

Lesson 6 / July 6, 2008

Unusual Friendship

for use as

STEP 1

Lesson 6 Focus:

God wants us to know
Him through Jesus.

Lesson 6 Bible Basis:

Exodus 33:11-23; John
1:14, 18

Students will discuss unusual friendships (bizarre animal friendships included), look at a real-life friendship, and apply lessons learned to an even more important area—spiritual friendship.

Materials:

laptop computer with Internet access or printouts of unusual animal friendships (optional) (Note: carefully screen various websites prior to class to ensure appropriate material)

Find computer pictures of unusual animal friendships by searching the Internet using key words “unusual animal friendships” or log on to <http://letsbefriends.blogspot.com/> to access the images provided there. You also could print these pictures prior to class time to have available for viewing by your group. (A picture of Owen the hippopotamus and Mzee the tortoise are likely to pop up in your search or you could access their website [information provided below]. Use the following story to explain about this unusual friendship with your students.)

If computer access is not available to you, you can still share with your students about the unusual friendship of Owen and Mzee.

Owen was a baby hippopotamus and Mzee a 130-year-old giant tortoise. When Owen was about one year old, heavy flooding in Africa washed Owen and his family down the river to the small coastal town of Malindi. On the morning of December 26, 2004, a massive tsunami stranded Owen alone on a reef. Many people tried to rescue the hippo, and he finally was rescued in a huge fishing net. Owen was transported to Haller Park, an animal sanctuary, and this is where he met Mzee the tortoise who shared the same enclosure. Owen took to Mzee right away, but it took Mzee a few days to feel the same way. Soon, however, the tortoise and the hippo were inseparable and with Mzee at his side, Owen began to eat and recover. The animals now swim together, eat together, drink together, and sleep together. They even rub noses. Though the animals could easily harm each other, they remain gentle. A picture of the two of them photographed together appeared in newspapers in January 2005 and elevated them to fame. To learn more about this pair you can visit their website, <http://www.owenandmzee.com/omweb/>.

Regroup and have all students share about what they liked most about the unusual animal friendships. Then ask:

Lesson 6
Memory Verse

The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth.

—John 1:14

- ▶ **What can we learn from unusual animal friendships?** (*Everyone needs companionship and can be comforted and entertained by interactions with others around them. Unlikely and even unexplainable friendships can occur when they are allowed.*)
 - ▶ **If animals can turn off their instincts to hunt or hurt, and can form unusual friendships with other animals, shouldn't people be even more able to do this? Explain.** (*We don't have instincts to hurt or hunt, yet we can be manipulated by others' social status or other factors to reject someone else's friendship for one reason or another.*)
 - ▶ **Do you have any "unusual" friendships—one that might look odd on the surface, to other people? Describe them.**
 - ▶ **Why do you think people are often afraid to venture out into unlikely friendships?** (*Fear of what people might think, misconceptions, inability to meet or interface with people who are different from us, etc.*)
- Q. What might we gain if we were willing to venture into unlikely friendships?** (*New experiences, friendships with people from different countries, different interests or hobbies, unusual insights and advice if the person is much older than we are or had different experiences from ours, etc.*)

Today's lesson is about how the God of the universe chose to have an unusual friendship with us through His Son, Jesus Christ. If Jesus had not come and made Himself one of us, God would not have been able to have the relationship He has with us today. Let's look at how all of this played out in the Bible so that we can now call God our Friend.

(Continue on to Steps 2 and 3 in your *Middle School Teacher's Guide*; your Step 4 appears below.)

Sources:

<http://letsbefriends.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.owenandmzee.com/omweb/>

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STEP 4 

Lesson 6 Focus:

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Lesson 6 Bible Basis:

Exodus 33:11-23; John
1:14, 18

In Step 1, we looked at how unusual friendships are sometimes formed between animals that are normally enemies. A recent news story describes an unusual friendship that took place between two people who also were more likely to be enemies than friends. They took the friendly route, however, and their unusual friendship instead serves as an example to us all.

Gary Wright and David Kaczynski would not have become friends in ordinary circumstances. In 1987, David Kaczynski's brother Ted (also known as the Unabomber), tried to kill Gary Wright with a bomb outside of his Utah office. As a result of the blast, Gary flew through the air and more than 200 shards of shrapnel tore through his body. Nerves in his arm were severely injured as a result. Instead of forming a bond of hate with the Kaczynski family, in time, Gary instead became friends with Ted's brother David.

It took nine years after the attack for David to muster up the courage to call Gary. David had been the one to turn in his own brother Ted to the authorities. Instead of lashing out in anger when David finally talked on the phone with him, Gary said, "You really don't have to carry that [burden]." In 1999 the two men began traveling the country together telling their story. The two have also traveled together for enjoyment, canoeing the Adirondacks together and touring the Baseball Hall of Fame in Cooperstown, New York. Says Kaczynski, "I know that this friendship is for life. We'll be there for each other as long as we're alive."

Ask your students:

- ▶ **Why do you think David chose to get in contact with his brother's victim, Gary?** *(To reconcile and to offer his apologies for his brother's actions.)*
- ▶ **Why do you think Gary chose to forgive this man and become his friend?** *(He may have realized that it did no good to hold onto anger.)*
- ▶ **What kind of an impact can their unusual friendship have on the world?** *(Their example of forgiveness and reconciliation can help others forge friendships with those who have hurt them in much lesser ways.)*

Our friendship with God is unusual yet it also stems out of reconciliation. Jesus Christ's death on the cross and His taking our sins upon Himself allowed

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Memory Verse

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a Holy God to view us in light of what Jesus did in our place. Our sins can be forgiven and God can accept us through His Son, Jesus.

In Hebrews 1:3, we learn that Jesus is the exact representation of God's nature. John 14:6 says that Jesus is the only way to God. No one comes to the Father except through Him. Although the likelihood of us being friends with God might seem impossible, it actually can become a reality today if you believe what the Scriptures say. You can know the Father if you take time to know Jesus. A true friendship can be formed with the very God who created the universe, even if it does seem somewhat unusual to us!

This week, make a concerted effort to meditate about Jesus' life, death, and resurrection. Study the passages found in today's lesson, Exodus 33:11-23 and John 1:14, 18. Memorize this week's Bible verse, "The Word became flesh and made his dwelling among us. We have seen his glory, the glory of the One and Only, who came from the Father, full of grace and truth." —John 1:14

As for friendships around you, make an effort to form an unusual one this week. Who knows whom you could befriend or how you could help forward the kingdom of God as a result of your friendship. If you're the athletic type, find a computer ace and ask him or her to help you learn something new on the Web or to teach you how to play a fun Internet game. If you are shy, talk to someone outgoing and see if you have something in common. You might be surprised. Most importantly, if you know of someone who doesn't know Jesus, invite him or her to a fun activity at your church. Your unusual friendship might be just what someone needs to find out about an even more unusual friendship—the one between God and us.

Close in prayer.

Sources:

<http://www.cnn.com/2008/CRIME/06/06/unabomber.brother/>

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