The trap of being in the middle snaps shut and you are caught.

Parents can't dodge the trap. Neither can a pastor when two parishioners bring a dispute to him. Nor can supervisors on the job. You may even wander into a no-man's land between two feuding friends.

Welcome to one of life's tough challenges, one that God knows all about and helps us to endure, just as he helped Jonathan, the son of King Saul. God rejected Saul, the first king of Israel, after Saul rejected the word of the Lord. When it became evident that God was with David, Saul became jealous and fearful of David. But Jonathan loved and respected David.

1. What do you feel when you are caught in the middle of a problem between two people you love? How does a situation like this pull you in two different directions?

READ I SAMUEL 18:1-16,28-30.

2. What do you think are the reasons for Saul's jealousy of David?

READ I SAMUEL 19:1-10.

3. When Saul ordered his son Jonathan to kill David, what risks did Jonathan take for his friend (verses 1-7)?

4. What effects might Saul's unpredictable behavior toward David have had on Jonathan (verses 6-10)?

READ I SAMUEL 20:1-42.

5. After fleeing for his life, David secretly returned to appeal to Jonathan for help. What different perspectives do David and Jonathan have concerning Saul (verses 1-9)?
6. Describe the plan Jonathan devised to inform David of Saul's intentions (verse 10-23).

- ✎ 7. What will it cost Jonathan if God does what Jonathan anticipated in verses 13-17?
8. David and Jonathan both recognized that God was involved in their situation (verses 8,22-23). How would recognizing God's interest in your situation help you cope with being in the middle?
- ✎ 9. Imagine yourself as Jonathan. What emotional ups and downs would you have faced during the New Moon festival (verses 24-34)?

Describe similar roller-coaster emotions you've faced when you've been caught in the middle.

- ✎ 10. Saul and Jonathan both saw the other's behavior as shameful (verses 30-31,34). Why is shame such a devastating accusation when you are trying to do what is right?
11. When Jonathan realized he must send David away, what different sorrows caused each man to weep (verse 41)?

READ I SAMUEL 23:15-18.

12. When David was hiding, Jonathan came, probably at their last meeting, to help David find strength in God (verse 16). How would his actions and his words have accomplished that purpose?

When you have been the person who is estranged, as David was, how has a friend in the middle helped you find strength in God?

13. What do you learn from Jonathan's courage, risk taking, and confidence in God that can help you when you are caught in the middle of uncomfortable circumstances?

Pray the Bible into Life

- Thank the Lord Jesus, your advocate before God, for understanding what it means to be in the middle.
- Thank God that just as he completely understood the motives of the three parties involved in the biblical account, he completely understands each of our motives, even when we misjudge one another.
- Confess your fears and pain about being in the middle and pray for wisdom for one another in these situations.