

Influence of Friends



SMALL GROUP LESSON

Lesson Objective:

Influence of friends is never neutral; it either pushes me toward good choices or bad choices. As a friend, God wants me to be an influencer for good (for His purposes).

Set Up Info:

Supplies Needed:

1. Computer or internet connection to watch the YouTube video
2. Pair of dice
3. Copies of the Student Response sheet (printed below)
4. Bibles so you can look up the Scripture story (or copy the ones below)
5. A passion to see students transformed in their positive influence on friends!

Instructive Prep:

It's amazing how military kids try to change their persona when they move to a new place. Sometime it works for the better, but often you find them falling under the influence of some bad 'friends.' There's something about bad influencers that seem to be more initially open and attract new, vulnerable kids. So, it stands to reason that we should point kids toward being influencers for good and maybe even as a group.

This session is designed to look at some examples of being a positive influence on others. Using the relationship between Legolas and Gimli, as well as the biblical story of friends who carry their buddy to Jesus for healing, we can help military kids see the power of influence and how *active* influence is even more powerful. The main point is to realize and act upon the truth that ***influence of friends is never neutral, it either pushes me toward good***

choices or bad choices. As a friend, God wants me to be an influencer for good (for God's purposes).

The progression of these studies is four-fold: *learn, feel, do and what next*. The aim is for students to learn something new, connect at an emotional level to some degree, and participate in doing something during the study (like making a hand gesture as a weapon). Finally, the *what next* focuses on a change in attitude and/or behavior, which you will find in the challenge of the Life Application section. Remember, the movement is toward spiritual and emotional transformation in kids' lives, so the application section based on God's truth is really the crux of the time together! Have fun and lead well.

INTRO:

This is a story about a couple of characters from Lord of the Rings. The elf and the dwarf become friends over time, overcoming their natural suspicions and general dislike of the 'other type.' Their competitive nature pushes them to betterment and eventually results in 'iron sharpening iron' for the good.

INTRO STORY:

LOTR Legolas and Gimli (and Aragon)

For centuries in Middle-earth the elves and the dwarves have been at odds. While the two species were once very intertwined, time has turned them against each other as they each pursue different goals. The thin alliance that exists between them during the time of Frodo and the One Ring, has been maintained only out of the dire need to have allies against the growing power of the Dark Lord Sauron. The elf Legolas and the dwarf Gimli are not exceptions to their race. The animosity that lies between the two of them is evident from the formation of the Fellowship of the Ring.

Legolas is an archer and approaches his battles with precision and an eye for detail. Gimli on the other hand encounters his enemies with brute force and a wide-spread swing of his battle axes. Everything about these two are at odds -- one is tall and slender with light features while the other is short, large and burly in appearance. Gimli never misses a chance to make an observation or comment while his counterpart stays mostly silent and speaks with precision.

There is nothing at all that they have in common except the quest with Frodo and the Ring, and it is because of their devotion to Frodo that Legolas and Gimli

eventually become friends. Both of them, despite their different approaches, are fearless warriors who are ready to sacrifice themselves for the cause. The loyalty and ability in battle that they both obviously possess are the first things that begin to dissipate the hate that exists between them. At first a small bit of respect begins to grow in each of them for the other. Gimli finds himself grudgingly praising Legolas' prowess and Legolas reciprocates the appreciation.

Each is impressed by the determination of the other, and out of that seed of respect comes an appreciation for the other's battle tactic. Out of that respect and appreciation grows a willingness to learn about each other on a more personal level. They begin to banter and cajole one another -- even beginning a game of sorts where they tally their kills in a fight and compare the scores. The animosity that existed between them at the start of their journey softens to toleration and then grows into admiration and finally develops into a friendship that changes both dwarf and elf in ways they never anticipated. Developing the willingness to see past their personal judgmental opinions and explore the possibility that there is something to be gained from working together facilitated a situation where Legolas and Gimli grew to understand one another and found their lives richer because of one another's presence and influence.

Watch either or both of these video montages about their competitive friendship:
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=uUaFNlBkDxY&feature=related>
<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=qNz0OcLQbk8>

Intro Questions:

1. Who is your favorite character in The LOTR series and why?
2. What kind of friend do you think they would make?

PERSONAL REFLECTION QUESTIONS:

Use a pair of dice to determine the order that kids will answer the next questions. Have everybody roll the dice and then answer in the order with the highest roll going first and the lowest roll going last. After the first question is answered, roll again and do the same thing for subsequent questions.

1. What ways did Legolas and Gimli make each other better?
2. How did these two use competition as an influence for good? Were they successful?

3. Describe a time when you were an influencer for good with a friend or group of friends.
4. Using the four weapons of a sword, an axe, a bow & arrows, and a fist, have each person create the hand gesture representing the weapon and creatively describe how they symbolize a way to influence friends for good. *(For example: A hand gesture of an axe might look like a hatchet going up and down, and the person might say that you can help someone cut out a bad habit. Or using the bow and arrow gesture, a person might say that you can ask pointed questions of a friend and try to get to the heart of the matter and help them change, etc. – the key is being creative! If it goes well, then maybe a second round is in order!)*
5. Write your own questions: _____

CENTRAL BIBLE PASSAGES

Below is a primary Bible story on Jesus' response to the tremendous influence for good (their faith) that some guys had toward their friend. It's incredible to understand that they did whatever they could to influence their friend's condition! Following that story are several passages that speak to the significance of being a good influence or a bad influence in friendships. These make for some good analysis of God's truth compared and contrasted with our own experiences in friendship.

Luke 5:17-26

Jesus Heals a Paralyzed Man

¹⁷One day when Jesus was teaching, some Pharisees and teachers of the Law were sitting there who had come from every town in Galilee and Judea and from Jerusalem. The power of the Lord was present for Jesus to heal the sick.

¹⁸Some men came carrying a paralyzed man on a bed, and they tried to carry him into the house and put him in front of Jesus. ¹⁹Because of the crowd, however, they could find no way to take him in. So they carried him up on the roof, made an opening in the tiles, and let him down on his bed into the middle of the group in front of Jesus.

²⁰When Jesus saw how much faith they had, he said to the man, "Your sins are forgiven, my friend."

²¹The teachers of the Law and the Pharisees began to say to themselves, “Who is this man who speaks such blasphemy! God is the only one who can forgive sins!”

²²Jesus knew their thoughts and said to them, “Why do you think such things? ²³Is it easier to say, “Your sins are forgiven you,” or to say, “Get up and walk”? ²⁴I will prove to you, then, that the Son of Man has authority on earth to forgive sins.” So he said to the paralyzed man, “I tell you, get up, pick up your bed, and go home!” ²⁵At once the man got up in front of them all, took the bed he had been lying on, and went home, praising God.

²⁶They were all completely amazed! Full of fear, they praised God, saying, “What marvelous things we have seen today!”

Comment: *Whatever it took to get their friend to the feet of Jesus was what these friends were willing to do! Now, that’s being an influencer for good! Sometimes the best plans can be hatched as a group as you discover the power of positive influence as a team of committed Christ-followers. Point out how this guy’s life must have changed in both the immediate and the long term view.*

1 Thessalonians 5:14-15

¹⁴We urge you, our *friends*, to warn the idle, encourage the timid, help the weak, be patient with everyone. ¹⁵See that no one pays back wrong for wrong, but at all times make it your aim to do good to one another and to all people.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12

⁹Two are better off than one, because together they can work more effectively. ¹⁰If one of them falls down, the other can help him up. But if someone is alone and falls, it’s just too bad, because there is no one to help him. ¹¹If it is cold, two can sleep together and stay warm, but how can you keep warm by yourself ¹²Two people can resist an attack that would defeat one person alone. A rope made of three cords is hard to break.

Mark 9:50

⁵⁰Salt is good; but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? “Have the salt of *friendship* among yourselves, and live in peace with one another.”

Comment: *As you can see, influence can work toward a positive or negative impact on a friend. God’s word gives suggestions for how to influence friends for good – being salt, encouraging the timid, etc. – and suggests we band together with other like-minded friends who will keep us on track in pleasing him.*

LIFE APPLICATION:

1. Discuss together in the group how banding together is better than trying to influence someone singlehandedly. Decide on a friend you want to influence for good and a plan of action for doing it. Now, go do it this week!
2. How can you “carry” a friend to the feet of Jesus so they might be “healed” in some way that changes their life? When will you do that? Can you name other friends who might help? Invite them to join you and hold you accountable.
3. Write your own challenge: _____

STUDENT RESPONSES:

1. FRIEND TO INFLUENCE FOR GOOD:

2. FRIEND TO CARRY TO JESUS' FEET: