

# Character and Integrity

*Volume 21*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Character and Integrity

*Volume 21*

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## **About This Series**

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Welcome to Deep Research Sunday School Lessons, a meticulously researched collection of Sunday School lessons designed for thoughtful, transformative learning.

Our mission is simple: to return Sunday School to school, a place where deep conversations happen, where difficult questions are welcomed, and where faith and intellect work together.

Each volume is organized around a central biblical theme such as forgiveness, community, justice, anger, or character. Within that theme, you will find multiple lessons, each based on a specific Scripture passage and developed for three age groups.

## **A Note on Scripture Sources**

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These lessons draw primarily from the 66 books of the Protestant canon, using the New International Version (NIV) as our primary translation. Occasionally, lessons may reference the Deuterocanonical books (also called the Apocrypha), which are accepted as canonical by Catholic and Orthodox traditions and valued as historical literature by many Protestant scholars.

We include these texts sparingly but intentionally, because we believe they offer valuable historical and theological context for understanding the world of the Bible and the development of Jewish and Christian thought.

Whether or not the Deuterocanonical books are part of your personal faith tradition, we invite you to engage with them as literature that shaped the faith of millions and provides insight into the intertestamental period.

Above all, we believe that Christians should be inclusive of other Christians. The body of Christ is large, and our differences should draw us closer together in mutual respect, not push us apart in division.

## **How to Use This Book**

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### **For Teachers and Group Leaders**

Each lesson in this volume is designed to stand alone, allowing you to teach them in any order that fits your curriculum or group needs.

The discussion questions provided at the end of each lesson are starting points, not scripts. Allow your group to explore tangents and raise their own questions as the Spirit leads.

### **For Individual Study**

If you are using this book for personal devotion or self-directed study, we encourage you to take your time with each lesson, journaling your thoughts and prayers as you go.

### **For Families**

These lessons can be adapted for family devotion time. Parents may wish to simplify certain concepts for younger children while using the discussion questions to engage older children and teens.

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*We pray that this volume blesses your study, enriches your teaching,  
and draws you ever closer to the heart of God.*

*The 1611 Press Team*

# God's Nine Commands

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*Care for Every Kind of Vulnerable Person, How Do We Help the Blind See God's Glory?*

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**2 Esdras 2:15-25**

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## Instructor Preparation

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Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

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## The Passage

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**2 Esdras 2:15-25 (GNT)**

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*15 My people, listen to me. Get ready for battle, and be prepared to endure troubles and hardships as if you were exiles. 16 Sell what you have and give the money to the poor. Do not hold on to this world's possessions as if they belonged to you. 17 Eat, drink, and share what you have with others. 18 Use the wealth that God gives you to do good for others who are in need. 19 Do not be lazy or careless in following the commands of the Most High God.*

*20 Help the widow, defend the fatherless, give to the needy, protect the orphan, clothe the naked. 21 Care for the weak and the helpless, and do not ridicule the disabled; protect the maimed, and let the blind have a vision of my splendor.*

*22 Keep safe both young and old within your walls. 23 When you find the dead unburied, bury them and mark their graves, and I will give you the place of honor when I raise the dead. 24 Be calm and patient, for your reward will come. 25 My servants will spring up from the depths of the earth, and from their graves those I have acknowledged as mine will arise. Do not worry, for eternal joy will replace your sorrow.*

## Context

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This passage comes from 2 Esdras (also called 4 Ezra), a Jewish apocalyptic text written after the destruction of Jerusalem in 70 AD. The people are experiencing devastating loss and wondering how to live faithfully in a broken world. This is God's voice speaking through the prophet Ezra, giving practical commands for caring for society's most vulnerable people during times of crisis and upheaval.

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The immediate context is a divine speech that begins with a call to prepare for difficulty and sacrifice, then shifts to specific commands about caring for nine categories of vulnerable people. This isn't abstract theology, it's concrete instruction for people facing real hardship about how to maintain their humanity and faith by serving others who have even less.

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## The Big Idea

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God requires comprehensive care for all vulnerable people, with specific attention to their distinct needs, from basic physical provision to spiritual enablement.

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The nine commands reveal that vulnerability takes many forms, requiring different responses from God's people. The progression from basic care (help, defend, give, protect, clothe) to relational care (care for weak/helpless) to dignity protection (don't ridicule disabled) to spiritual care (help blind see God's splendor) shows that true compassion must address the whole person, not just immediate physical needs.

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## Theological Core

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- **Comprehensive vulnerability care.** God identifies nine distinct categories of need, each requiring specific responses rather than generic charity.
  - **Dignity protection for the disabled.** The command against ridicule shows that how we treat disabled people reveals our understanding of human worth.
  - **Spiritual vision as essential need.** Helping the blind "have a vision of my splendor" elevates spiritual sight to the same level of urgency as physical care.
  - **Service as identity in crisis.** During times of social upheaval and personal loss, caring for the vulnerable becomes how God's people maintain their calling and character.
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# Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- Vulnerable people need different kinds of care, financial, physical, emotional, legal protection, and spiritual support
  - Ridicule of disabled people is specifically prohibited because it attacks their dignity and worth
  - Helping blind people "see God's splendor" requires discernment about both literal and metaphorical blindness
  - True compassion involves long-term commitment and systemic change, not just individual charity
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### Grades 4, 6

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- Different people need different kinds of help, some need food, some need protection, some need friends
  - It's wrong to make fun of people who have disabilities or look different from us
  - When we help people, we might also help them understand how much God loves them
  - Sometimes our feelings say "avoid that person," but we choose to be kind anyway
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### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to help people who need help
  - God loves everyone, and we should be kind to everyone
  - We can share our toys, food, and hugs with people who are sad or lonely
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Treating all vulnerability the same.** The nine commands show distinct needs requiring different responses, don't collapse "help the widow" and "protect the orphan" into generic charity that misses what each group specifically requires.
  - **Spiritualizing away physical needs.** While the passage includes spiritual care, it begins with concrete physical provision, don't use "helping blind see God's splendor" to avoid addressing real material poverty and need.
  - **Avoiding the disability discussion.** The specific prohibition against ridiculing disabled people requires honest conversation about how we treat people with disabilities, not vague talk about "being nice to everyone."
  - **Making it about individual charity only.** These commands come in the context of social upheaval and systemic breakdown, include discussion of advocacy, policy, and community response alongside personal generosity.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"How do we help blind people see God's splendor, isn't that impossible?"**

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This is both literal and metaphorical. Literally, we can help visually impaired people experience God through other senses, touch, sound, community, worship that doesn't depend on sight. Metaphorically, we help spiritually blind people encounter God's beauty through our love, service, and witness. The command suggests both are equally important and that physical and spiritual sight are connected in ways we don't always understand.

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### **"Why does the passage single out disabled people specifically?"**

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Because disabled people face both material vulnerability and social ridicule that attacks their dignity. God's command shows that protection from mockery is as important as physical care. It also reveals that how we treat disabled people is a test of our understanding that all humans bear God's image regardless of physical or mental capacity. The specific mention suggests this was a particular problem then, as it often is now.

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## **"Isn't this just Old Testament law that doesn't apply to Christians?"**

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This passage comes from the post-temple period and reflects the same heart as Jesus's teachings about loving the least of these. The specific categories help us see vulnerabilities we might miss and evaluate whether our care is truly comprehensive. Jesus expanded rather than eliminated these principles, the detailed list helps us examine where our love might have gaps or blind spots.

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### **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God calls us to specific, comprehensive care that meets people's distinct needs, from basic survival to dignity protection to spiritual sight, refusing to let any form of vulnerability go unaddressed.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the complexity of comprehensive care for vulnerable people, helping them discover both the specific nature of different needs and the challenging question of how to help people experience God's beauty and glory.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we help blind people "have a vision of God's splendor" when that seems impossible? And what does it mean that God puts spiritual sight on the same level as physical care?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their instinct that some vulnerabilities are harder to address than others
  - Honor the complexity that spiritual care requires wisdom and discernment, not just good intentions
  - Let students wrestle with practical questions rather than giving them easy answers about complicated social issues
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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You're walking downtown when you see someone holding a cardboard sign asking for help. Your brain immediately starts calculating, do you have cash? Is this person really in need? Will giving money actually help? Are there other ways to help that would be better? You want to do the right thing, but you're not sure what that is.

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Now imagine you see someone your age sitting alone at lunch, looking sad. Or someone being made fun of because they learn differently. Or your neighbor whose mom just died. Suddenly you realize that "people who need help" includes lots of different situations that might require completely different responses. The overwhelm sets in: how do you know what kind of help each person actually needs?

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Today we're looking at a passage where God gives incredibly specific instructions about caring for vulnerable people. Except God doesn't just say "be nice to people who are struggling." Instead, God lists nine different categories of vulnerable people and tells us exactly what each group needs. And the final command is the most puzzling of all.

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As you read, notice how specific each command is. Notice that God seems to think there's a difference between helping, defending, giving, protecting, caring, and not ridiculing. And pay special attention to the final command about helping blind people see God's splendor, what do you think that could possibly mean?

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Open your Bibles to 2 Esdras chapter 2 and find verse 20. We're going to read silently first, then talk about what you notice.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help students find 2 Esdras (it might be in a separate section of apocryphal books). If they finish early, encourage them to reread the nine commands slowly and think about what makes each one different. Let them feel the weight of comprehensive care.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What are the nine different commands, and what makes each one specific?
  - Why might God list disabled people separately and include the command not to ridicule them?
  - What could it mean to help blind people "have a vision of my splendor"?
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- Which of these commands feels most challenging or confusing to you?
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## 2 Esdras 2:20-21 (GNT)

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*20 Help the widow, defend the fatherless, give to the needy, protect the orphan, clothe the naked.  
21 Care for the weak and the helpless, and do not ridicule the disabled; protect the maimed, and let the blind have a vision of my splendor.*

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## 3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

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### Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers. Let students pass if they're uncomfortable. Choose confident readers who can handle the weight of these commands with appropriate seriousness.

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**Reader 1:** Verses 19-20 (Context and first five commands) **Reader 2:** Verse 21 (Final four commands including the puzzling one) **Reader 3:** Verses 22-24 (The broader context of faithful living)

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Listen for the progression in these commands. This isn't random, there's a movement from basic provision to deeper care to something that seems almost impossible.

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### Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. If groups are stuck, prompt with "What genuinely confused you?" or "What made you uncomfortable?" Their real questions will drive the best discussion.

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Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what we just read. Not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about or confused by. For example, you might wonder why God lists so many specific groups, or what exactly it means to "defend the fatherless," or how helping blind people see God's glory could possibly work. Take three minutes, go.

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### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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**Remember:** Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Look for moments to highlight the pattern of comprehensive, specific care.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Group similar questions together. Start with questions that most students can relate to or have experience with.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between helping a widow and defending the fatherless, why would God use different verbs?"
- "Why do you think the disabled get a specific command about not ridiculing them that other groups don't get?"
- "Is there a hierarchy here, or are all nine commands equally important?"
- "What kinds of blindness might prevent someone from seeing God's splendor?"
- "How would you help someone see God's beauty if they literally couldn't see?"
- "Which of these commands feels most relevant to your school or community?"
- "What would it look like if someone tried to follow all nine commands today?"
- "Why might God give such specific instructions instead of just saying 'help people who need help'?"

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? God isn't giving one generic command to help people. Instead, God identifies nine distinct forms of vulnerability that require nine different responses. A widow might need financial help and advocacy. An orphan might need protection from people who would take advantage of them. A disabled person needs both care and protection from ridicule. And a blind person needs both physical care and somehow to experience God's beauty. It's like God is saying that true compassion has to be smart about what each person actually needs.

### 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives and our community. Where do you see these nine categories of vulnerability today? And more importantly, where do you see people trying to help but maybe not understanding what specific kind of help each situation needs?

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### **Real Issues This Connects To**

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- Students with learning disabilities who need both academic support and protection from mockery
  - Kids whose parents are divorced or absent who might need different support than kids facing other challenges
  - Homeless people who might need everything from immediate shelter to job training to mental health support
  - Social media interactions with people who have disabilities or differences
  - Refugee and immigrant families who need both material help and advocacy for their rights
  - People struggling with depression or suicidal thoughts who can't "see" hope or beauty anymore
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations require individual response, others need systemic change. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about complex social issues.

### **Discussion Prompts**

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- "When have you seen someone get the wrong kind of help for their situation?"
  - "Which of the nine commands do you think our school/community does well, and which do we struggle with?"
  - "How do you decide when to help directly versus when to advocate for someone else to help?"
  - "What's the difference between charity that makes you feel good and care that actually addresses what someone needs?"
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## **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

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Here's what I want you to take with you: God's compassion is incredibly specific and smart. True care means paying attention to what each person actually needs rather than just doing what feels good to us. And sometimes that care includes things we never thought of, like helping people who can't see God's beauty to somehow experience it anyway.

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This week, pay attention to the different kinds of vulnerability you encounter. Notice whether you tend to respond the same way to different needs, or whether you're able to discern what specific kind of help each situation calls for. And especially notice people who might be spiritually blind, unable to see God's love or beauty, and consider how you might help them experience it.

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You did really thoughtful work wrestling with these hard questions today. The fact that you're thinking seriously about what comprehensive care looks like means you're already becoming the kind of people God can use to help others experience both physical provision and spiritual sight.

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## Grades 4, 6

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Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that different people need different kinds of help, and that we never make fun of people who have disabilities or are different from us.

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### If Kids Ask "What if someone is faking being disabled?"

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Say: "Our job is to be kind and respectful to everyone. God will worry about people's hearts, we focus on treating everyone with dignity."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever tried to help someone but realized you didn't know exactly what kind of help they needed. Maybe you offered to share your snack with someone who was actually feeling sad about their parents fighting. Or you tried to cheer up someone by being silly when they really just needed you to listen.

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Now here's a harder question: Have you ever seen someone who looked different from you, maybe they used a wheelchair, or talked differently, or learned differently, and you weren't sure how to act around them? Part of you wanted to be helpful, but another part of you felt awkward or didn't know what to say. And maybe you've seen other kids make jokes about people who are different, even though it didn't feel right.

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Those awkward feelings make total sense. It's normal to feel uncertain when you meet someone whose life looks different from yours. And it's hard to know how to help when you're not sure what someone needs. The problem isn't that you feel confused, the problem is when we let that confusion stop us from caring.

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This reminds me of stories where characters have to learn that different people need different things. Like in Finding Nemo, Dory needs a different kind of help because of her memory problems. Or in Wonder, Auggie needs people to see past his face to his heart. Or in Coco, Mama Coco needs Miguel to help her remember through music when words don't work anymore.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to help when you don't immediately understand what someone needs. Do you ask? Do you guess? Do you wait for them to tell you? And what do you do when other people are being mean to someone who's different?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when God gave very specific instructions about helping different kinds of people who needed different kinds of help. And one of God's commands was so unique and surprising that it might change how you think about helping people. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share personal stories about feeling confused around disabled people or witnessing bullying. Acknowledge these experiences briefly with "That sounds confusing/hard" and keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago, God's people were going through one of the hardest times they had ever experienced. Their beautiful city Jerusalem had been destroyed by enemy armies. Their temple where they worshiped God was gone. Many families had lost their homes, their jobs, and even family members.

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People were scattered everywhere, trying to figure out how to survive. Some were living in foreign countries where they didn't know the language or customs. Others were trying to rebuild in the ruins of their destroyed city. Everyone was struggling, everyone was hurting, and everyone felt lost and scared.

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In the middle of all this chaos and fear, when everyone was focused on their own survival, God spoke through a prophet named Ezra. And God didn't give one general command like "be nice to people." Instead, God gave very specific instructions, nine different commands about nine different kinds of people who needed nine different kinds of help.

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Imagine you're sitting in a crowd of worried, tired people when you hear God's voice saying these words. You lean forward because you want to know what God thinks is most important when everything feels broken.

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First, God said: "Help the widows." Widows were women whose husbands had died, which meant they often had no way to earn money or protect themselves. They needed people to make sure they had food and shelter and weren't cheated by dishonest people.

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Then God said: "Defend the fatherless." These were kids whose dads had died or abandoned them. "Defend" means to stand up for them when people tried to take advantage of them or hurt them. These kids needed someone to be their protector and advocate.

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Third: "Give to the needy." Some people just didn't have enough food, clothes, or money to survive. They needed direct gifts, actual things that would help them live.

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Fourth: "Protect the orphans." Orphans were children who had lost both parents. They needed safety and care and someone to make sure they grew up healthy and loved.

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Fifth: "Clothe the naked." Some people didn't have adequate clothing to stay warm or look presentable. They needed actual coats and shirts and shoes.

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## **2 Esdras 2:20a (GNT)**

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*20 Help the widow, defend the fatherless, give to the needy, protect the orphan, clothe the naked.*

Can you see the pattern? God was saying that different people have different needs. A widow might need help managing money and legal protection. An orphan might need a safe place to live and someone to love them. A person without clothes needs actual clothing. You can't just do the same thing

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for everyone, you have to pay attention to what each person actually needs.

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But God wasn't finished. There were four more commands, and these were even more specific.

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Sixth: "Care for the weak and the helpless." These were people who couldn't take care of themselves, maybe because they were very old, or very sick, or had disabilities that made daily life hard. They needed gentle, patient care.

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Seventh: "Do not ridicule the disabled." This command is different from all the others. Instead of telling people what to do, God specifically told them what not to do. Don't make fun of people with disabilities. Don't laugh at them or mock them or treat them as if they're worth less than other people.

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God felt so strongly about this that it got its own special command. Why? Because people with disabilities face two problems: they need help with daily life, and they also face people being mean to them about their differences. God wanted to make sure both problems were addressed.

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Eighth: "Protect the maimed." Maimed people are those who have been injured or hurt in ways that left them with permanent damage to their bodies. They need protection from people who might hurt them more or take advantage of them.

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And then came the ninth and most surprising command of all.

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## **2 Esdras 2:21b (GNT)**

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*21 ...and let the blind have a vision of my splendor.*

Wait. Let the blind have a vision of God's splendor? How is that possible? If someone can't see, how can they see God's beauty and glory?

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This command is amazing because it shows that God cares about more than just people's basic needs like food and shelter. God also wants people to experience beauty, joy, and the wonder of knowing how magnificent and loving God is.

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So how do you help a blind person "see" God's splendor? Maybe by describing beautiful things in a way they can imagine. Maybe by helping them feel God's love through music or touch or delicious tastes. Maybe by being so kind and loving that they experience God's beauty through your friendship.

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But here's what's really interesting: there are people who can see with their eyes but are "blind" to God's love. Maybe they've been hurt so badly that they can't see anything beautiful anymore. Maybe they've been told they're worthless so many times that they can't see how much God loves them. Maybe they're so angry or sad that they've forgotten what joy feels like.

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God's command means we should help all these people, both those who can't see with their eyes and those who can't see God's love with their hearts, to somehow experience how beautiful and wonderful God is.

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When the people heard all nine commands, they realized something important: God wasn't just asking them to drop coins in a donation box. God was asking them to pay attention to different people's different needs and to make sure everyone, everyone, got to experience both physical care and spiritual beauty.

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The people who followed these commands discovered that when you help someone experience God's love and beauty, something amazing happens. You start seeing God's beauty more clearly too. Taking care of people who need different kinds of help teaches you about different parts of God's heart.

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What we learn from this is that God cares about every single person and wants us to be smart and specific about how we help. And we learn that sometimes helping people means making sure they get to experience joy and beauty and love, not just survival.

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**Pause here.** Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Different Needs

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Imagine you're in your class at school and you notice four different people who seem like they need help. One kid forgot their lunch money. Another kid is being teased because they wear different clothes. A third kid uses a wheelchair and can't reach something on a high shelf. And a fourth kid just sits alone looking really sad. Would you help all four kids the same way, or would each one need something different?

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**Listen For:** "Different help for each one," "Ask what they need", affirm: "Exactly! Each person has a different problem that needs a different solution."

## Question 2: The Ridicule Problem

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Why do you think God made a special command about not making fun of disabled people? Why not just say "be nice to everyone"? What's the difference between helping someone and making sure other people aren't mean to them?

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**If They Say:** "Because people are mean to them a lot", respond: "What do you think that feels like when you need help but people are also making fun of you?"

## Question 3: Seeing God's Beauty

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The weirdest command was helping blind people see God's beauty. If you had a friend who couldn't see with their eyes, how could you help them experience something beautiful about God? What are some ways to experience beauty that don't require sight?

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**Connect:** "Those are beautiful ideas! This shows that God wants everyone to experience joy and wonder, not just basic survival."

## Question 4: The Heart Connection

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We talked about how some people can see with their eyes but their hearts are "blind" to God's love, maybe because they're really sad or have been hurt. If you wanted to help someone like that experience God's love, what would you do? How do you help someone's heart "see" again?

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**If They Say:** "Be really nice to them", respond: "What would that look like? What specific nice things help people feel loved?"

You guys understand something really important: different people need different kinds of help, and real care means paying attention to what each person actually needs. Let's do an activity that shows how we all need each other in different ways.

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## 4. Activity: The Nine Helpers Circle (8 minutes)

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**Zero Props Required** , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

## **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces that different people need different kinds of help by having kids physically experience providing and receiving various types of support. Success looks like kids discovering that everyone has both strengths to offer and needs to receive help, and that community works best when we pay attention to specific needs.

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## **Instructions to Class(3 minutes)**

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We're going to create the Nine Helpers Circle. Everyone gets a card with one of the nine types of vulnerability we heard about in the story. Your job is to find people who can help with your specific need, and to offer the kind of help you're good at giving to others.

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Here's the challenge: you can only help in the way that matches what you're good at, and you can only ask for help in the way that matches your card. So if your card says "orphan," you need protection and care. If your card says "helper of widows," you can provide financial help and advocacy.

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The twist is that everyone gets both a vulnerability card and a helper card, because in real life, we all need help sometimes and we all have ways we can help others. You'll have to figure out how to both give and receive help at the same time.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what God was teaching in our story, that real community happens when we pay attention to different people's different needs and offer our different abilities to help.

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## **During the Activity(4 minutes)**

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First phase: Give out the cards and let kids find their matches. They'll initially focus on completing the obvious connections, widows finding financial helpers, orphans finding protectors, etc.

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The struggle: After about a minute, they'll realize that some needs are harder to meet than others. The "blind seeing God's splendor" cards will create confusion and force creativity about how to show beauty without sight.

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Coaching phrases: "I notice some of you are stuck, what creative ways could you help someone experience God's beauty?" "I wonder if some of you could work together to help one person." "What if you close your eyes and have someone describe something beautiful to you?"

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The breakthrough: Celebrate when someone finds a creative way to help a "blind" person experience beauty through touch, sound, or description. This is the physical representation of comprehensive, thoughtful care.

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Completion: Once everyone has both given and received help, have them notice how they felt different when giving versus receiving, and how some kinds of help were easier to give than others.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone gets creative about helping a "blind" person experience beauty, this is the physical representation of the passage's movement from basic care to spiritual enablement.

### **Debrief(1 minute)**

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What did you notice about how it felt when someone helped you in exactly the way you needed versus when they tried to help but didn't understand your specific need? And what was it like trying to help someone experience God's beauty when you had to be creative about it? You just experienced what the story teaches, that real care means paying attention to what each person actually needs and getting creative when the need is complicated.

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## **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

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Here's what we learned today: God wants us to help people in smart, specific ways that match what each person actually needs. Different problems need different solutions. And we never, ever make fun of people who have disabilities or look different from us.

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This doesn't mean we have to become experts on every kind of disability or need. It means we pay attention, ask questions when we're not sure how to help, and treat every person with dignity and respect. And sometimes helping people means making sure they get to experience beauty and joy, not just basic survival.

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The amazing result is that when we help different people in different ways, we learn about different parts of God's heart. And sometimes the people we help end up helping us see God's beauty too.

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### **This Week's Challenge**

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This week, notice when you encounter someone who needs help. Before you jump in, pause and ask yourself: what kind of help does this person actually need? Is it food, friendship, protection from

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bullying, or maybe just someone to listen? Practice matching your help to their real need.

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### Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*God, thank you for caring about every kind of person and every kind of need. Help us to be smart about how we help others, and help us never to make fun of people who are different from us. Show us how to help people see your beauty and love. Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God wants us to help people who need help and be kind to everyone, especially people who are different from us.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
  - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
  - **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
  - **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
  - **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
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### If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare helping different people to taking care of different pets, a fish needs water, a cat needs soft places to sleep, a bird needs a clean cage. Different needs!

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### 1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about helping others or God's love for everyone. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "Love One Another," or "Helping Others." Use movements: point to different children during verses about loving everyone, make helping gestures (hugging motions, sharing motions) during verses about kindness.

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Great singing! You know how to show love with your voices. Now let's sit down and hear a story about how God wants us to show love with our actions too. Make a horseshoe shape on the floor, I'm going to tell you about the most important list God ever made.

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## 2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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**Formation:** Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound caring when you're God, sound excited when you discover something wonderful.

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Today we're going to meet God making a very special list.

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Long, long ago, God's people were having a really hard time. Their city was broken. Their houses were broken. Many people were sad and scared.

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Everyone was trying to take care of themselves. People were worried about having enough food and safe places to sleep. It was scary and confusing.

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But God looked down and saw all these hurting people. And God had an idea! God decided to tell them exactly how to help each other.

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So God spoke to a man named Ezra and said, "I want you to tell my people something very important. I want them to help people, but I want to tell them exactly how to help!"

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And then God started making a list. Not a grocery list or a chore list, but a helping list! "First," God said, "help the ladies whose husbands died. They need people to make sure they have money for food."

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**2 Esdras 2:20a (GNT)**

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*20 Help the widow, defend the fatherless, give to the needy, protect the orphan, clothe the naked.*

Do you think God cares about people who are sad and need help? Yes! God cares so much that God made a list!

God said, "Second, defend the children whose daddies are gone. Stand up for them!" "Third, give food and things to people who don't have enough!" "Fourth, protect the children who don't have mommies or daddies!" "Fifth, give clothes to people who are cold!"

But God wasn't done with the list yet! There were more people who needed different kinds of help.

"Sixth," God said, "take care of people who are weak and can't take care of themselves. Be gentle with them. Be patient with them."

"Seventh," God said, "do NOT make fun of people who have disabilities. Do not laugh at people who look different or move differently or talk differently. That makes me very sad!"

"Eighth, protect people who have been hurt and need extra safety."

And then God said something really surprising for number nine!

"Help the people who can't see with their eyes to see how beautiful and wonderful I am!"

Now how do you help someone who can't see to see how beautiful God is? That's tricky! Maybe you describe beautiful things to them. Maybe you sing beautiful songs. Maybe you're so kind that they feel God's love through your hugs!

But you know what? Some people can see with their eyes, but their hearts are sad and they can't see God's love anymore. Maybe someone was mean to them. Maybe they forgot that God loves them. We can help them too!

When we're kind to people, when we share our toys and our hugs, when we never make fun of anyone, we help people see how much God loves them!

God made this list because God loves every single person and wants all of us to help take care of each other. And when we help people, we make God happy!

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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**Formation:** Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

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Find a partner and stand facing each other! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think!

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**Teacher Circulation:** Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

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#### Discussion Questions

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*Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.*

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1. How do you think the sad people felt when they heard God's list?
  2. Which kind of help from God's list sounds the hardest to do?
  3. Which kind of help sounds the most fun to do?
  4. Why do you think God said not to make fun of people who are different?
  5. What would you do if you saw someone making fun of a kid with a disability?
  6. How could you help someone who can't see to feel God's love?
  7. Who is someone at school who might need a friend?
  8. What's something you could share with someone who doesn't have much?
  9. How does it feel when someone is really kind to you?
  10. What's something beautiful you could describe to someone who can't see?
  11. How do you show someone you care about them?
  12. What would happen if everyone followed God's list?
  13. Which person on God's list would you most want to help?
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14. How do you feel when you help someone?

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15. What's the best way to be kind to someone who looks different from you?

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16. Why does God want us to help people?

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17. What would you tell someone who doesn't think God loves them?

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18. How could your family help someone this week?

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19. What would God's face look like when we help someone?

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20. How do you help someone feel not scared anymore?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together and sing about being kind to everyone. Make straight lines facing me!

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#### **4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Standing in straight lines facing forward

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Choose songs about kindness and inclusion. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Jesus Loves Everyone," or "God's Love is So Wonderful." Include movements: spread arms wide for "everyone," make heart shapes with hands for "love," gentle swaying motions for peaceful songs.

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Beautiful singing about being kind! Now let's sit down and talk to God about helping people. Sit criss-cross-applesauce in rows and fold your hands.

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#### **5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

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*Dear God, thank you for making that special list about helping people...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to be kind to everyone we meet, especially people who look different from us or need extra help. Help us never to make fun of anyone...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us share our toys and our hugs and our smiles so that everyone can see how much you love them...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving every person and for teaching us how to love them too. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping people. Examples: "God, help me be kind to everyone" or "Thank you God for loving people who are different."

Remember, God made that special list because God wants us to help people who need help and be kind to everyone. Have a wonderful week showing God's love to others!

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# The King Who Raises

*Resurrection Hope, When do we trust God's power over death?*

**2 Maccabees 7:1-42**

## Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

## The Passage

**2 Maccabees 7:1-14 (NIV)**

*1 It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. 2 One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."*

*3 The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. 4 These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on.*

*5 When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to fire him while still breathing and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, 6 "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'"*

*7 After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. When they had torn off the skin of his head with the hair, they asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" 8 He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done.*

*9 And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."*

*10 After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, 11 and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." 12 As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.*

*13 After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. 14 When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!"*

## **Context**

This passage occurs during the brutal persecution under Antiochus IV Epiphanes around 167 BC. The Seleucid king had outlawed Jewish religious practices and was forcing Jews to abandon their ancestral laws, including dietary restrictions. Seven brothers and their mother were arrested for refusing to eat pork, which Jewish law prohibited. This was not merely about food, it represented a complete rejection of Jewish identity and covenant faithfulness.

The torture and execution described here was part of Antiochus's systematic campaign to hellenize the Jewish people and eliminate their distinctive religious practices. The family's refusal represented more than personal conviction; it was an act of covenant loyalty that would inspire the Maccabean revolt. Their willingness to die rather than compromise demonstrated that some things matter more than

physical survival.

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## The Big Idea

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The King of the universe guarantees resurrection and everlasting renewal of life for those who die faithful to his laws, demonstrating that his power infinitely exceeds any earthly king's authority over death.

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This hope is not mere wishful thinking but represents one of the earliest clear biblical affirmations of bodily resurrection. The brothers' confidence in the face of torture reveals that resurrection belief was well-established among faithful Jews by the second century BC, providing a theological foundation that would later become central to Christian faith.

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## Theological Core

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- **Resurrection certainty.** The King of the universe will raise those who die for his laws to everlasting renewed life, making physical death temporary rather than final.
  - **Divine sovereignty over earthly power.** The King of the universe's authority supersedes any human king's power, including power over life and death.
  - **Martyrdom's reward.** Faithful death for God's laws secures not just honor but actual resurrection to everlasting life with renewed bodies.
  - **Hope enabling perseverance.** Resurrection hope provides the strength to endure present suffering while maintaining covenant faithfulness.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- Resurrection hope doesn't make suffering trivial but provides strength to endure it faithfully
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- Some convictions are worth suffering for, even when the cost seems unbearable
- God's power to raise the dead means earthly authorities don't have final say over our lives
- Wrestling with hard questions about faith and suffering is part of mature discipleship

### Grades 4, 6

- God's power is bigger than any human power, including bullies and bad leaders
- Sometimes doing right means accepting hard consequences, but God sees and remembers
- Physical death is not the end for people who trust God, he promises life beyond death
- Being scared about standing up for what's right is normal, but we can do it anyway with God's help

### Grades 1, 3

- God is the strongest King, stronger than any person who tries to hurt his people
- God loves people who choose to obey him even when it's really hard
- When we trust God, we never have to be afraid forever because he takes care of us

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Glorifying suffering for its own sake.** The brothers didn't seek martyrdom but accepted it as the cost of faithfulness. Their hope was in resurrection, not in death itself.
- **Minimizing the horror of their experience.** Resurrection hope doesn't make torture painless or acceptable, it provides strength to endure what shouldn't have to be endured.
- **Dismissing this as "just Old Testament."** This represents crucial theological development that bridges Jewish and Christian understanding of resurrection hope.
- **Making it only about individual salvation.** Their faithfulness preserved Jewish identity and covenant relationship, demonstrating that personal courage serves communal purposes.

## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Why didn't God just save them from being tortured?"**

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The text doesn't explain God's allowing this suffering, but it shows that God's plan involves something bigger than preventing all pain. The brothers trusted that God's power to raise the dead means their suffering wasn't meaningless or final. Sometimes faithfulness requires accepting what we can't understand while trusting God's ultimate justice and power to make things right.

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### **"How can we know resurrection is real?"**

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The brothers' confidence suggests this belief was well-established in their community through Scripture study and faith tradition. For Christians, Jesus's resurrection provides historical evidence that what the brothers hoped for is actually possible. We can't prove resurrection scientifically, but we can examine whether the historical claims and personal testimonies are trustworthy.

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### **"Should we be willing to die for our faith today?"**

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This passage calls us to consider what convictions matter enough to suffer for, while recognizing that most of us won't face this extreme choice. The principle applies to smaller acts of faithfulness that cost us something, standing up for truth, helping others when it's inconvenient, or maintaining integrity when compromise would be easier. The resurrection hope that strengthened them can strengthen us in our own faithful choices.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**The King of the universe has power over death itself, giving us hope that enables faithfulness even in the face of seemingly impossible circumstances.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

## **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between resurrection hope that could make suffering seem easier to accept versus hope that provides strength to endure necessary suffering. Help them discover how these brothers' confidence about God's power over death affected their choices in an impossible situation.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Does believing in resurrection after death make it too easy to accept present injustice and suffering, or does it provide the strength needed to resist evil even when resistance is costly?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate that this story is genuinely disturbing and that being troubled by torture and injustice shows healthy moral instincts
  - Honor the complexity that resurrection hope can both inspire courage and potentially minimize present suffering
  - Let students wrestle with whether some things are worth suffering for without pushing toward easy answers
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## **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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You're in a situation where standing up for what you believe will definitely get you in serious trouble. Maybe it's calling out racism when everyone else stays silent, or refusing to participate in something that hurts someone else, or telling the truth when everyone expects you to lie. You know the consequences will be real and painful, social rejection, academic consequences, family conflict.

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Part of your brain says, "This isn't worth it. Just go along. You can make a difference later when the cost isn't so high." The practical voice sounds reasonable. Why choose unnecessary suffering when you could live to fight another day? Why not pick battles you can actually win?

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But another part knows that some lines can't be crossed, some compromises poison everything that comes after. Today we're looking at people who faced that choice in the most extreme way imaginable, where standing up for their convictions meant certain torture and death. Except they had something that changed everything about how they calculated the cost.

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As we read their story, notice what gives them strength to choose suffering over compromise. Pay attention to how their hope about God's power changes what they're willing to endure. Ask yourself whether their confidence makes the choice easier or harder.

Turn to 2 Maccabees chapter 7. We're reading about seven brothers who refused to abandon their faith when a king tried to force them. Begin reading silently at verse 1.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** This is disturbing content. Walk quietly among students and watch for reactions. Some may be visibly affected by the torture descriptions. Be prepared to acknowledge that this is difficult material and that strong reactions are appropriate.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions do the brothers take, and how do other characters respond?
- Why do the brothers choose torture over eating pork, what's really at stake for them?
- What exactly do they believe about God's power, and how does it affect their choices?
- How would you feel in their situation, and what would be going through your mind?

### 2 Maccabees 7:1-14 (NIV)

*1 It happened also that seven brothers and their mother were arrested and were being compelled by the king, under torture with whips and thongs, to partake of unlawful swine's flesh. 2 One of them, acting as their spokesman, said, "What do you intend to ask and learn from us? For we are ready to die rather than transgress the laws of our ancestors."*

*3 The king fell into a rage, and gave orders to have pans and caldrons heated. 4 These were heated immediately, and he commanded that the tongue of their spokesman be cut out and that they scalp him and cut off his hands and feet, while the rest of the brothers and the mother looked on.*

*5 When he was utterly helpless, the king ordered them to fire him while still breathing and to fry him in a pan. The smoke from the pan spread widely, but the brothers and their mother encouraged one another to die nobly, saying, 6 "The Lord God is watching over us and in truth has compassion on us, as Moses declared in his song that bore witness against the people when he said, 'And he will have compassion on his servants.'"*

*7 After the first brother had died in this way, they brought forward the second for their sport. When they had torn off the skin of his head with the hair, they asked him, "Will you eat rather than have your body punished limb by limb?" 8 He replied in the language of his ancestors and said to them, "No." Therefore he in turn underwent tortures as the first brother had done.*

*9 And when he was at his last breath, he said, "You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."*

*10 After him, the third was the victim of their sport. When it was demanded, he quickly put out his tongue and courageously stretched forth his hands, 11 and said nobly, "I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again." 12 As a result the king himself and those with him were astonished at the young man's spirit, for he regarded his sufferings as nothing.*

*13 After he too had died, they maltreated and tortured the fourth in the same way. 14 When he was near death, he said, "One cannot but choose to die at the hands of mortals and to cherish the hope that God gives of being raised again by him. But for you there will be no resurrection to life!"*

### **3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)**

#### **Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)**

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but allow students to pass given the difficult content. Choose confident readers for the brothers' defiant speeches to capture their courage.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-6 (Setup and first brother's death) **Reader 2:** Verses 7-9 (Second brother's defiance and resurrection hope) **Reader 3:** Verses 10-14 (Third and fourth brothers' confidence)

Listen for the tone in their voices, this isn't just information but drama. Notice how their confidence grows even as the torture continues.

### Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes to come up with genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen. If groups are stuck, suggest "What surprised you most?" or "What confused you?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions start with "Why..." "How..." or "What if..." Don't worry about having answers; focus on what you're genuinely wondering about. You have three minutes.

### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

**Remember:** Students drive with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Honor their emotional reactions to this difficult material.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board, look for themes. Start with questions most students can relate to rather than abstract theological ones.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that the brothers genuinely believed God would raise them from the dead?"
- "How does their confidence about resurrection affect the way they talk to the king who's torturing them?"
- "Is there a difference between accepting suffering because you believe in resurrection versus seeking suffering for its own sake?"

- "The second brother says the King of the universe will raise them up while the earthly king dismisses them from life, what's the contrast there?"

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- "Does believing in life after death make it easier to accept injustice in this life, or harder to tolerate it?"

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- "What would you need to be convinced of to face what these brothers faced?"

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- "If you really believed someone had power over death itself, how would that change your other fears?"

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- "Why does the text say even the king was astonished at the third brother's spirit?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? Their hope isn't in avoiding death but in God's power to overcome death. That changes everything about how they calculate risk and courage. When you believe the King of the universe can raise the dead, earthly kings lose their ultimate power over you. But notice, this doesn't make their suffering less real or painful. It gives them strength to endure what shouldn't have to be endured.

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### **4. Application (3, 4 minutes)**

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Let's get real about your lives. Most of you won't face torture for your faith, but you will face moments when doing right costs something significant. Where do you see situations that test whether your convictions are strong enough to accept hard consequences?

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### **Real Issues This Connects To**

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- Standing up to bullying when it might make you the next target

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- Refusing to participate in cheating or academic dishonesty even when it affects your grades

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- Calling out prejudice or injustice in your friend group even when it causes social conflict

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- Maintaining personal integrity on social media when compromise would gain followers or acceptance

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- Supporting unpopular causes or people when it brings criticism or misunderstanding

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- Making choices about sexuality, honesty, or money that go against cultural pressure

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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Acknowledge that different situations call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about when to resist.

## Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose integrity over convenience, and what did that cost them?"
- "What helps you decide when something is worth the risk of negative consequences?"
- "How would believing that God's power is bigger than any human power change your courage in difficult situations?"
- "What's the difference between wise courage and reckless defiance?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: The King of the universe has power that earthly authorities can never match, including power over death itself. That doesn't make suffering easy or pleasant, but it can provide strength to choose faithfulness even when the cost seems unbearable. The brothers' confidence wasn't in avoiding consequences but in trusting that God's power extends beyond any human threat.

This week, pay attention to moments when you have to choose between what's convenient and what's right. Notice what fears hold you back from acting on your convictions. Ask yourself what it would mean to believe that God's power is bigger than whatever you're afraid of losing, popularity, comfort, safety, control.

I'm impressed by the thoughtful way you wrestled with this difficult story today. Keep asking hard questions about faith and suffering and courage. Your willingness to think deeply about these things is exactly what these brothers would want their story to inspire.

## Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God's power is bigger than any earthly power, and he promises life beyond death for those who stay faithful to him even when it's really hard.

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### If Kids Ask "Why didn't God just save them from getting hurt?"

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Say: "That's a really hard question. Sometimes God gives people strength to get through terrible things rather than preventing them. The brothers trusted that God's power was bigger than death itself."

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#### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been afraid of someone who had power over you, maybe a bully at school, or a teacher when you didn't do your homework, or someone bigger and stronger who was being mean. Keep your hands up if you wished someone stronger was there to help you.

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Now here's a harder question. Imagine someone really powerful, like a principal or a police officer, told you to do something you knew was wrong. They said if you didn't do it, you'd get in huge trouble. Part of you thinks, "I have to do what they say because they're in charge." But another part thinks, "This is wrong and I shouldn't do it, no matter who's telling me to."

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That's a confusing, scary feeling, isn't it? When someone with power over you wants you to do something wrong, and you know there will be consequences for saying no. Your feelings make total sense, it's genuinely hard to know what to do when the cost of doing right seems really high.

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This is like in movies when a hero has to choose between saving themselves or doing the right thing. Think about Moana choosing to face Te Fiti even though it was dangerous, or Simba deciding to go back and face Scar even though he was scared. The heroes found courage because they knew something the villain didn't understand.

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The tricky part is figuring out when something is important enough to stand up for, even when it costs you. How do you decide what's worth the risk? How do you find the courage when you're scared?

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Today we're going to hear about seven brothers who faced the most impossible choice you could imagine. A powerful king wanted them to do something against God's laws, and they had to decide what mattered more. But they knew something about God that changed everything about their choice. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share stories about bullying or authority conflicts. Acknowledge briefly that those situations are really hard, then move toward the story to show how faith can help.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long, long ago, there was a very powerful king named Antiochus. He controlled a huge area and many different peoples. This king decided he wanted everyone in his kingdom to live exactly the same way, eat the same foods, worship the same gods, follow the same rules.

But God's people, the Jews, had special laws that God had given them. These laws were about how to live in a way that honored God, including what foods they could eat. God had told them not to eat pork because it would help them remember they belonged to him in a special way.

King Antiochus got angry about this. "Everyone in my kingdom will eat what I say and worship who I say," he declared. "No more of these special Jewish laws!" He sent his soldiers to force Jewish families to eat pork and abandon the laws God had given them.

Imagine how scary this must have been. Soldiers knocking on your door, demanding you break the promises your family had made to God for hundreds of years. Your heart would be pounding, and you'd feel sick to your stomach.

One day, the soldiers arrested a family, a mother and her seven grown sons. They dragged them before the king. The soldiers heated up big pans and brought out pork. "Eat this," the king commanded, "or you'll be tortured."

The oldest brother stepped forward. He was probably shaking, but his voice was strong. "What do you want to learn from us? We're ready to die rather than break God's laws." Can you imagine how much courage that took?

The king flew into a rage. He ordered terrible things to happen to the first brother. It was horrible and painful. But something amazing happened, the other brothers and their mother didn't give up. They encouraged each other to stay strong.

When the soldiers brought the second brother forward, they asked him the same question: "Will you eat this pork instead of being hurt?" The brother looked right at the king and said, "No."

**2 Maccabees 7:9 (NIV)**

*"You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."*

Did you hear what he said? He called God "the King of the universe", bigger and more powerful than any earthly king! The brother knew that even if the earthly king hurt his body, the King of the universe could give him new life that would last forever.

The third brother was even more amazing. When they demanded he put out his hands to be hurt, he stretched them out courageously and said something incredible.

### **2 Maccabees 7:11 (NIV)**

*"I got these from Heaven, and because of his laws I disdain them, and from him I hope to get them back again."*

He believed God had given him his hands and could give them back again! Even the king was amazed at how brave this young man was. The brother wasn't afraid because he trusted that God's power was bigger than anything the earthly king could do.

The fourth brother said something that made it even clearer. He looked at the king and said, "We choose to die trusting that God will raise us up again. But you, you won't get that gift because you don't trust God!"

Do you see what was happening? These brothers weren't just being stubborn or trying to be heroes. They really, truly believed that God was more powerful than death itself. They believed that the King of the universe could give them new life, new bodies, everything they needed, forever.

That faith didn't make the pain less real or the choice easy. But it gave them strength to choose what was right even when it cost them everything. They knew that earthly kings might be powerful, but God was more powerful than all of them put together.

Because they trusted God's power over death, they couldn't be controlled by the fear of death. The thing the earthly king was threatening them with, losing their lives, wasn't the worst thing that could happen to them. The worst thing would be breaking their relationship with God.

Sometimes in our lives, people with power over us try to make us do things that are wrong. It might be bullying, or cheating, or being mean to someone, or lying. We feel scared because we know there might be consequences for saying no.

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What we learn from these brave brothers is that God's power is bigger than any human power. When we trust God, we never have to be afraid forever because he can take care of us in ways that no earthly authority can touch.

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The core truth is this: No matter how powerful someone seems, God is more powerful. And God promises to take care of people who choose to do right, even when it's really hard.

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**Pause here.** Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Scary Feelings

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Think about being one of those brothers, standing in front of that angry king with his soldiers all around. Your hands are probably sweaty, your heart is beating fast, and part of you just wants to run away or do whatever he says to make it stop. What do you think was going through their minds when they decided to say no anyway?

---

**Listen For:** "They were scared," "They wanted to obey God more," "They remembered God was stronger",  
affirm: "Yes, being scared makes total sense. But they trusted God even while they were afraid."

#### Question 2: The Different Kings

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The brother called God "the King of the universe" and said the earthly king could only "dismiss them from this present life." What's the difference between a king who can hurt your body and a King who can give you life forever?

---

**If They Say:** "God is stronger," "God can bring you back to life", respond with "How would knowing that change how scared you'd be of the earthly king?"

#### Question 3: The Amazing Confidence

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The third brother said he got his hands from Heaven and hoped to get them back again from God. He wasn't just hoping to survive, he believed God could give him a completely new body after death. What would you have to believe about God to be that confident?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made their choice so hard and so brave, they really believed God's power was bigger than death."

#### Question 4: The Ripple Effects

The story says even the king and his soldiers were amazed at how brave these young men were. If people who don't believe in God can see something different about how God's people handle scary situations, what does that teach them about God's power?

**If They Say:** "That God is real," "That God makes people brave", affirm while adding "And that maybe they'd want that kind of strength too."

The brothers' courage came from knowing that God's power is bigger than any earthly power, even the power over life and death. That knowledge didn't make their choice easy, but it gave them strength to choose faithfulness even when the cost was enormous. Now let's experience what different kinds of power feel like.

#### 4. Activity: Power Tower (8 minutes)

**Zero Props Required** , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces the difference between earthly power that can be overcome and God's power that can't be defeated by having kids physically experience how different kinds of strength work. Success looks like kids discovering that the power to help others stand up is stronger than the power to knock them down.

##### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Power Tower. Everyone find a partner, one person will be the Tower, and one will be the King. Towers, stand up straight with your feet together. Kings, your job is to try to make your Tower wobble or fall down by gently pushing on their shoulders. Don't hurt anyone, just see if you can make them unsteady.

---

But here's the twist, there are also going to be Supporters. Supporters can come alongside any Tower and help them stay strong by holding their arms or bracing them. Kings can only push; Supporters can help Towers stand firm.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like the story. The earthly king had power to hurt the brothers' bodies, but God's power helped them stand strong in their hearts. Let's see what happens when different kinds of power meet.

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Okay, Kings start trying to make your Towers wobble. Towers, try to stay standing on your own first.

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### **During the Activity(4 minutes)**

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Watch what's happening, the Kings are using their power to make Towers unsteady. See how even gentle pushing can make it hard for Towers to stay balanced when they're trying to stand alone.

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Now, Supporters, go help any Tower that needs it. Stand next to them, hold their arms, help them stay steady. Kings, keep trying to push, but remember we're being safe.

---

I notice something interesting, when Supporters come alongside, the King's pushing doesn't work as well. The Supporters aren't fighting the King; they're just helping the Tower be stronger than the pushing force.

---

Now everyone freeze where you are! Towers, how did it feel when you had support versus when you were alone? Kings, what happened to your power when Supporters showed up?

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Switch roles so everyone gets to experience being a Tower with and without support. This time, I want you to notice how much difference it makes when you're not facing the pushing power all by yourself.

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**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize that the power to help someone stand is stronger than the power to knock them down. This represents how God's power to sustain is greater than any earthly power to destroy.

### **Debrief(1 minute)**

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What did you notice about how it felt when you had support versus when you were trying to stand alone? The brothers had God's support, not to avoid the king's power, but to stay strong in their hearts even while their bodies were being hurt. God's power to help them stand firm was bigger than the earthly king's power to make them fall down.

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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what we learned today: God's power is bigger than any human power, even the power over life and death. The brothers weren't superhuman or unafraid, they were regular people who trusted that the King of the universe was stronger than any earthly king.

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This doesn't mean God always stops bad things from happening to good people. But it does mean that when we trust God, no earthly power can separate us from his love and care. Even death can't win against God's power to give new life.

---

The amazing result is that when you know God's power is bigger than anything you're afraid of, you can choose to do what's right even when it costs you something. You're not doing it alone, you have the King of the universe on your side.

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## This Week's Challenge

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This week, when you face a situation where doing the right thing might get you in trouble, remember the brothers' words: "The King of the universe is more powerful." Before you make your choice, ask yourself: "What would I do if I really believed God's power was bigger than whatever I'm afraid of?"

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## Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*Dear God, thank you for being the King of the universe, more powerful than anyone or anything that tries to scare us. Help us remember that your power is always bigger, and give us courage to do what's right even when it's hard. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids know that God is the strongest King who takes care of people who love him, even after they die.

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## Movement & Formation Plan

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- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
  - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
  - **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
  - **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
  - **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
- 

## If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare God to the strongest superhero they know, then explain that God is even stronger than that, and ask "Who would you rather have protecting you?"

---

### 1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's power and strength. Suggestions: "Our God is So Big," "My God is So Great," or "God is Bigger." Use movements: stretch arms wide during "so big," flex muscles during "so strong," point up during "so great."

---

Great singing! You know what? Today we're going to learn about just how big and strong God really is. Come sit in our story horseshoe so I can tell you about some very brave people who knew God was stronger than anyone else.

---

### 2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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**Formation:** Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound mean when you're the bad king, sound strong and confident when you're the brothers talking about God.

Today we're going to meet seven brothers who loved God very much.

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

These brothers lived a long time ago when there was a very mean king. This king wanted everyone to do exactly what he said, even if it meant breaking God's rules.

*[Use mean voice and scowling face]*

The king said, "Everyone must eat the same food I eat and forget about God!" But God's people had special rules about food that helped them remember they belonged to God.

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to worried]*

The king's soldiers came and arrested the seven brothers and their mommy. They brought them to the king's palace. It was very scary!

*[Move to center, speak like the mean king]*

The king shouted, "Eat this food that goes against your God's rules, or I will hurt you!" The brothers looked at the king, and then they looked at each other.

*[Move to side, sound brave but a little scared]*

The oldest brother spoke up: "We love God more than anything. We won't break his rules, even if you hurt us." Can you imagine being that brave?

**2 Maccabees 7:9 (NIV)**

*"You accursed wretch, you dismiss us from this present life, but the King of the universe will raise us up to an everlasting renewal of life, because we have died for his laws."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you know what the brother said? He said God is the King of the WHOLE UNIVERSE! That means God is the King of everything, bigger and stronger than any mean king on earth!

---

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

---

The brother knew something amazing. Even if the mean king hurt his body, God could give him a new body in heaven. God is so powerful that not even death can stop him from taking care of people who love him!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Another brother said, "God gave me my hands, and God can give them back to me again!" He believed God's power was bigger than anything the mean king could do.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

All the brothers chose to love God even when it was really, really hard. They weren't mean to the king, but they wouldn't break God's rules.

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*[Speak with amazement]*

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Even the mean king was amazed at how brave they were! He couldn't understand how they could be so strong and unafraid.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

---

Here's the big truth: God is the strongest King in the whole universe! He's stronger than any bully, any mean person, any scary situation. And he loves people who choose to obey him.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in your life, someone might try to make you do something wrong. Maybe a kid at school wants you to be mean to someone else, or someone tells you to lie, or someone tries to make you feel scared.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When that happens, you can remember what the brothers knew: God is the King of the universe! He's stronger than anyone who tries to scare you or make you do wrong things.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

God loves you so much, and he will always take care of you. Even when things are scary, you never have to be afraid forever because God is the strongest King of all!

### **3. Discussion (5 minutes)**

**Formation:** Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'm going to give each pair a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk together.

**Teacher Circulation:** Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

#### **Discussion Questions**

*Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.*

1. How do you think the brothers felt when they saw the mean king?
2. Have you ever been scared of someone bigger than you?
3. Why do you think the brothers said no to the king?
4. What would you do if someone wanted you to break God's rules?
5. What changed when the brothers remembered God was stronger?
6. How does God take care of people who love him?
7. What happened to the brothers after they died?
8. How is God different from a mean king?
9. Who is the strongest person you know? Is God stronger?
10. When do you feel scared, and how can you remember God is with you?

11. Why did God let the brothers get hurt?

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12. How can you be brave like the brothers?

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13. What does it mean that God is King of the universe?

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14. How do we show that we trust God is strongest?

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15. What would you tell someone who was scared of a bully?

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16. How does knowing God is strongest help you make good choices?

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17. What do you want to remember about this story?

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18. How can we pray for courage like the brothers had?

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19. What would happen if everyone knew God was the strongest King?

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20. How can we be like the brothers at school or home?

---

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines for a song. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

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#### **4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Standing in straight lines facing forward

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Choose songs about God's strength and protection like "Jesus Loves Me" (emphasizing "little ones to Him belong, they are weak but He is strong"), "He's Got the Whole World" with hand movements showing God holding everything, or "God is So Good" with strong, confident movements.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer and thank God for being our strong King. Sit criss-cross applesauce and fold your hands like this.

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#### **5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

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*Dear God, thank you for being the strongest King in the whole universe.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that you are stronger than anyone or anything that tries to scare us or make us do wrong things.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Give us brave hearts like the brothers, so we can choose to obey you even when it's hard. Help us remember that you love us and take care of us always.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for your love that is stronger than anything. Thank you that we never have to be afraid forever because you are with us. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about God being strong. Examples: "Thank you that you're stronger than bullies" or "Help me be brave like the brothers."

Remember, God is the King of the universe, and he loves you so much! When you feel scared this week, remember that God is stronger than anything. Have a wonderful week!

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# Choosing Kindness

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*Power to Heal, When you win, do you seek ways to show kindness?*

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**2 Samuel 9:1-13**

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## Instructor Preparation

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Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

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## The Passage

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**2 Samuel 9:1-13 (NIV)**

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*1 David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" 2 Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" "At your service," he replied. 3 The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet." 4 "Where is he?" the king asked. Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar." 5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.*

*6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "At your service," he replied. 7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table." 8 Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"*

*9 Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's steward, and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. 10 You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table." (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) 11 Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. 12 Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth. 13 And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet.*

## Context

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David has now been established as king over all Israel, having consolidated power after years of civil war following Saul's death. In ancient Near Eastern politics, new rulers typically eliminated surviving members of the previous dynasty to prevent future challenges to their throne. David's former enemy Saul is dead, along with his heir Jonathan, who was actually David's closest friend and covenant partner.

This moment comes during a period of relative peace in David's reign. He has defeated external enemies and secured his kingdom. It's precisely when a king might turn to "cleaning house", dealing with loose ends from the previous regime. Instead, David surprises everyone by actively seeking out Saul's survivors, not to eliminate them, but to show kindness. The initiative is entirely his.

## The Big Idea

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**True power reveals itself not in eliminating threats, but in actively seeking opportunities to extend kindness to those connected with former enemies.**

This isn't naive idealism, David understands political reality. But his covenant loyalty to Jonathan transforms how he treats Jonathan's family, even Saul's descendants. The story deliberately highlights Mephibosheth's physical disability, raising complex questions about whether kindness is easier when the recipient poses no threat, while also showing David's mercy operates regardless of threat assessment.

## Theological Core

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- **Active pursuit of kindness.** David doesn't wait for opportunities to show mercy, he asks, searches, and summons, deliberately seeking ways to extend grace to unlikely recipients.
- **Covenant loyalty extending beyond death.** David's promise to Jonathan continues to shape his actions toward Jonathan's family, demonstrating how sacred relationships create ongoing obligations of care.
- **Table fellowship as restoration.** Eating at the king's table signifies full acceptance into the royal family, transforming Mephibosheth from fearful exile to honored family member.
- **Power transformed by mercy.** David's strength is demonstrated not through domination but through his capacity to lift up the vulnerable and include those who have every reason to fear him.

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## Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Power can be used to actively seek opportunities for mercy rather than to secure position through elimination of potential threats
- The challenge of distinguishing genuine kindness from strategic calculation, and why motive matters
- How covenant relationships create ongoing obligations that can transform how we treat former adversaries
- The wisdom of extending grace even when, especially when, culture expects retaliation or protective measures

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### Grades 4, 6

- When you're in a position of strength, you can choose to help people who might be afraid of you
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- Good choices sometimes mean actively looking for ways to be kind, not just avoiding being mean
- How you treat people shows what kind of person you really are, especially when you have power
- Sometimes the right thing feels uncomfortable or risky, but you can choose kindness anyway

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### Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind even to people who used to be mean to us
- God helps us choose kindness when we feel scared or angry
- We can look for ways to help people instead of ways to hurt them

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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Ignoring the political complexity.** Don't present this as simple niceness. David's kindness operated in a context where elimination of rivals was expected and politically logical. The story's power comes from David choosing mercy despite legitimate security concerns.
- **Glossing over Mephibosheth's disability.** The text emphasizes that he's "lame in both feet," which removes him as a physical threat. This detail complicates easy applications, acknowledge that kindness may indeed be easier when the recipient can't hurt you back.
- **Missing the initiative element.** This isn't about responding kindly when approached, David actively seeks out opportunities to show mercy. The lesson is about pursuing kindness, not just practicing it when convenient.
- **Sentimentalizing covenant loyalty.** David's promise to Jonathan wasn't emotional nostalgia but a sacred obligation that continued to shape his actions. Help students understand the weight and ongoing nature of covenant relationships.

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## Handling Hard Questions

**"How do we know David's kindness was real and not just politics?"**

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That's exactly the tension the story wants us to wrestle with. We can't fully separate genuine mercy from strategic wisdom, and maybe we're not supposed to. What matters is that David chose inclusion over elimination, restoration over destruction. Even if there were political benefits, the choice to actively seek opportunities for kindness rather than threats to eliminate reveals something important about character. The fruit of his choice speaks for itself.

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### **"Why should we be kind to people who would hurt us if they could?"**

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The story doesn't ask us to be naive about danger or ignore genuine threats. But it does challenge the assumption that former enemies must remain enemies forever. David shows that when you have the strength to choose, you can look for opportunities to transform conflict rather than perpetuate it. This requires wisdom about timing and safety, but it opens possibilities that cycles of retaliation never can.

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### **"What if showing kindness makes us look weak or vulnerable?"**

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David's kindness came from a position of strength, not weakness. He had already proven his power, this act demonstrated confidence in his security. Sometimes kindness requires more courage than cruelty. The question isn't whether showing mercy might cost us something, but whether we're strong enough to absorb that cost for the sake of something better than endless conflict.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Real strength shows itself by actively seeking opportunities to extend kindness to those who expect harm, even when, especially when, you have every right and reason to protect yourself instead.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between genuine mercy and strategic calculation. Help them explore how covenant loyalty can transform our treatment of former adversaries, even when, especially when, cultural expectations point toward self-protection.

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## The Tension to Frame

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When we have power after conflict, how do we distinguish between genuine kindness and strategic manipulation in our treatment of those connected with former enemies?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate students' instincts about self-protection, they're not wrong to think about safety and consequences
  - Honor the complexity of motive, most acts of kindness involve mixed motives, and that doesn't necessarily invalidate them
  - Let students wrestle with the political implications rather than rushing to neat moral conclusions
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Imagine you're finally in a position of power at school, maybe student body president, team captain, or editor of the school paper. You've worked hard to get there, and you've had to compete against people who weren't exactly nice to you along the way. Some actively tried to undermine you, spread rumors, or block your progress.

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Now you're in charge. You have influence, and the people who opposed you are pretty much at your mercy. Maybe they need recommendations for college applications, or they want positions on your team, or they're hoping to contribute to the publication you now control. Your natural instinct might be to think, "Why should I help them after what they did to me?"

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That reaction makes perfect sense. It's not petty, it's protective. You worked hard for this position, and helping your former opponents might even seem like bad strategy. They could use any assistance you give them to challenge you later. Plus, everyone expects you to reward your supporters, not your enemies.

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But what if there were another way to think about your power? What if strength could be demonstrated not by blocking former opponents, but by actively looking for ways to help them? Today we're looking at someone who faced exactly this dilemma, except the stakes were literally life and death.

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As we read, pay attention to David's initiative, notice that he doesn't wait for someone to ask for help. And watch for the tension between political wisdom and genuine mercy. Open your Bibles to 2 Samuel

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult names or unfamiliar terms. Watch for students who finish early and direct them to the reflection questions. Let them feel the weight of David's political situation and his surprising choice.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What was the normal expectation for how kings treated surviving members of previous dynasties?
- Why might David have been motivated to seek out Saul's descendants, what were his possible motives?
- What's surprising or uncomfortable about this interaction between David and Mephibosheth?
- How would you feel if you were in Mephibosheth's position when summoned to the palace?

### 2 Samuel 9:1-13 (NIV)

*1 David asked, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?" 2 Now there was a servant of Saul's household named Ziba. They summoned him to appear before David, and the king said to him, "Are you Ziba?" "At your service," he replied. 3 The king asked, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Ziba answered the king, "There is still a son of Jonathan; he is lame in both feet." 4 "Where is he?" the king asked. Ziba answered, "He is at the house of Makir son of Ammiel in Lo Debar." 5 So King David had him brought from Lo Debar, from the house of Makir son of Ammiel.*

*6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "At your service," he replied. 7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan. I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my*

table." **8** Mephibosheth bowed down and said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?"

**9** Then the king summoned Ziba, Saul's steward, and said to him, "I have given your master's grandson everything that belonged to Saul and his family. **10** You and your sons and your servants are to farm the land for him and bring in the crops, so that your master's grandson may be provided for. And Mephibosheth, grandson of your master, will always eat at my table." (Now Ziba had fifteen sons and twenty servants.) **11** Then Ziba said to the king, "Your servant will do whatever my lord the king commands his servant to do." So Mephibosheth ate at David's table like one of the king's sons. **12** Mephibosheth had a young son named Mika, and all the members of Ziba's household were servants of Mephibosheth. **13** And Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem, because he always ate at the king's table; he was lame in both feet. 2 Samuel 9:1-13 (NIV)

### 3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

#### Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the dialogue sections between David and Mephibosheth, these are emotionally charged exchanges that benefit from expressive reading.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-5 (David's search for survivors) **Reader 2:** Verses 6-8 (The meeting between David and Mephibosheth) **Reader 3:** Verses 9-13 (David's arrangements and the outcome)

Listen for the emotions here, fear, surprise, gratitude. This isn't just a political transaction; it's a deeply human encounter between two people with every reason to be wary of each other.

#### Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you most?" or "What felt uncomfortable to you?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about, confused by, or want to dig deeper into. Don't worry about having the "right" questions. Good questions might start with "Why did..." or "What if..." or "How do we know..." You have three minutes. Go.

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### **Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)**

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**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Look for opportunities to honor complexity rather than rushing to simple answers.

**Collecting Questions:** Let me write your questions on the board. We'll look for themes and start with the ones most of you seem curious about.

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### **Probing Questions (to go deeper)**

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- "What evidence do we have of David's motives? What makes this kindness rather than calculation?"
  - "Why does the text emphasize that Mephibosheth is 'lame in both feet'? How does that detail affect your reading?"
  - "David calls this 'God's kindness', what makes kindness specifically godly rather than just strategic?"
  - "How do you think Mephibosheth really felt about eating at David's table? What would that experience be like?"
  - "What would have happened if David had followed normal political protocol with surviving members of Saul's house?"
  - "Where do you see this pattern today, people in power choosing inclusion over elimination?"
  - "What if Mephibosheth had been physically capable of challenging David's throne? Would that change your view of David's actions?"
  - "Why does David mention Jonathan specifically? How do promises to the dead shape how we treat the living?"
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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? David doesn't wait for an opportunity to show mercy, he actively seeks it out. He asks, searches, and summons. And this isn't just avoiding cruelty; it's pursuing kindness. The normal pattern would be to eliminate potential threats. David completely reverses that, he uses his power to lift up someone who has every reason to fear him. The question for us is whether we can learn to look for these opportunities in our own lives.

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#### 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. You may not be kings, but you have moments of power, times when you're in a position to help or hurt someone who used to oppose you. Maybe it's academic, social, family dynamics, or even online spaces. Where do you see opportunities to actively pursue kindness toward people who might expect retaliation?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Former bullies who now need help with schoolwork or recommendations
  - Siblings who used to torment you but are now struggling with something you could help with
  - Ex-friends who hurt you but are now isolated and could use inclusion
  - Online spaces where you could choose to defend someone who previously attacked you
  - Social justice situations where extending grace to former opponents could break cycles of conflict
  - Family conflicts where you could choose restoration over ongoing grudges
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations genuinely call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about always being nice.

#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone use strength to include rather than exclude former opponents?"
  - "What would help you discern between wise kindness and naive vulnerability?"
  - "How do you decide when someone deserves a second chance, and how do you protect yourself while extending it?"
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- "What's the difference between choosing mercy from strength versus trying to buy peace through appeasement?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Real strength reveals itself not by eliminating people who might challenge us, but by actively looking for opportunities to extend kindness to those who have reason to fear us. This isn't naive, it requires wisdom and courage. But it opens possibilities that cycles of retaliation never can.

---

This week, pay attention to moments when you have the power to choose, times when you could help someone who used to oppose you, or include someone who might expect exclusion. You don't have to be foolish about safety or boundaries, but notice when fear or pride might be keeping you from opportunities to transform conflict into something better.

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I'm impressed by the thoughtful questions you wrestled with today. Keep asking hard questions, they're often more valuable than easy answers. The world needs people who are strong enough to choose mercy when everyone expects retaliation.

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## Grades 4, 6

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Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

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### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that when you have power or strength, you can choose to actively look for ways to help people who might be afraid of you or expect you to hurt them.

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### If Kids Ask "What if the person tries to hurt you back?"

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Say: "That's a really good question. Sometimes we do need to be careful and wise. But David shows us that when we're strong enough, we can take the risk of being kind first."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever gotten in trouble with someone and later felt nervous about seeing them again. Maybe it was a teacher, a parent, a friend, or even a principal. Keep your hands up if you worried that they might still be angry at you, even after some time had passed.

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Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever been the one with the power, like maybe you became the team captain after someone who didn't like you got cut from the team, or you got picked for something they wanted, or they got in trouble and now they need something from you. Part of you thinks, "Why should I help them after how they treated me?" But another part thinks, "Maybe I should be the bigger person."

---

Those feelings make total sense. It's hard to know what to do when someone who used to be mean to you now needs your help. Your brain is trying to protect you, it remembers being hurt, and it doesn't want it to happen again. That's not wrong or selfish. It's normal.

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This reminds me of stories like Frozen, where Anna has to decide whether to help her sister Elsa even after Elsa hurt her, or in Harry Potter when Harry has to choose whether to save Draco Malfoy even though Draco was awful to him. These stories show us that being strong sometimes means helping people who didn't help you.

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The tricky part is figuring out when it's safe to be kind and when you need to protect yourself. How do you know when someone deserves a second chance? And how do you stay strong while being kind?

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Today we're going to hear about King David, who had won a war against his enemies. Everyone expected him to get rid of anyone who might challenge him later. But David surprised everyone by actively looking for ways to help his former enemies' families instead. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share about sibling conflicts, friendship drama, or teacher situations. Acknowledge briefly but keep momentum moving toward the story. Some may relate to being afraid of consequences.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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David was now the king of Israel, and he had won a long, difficult war against King Saul's army. In those days, when one king defeated another, everyone expected the winner to hunt down and eliminate anyone from the losing family who might try to take the throne back later.

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King Saul was dead, and so was his son Jonathan, who had actually been David's best friend. David was safe on the throne, with a strong army and loyal supporters. This was the perfect time to "clean house", to deal with any loose ends from Saul's family.

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But instead of asking, "Are there any threats I need to eliminate?" David asked his servants a completely different question. He said, "Is there anyone still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show kindness for Jonathan's sake?"

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Imagine being one of David's advisors hearing that question. You might think, "Your Majesty, are you sure you want to find these people? Wouldn't it be safer to just... not look for them?" But David wasn't interested in playing it safe. He wanted to actively look for opportunities to be kind.

---

The servants found Ziba, who used to work for King Saul's family. When they brought Ziba to David, the king asked again, "Is there no one still left of the house of Saul to whom I can show God's kindness?" Notice that David calls it "God's kindness", he's not just being nice, he's trying to show the kind of love that God shows.

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Ziba's answer probably surprised David. "There is still a son of Jonathan," Ziba said. "But he is lame in both feet." Ziba was telling David that Jonathan's son Mephibosheth was disabled, he couldn't walk properly, which meant he definitely couldn't pose any military threat to David's throne.

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David could have thought, "Oh, well if he can't hurt me anyway, I don't need to worry about him." But that's not what happened. David immediately asked, "Where is he?" When Ziba told him that Mephibosheth was living far away in a place called Lo Debar, David said, "Bring him here."

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Now imagine how Mephibosheth felt when royal soldiers showed up at his door saying, "The king wants to see you." His grandfather Saul had been David's enemy. His father Jonathan had died in the war. Mephibosheth probably thought, "This is it. David is finally going to kill me to make sure I never challenge his throne."

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The journey to Jerusalem must have been terrifying. Mephibosheth couldn't run even if he wanted to. He was completely helpless, completely at David's mercy. When he arrived at the palace, he probably expected the worst.

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**2 Samuel 9:6-7a (NIV)**

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*6 When Mephibosheth son of Jonathan, the son of Saul, came to David, he bowed down to pay him honor. David said, "Mephibosheth!" "At your service," he replied. 7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan.*

Can you imagine the relief Mephibosheth must have felt when he heard those words? "Don't be afraid." David could see that this man was terrified, and the first thing he did was try to calm his fears. David wasn't interested in making Mephibosheth suffer or worry.

But David wasn't finished. He didn't just say, "Don't worry, I won't hurt you." He went much further than that.

## **2 Samuel 9:7b (NIV)**

*7b I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."*

David gave Mephibosheth back all of his family's land, that meant he would be wealthy again. But even more amazing, David invited him to eat at the king's table every day. In those times, eating at someone's table meant you were part of their family. David was basically adopting his former enemy's grandson.

Mephibosheth was so shocked he could barely speak. He said, "What is your servant, that you should notice a dead dog like me?" He felt worthless, like someone no one should care about. But David saw him differently.

David arranged for servants to take care of Mephibosheth's land and make sure he had everything he needed. The story ends by telling us that Mephibosheth lived in Jerusalem and ate at David's table like one of the king's own sons. He went from being a fearful exile to being an honored member of the royal family.

Sometimes in our lives, we're like David, we have the power to choose how we treat people who used to be against us. And sometimes we're like Mephibosheth, we're afraid that someone powerful might hurt us because of things that happened in the past.

What we learn from David is that real strength isn't about making sure no one can challenge you. Real strength is about actively looking for ways to help people who have reason to fear you, especially when

everyone expects you to protect yourself instead.

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David shows us what God's kindness looks like, it seeks out the lonely, the afraid, and the helpless, not to take advantage of them, but to lift them up and bring them into the family.

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**Pause here.** Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Scary Summons

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Put yourself in Mephibosheth's shoes. You're living quietly far away from the capital, and suddenly royal soldiers show up saying the king wants to see you. Your family used to be enemies with this king. You can't walk properly, so you can't run away or defend yourself. How would you feel on that long journey to the palace, and what would be going through your mind?

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**Listen For:** "Scared," "worried I'd die," "confused why he wants me", affirm: "Those fears make total sense. You'd have every reason to be terrified."

#### Question 2: The Surprising Choice

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David had won the war. He was safe and powerful. Everyone expected him to get rid of anyone from Saul's family who might challenge him later. Instead, he went looking for ways to help them. Why do you think David made such an unusual choice? What does this tell us about what kind of person he was?

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**If They Say:** "He was nice", respond "What's the difference between just being nice and actively looking for ways to help people who are afraid of you?"

#### Question 3: The Deeper Meaning

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David didn't just avoid hurting Mephibosheth, he gave him land, wealth, and a place at the royal table like family. Think about a time when someone was kind to you after you thought they might be mad at you. How did it feel when they went beyond just "not being angry" to actually being really generous to you?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what made David's choice so amazing, it wasn't just avoiding harm but actively seeking ways to bless someone."

#### Question 4: The Modern Connection

Think about situations in your life where you might have some power or influence, maybe in friend groups, family situations, school projects, or sports teams. Can you think of a time when you could choose to help someone who might expect you to ignore them or exclude them instead? What would that look like?

**If They Say:** "But what if they're mean to me again?", respond "That's a wise concern. How do you think David balanced being kind with being smart about protecting himself?"

David shows us that when we have strength or influence, we can choose to use it to lift people up rather than keep them down. It takes courage to be the first one to offer kindness, especially when someone used to oppose you. But look what happened, David gained a grateful friend instead of keeping a fearful enemy.

#### 4. Activity: The Table of Inclusion (8 minutes)

**Zero Props Required** , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces David's pattern of active inclusion by having kids physically experience the movement from exclusion to family-level inclusion. Success looks like kids discovering that choosing to include someone who expects exclusion requires initiative and courage, but creates community where fear existed before.

##### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "The Table of Inclusion." I need one volunteer to be the "King" or "Queen", someone who has power and can make choices about who belongs. Everyone else will start scattered around the room, some of you standing close together in small groups, and some standing alone.

Here's the challenge: The King or Queen has to actively look around the room and invite people to come sit at their "royal table", which is just sitting in a circle on the floor. But here's the twist: you have to especially look for people who are standing alone or who might think you wouldn't want them. You can't just invite your obvious friends.

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Everyone else, when you're invited to the table, you get to sit in the circle. If you're not invited yet, stay where you are but pay attention to how it feels to wait and wonder if you'll be included. We're doing this because it's exactly like David's situation, he had the power to include or exclude, and he actively chose to include someone who thought he'd be rejected.

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The goal isn't to be fast; it's to be intentional about looking for people who need inclusion the most. Ready?

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### **During the Activity(4 minutes)**

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Start by spreading out, some in friend groups, some by yourselves. King or Queen, begin looking around and making choices about who to invite. Remember, you're looking especially for people standing alone or who might not expect to be chosen.

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Notice what it feels like to have this kind of power, the power to include people who are waiting and hoping. Notice what it feels like to be waiting to see if you'll be invited, especially if you're standing alone.

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King/Queen, I notice you have some tough choices to make. Remember David didn't just invite the obvious people, he went looking for the person who had the most reason to fear him. Who in this room might not expect to be invited?

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Beautiful! Look how the table has grown as more people have been included. Everyone notice the difference between standing apart and wondering if you belong, versus sitting together as part of the same family.

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Perfect! Now everyone is at the table. Look around at each other, you've gone from being scattered and separated to being one group, one family around the same table, just like Mephibosheth went from fearful exile to honored family member.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to invite a person standing alone, this is the physical representation of David's active pursuit of kindness toward those who might expect exclusion.

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## **Debrief(1 minute)**

What did you notice about how it felt to be waiting to be invited versus sitting at the table together? King/Queen, what was it like having the power to choose who belongs? This is exactly what David experienced, he had the power to leave Mephibosheth in exile and fear, or to bring him into the royal family. David chose inclusion, and it transformed fear into gratitude, loneliness into belonging.

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## **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

Here's what we learned today: When you have power or influence, you can choose to actively look for ways to help people who might be afraid of you or expect you to hurt them. David didn't just avoid being mean to Mephibosheth, he went looking for opportunities to show kindness.

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This doesn't mean you have to be foolish or let people walk all over you. David was wise and strong. But when you're secure and confident, you can take the risk of being kind first. You can look for chances to include people who feel left out, help people who used to oppose you, and turn enemies into friends.

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The amazing result is that Mephibosheth went from living in fear to living in the palace as part of David's family. When we choose inclusion over exclusion, we don't just help other people, we build the kind of community where everyone feels safe and valued.

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## **This Week's Challenge**

This week, look for one opportunity to include someone who might not expect it. Maybe it's sitting with someone who usually sits alone, inviting someone new to join your group, or helping someone who used to be difficult. Pay attention to how it feels to be the one with the power to make someone's day better.

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## **Closing Prayer (Optional)**

*Dear God, thank you for David's example of using strength to help instead of hurt. Help us to have courage like David to look for ways to include people who feel left out. When we have the chance to be kind to someone who might not expect it, give us brave and generous hearts. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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# Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind even to people who used to be mean to us.

## Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
- **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

## If Kids Don't Understand

Compare David's table to eating dinner with your family, then ask "How would you feel if someone invited you to eat with their family every day?"

### 1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness or God's love. Suggestions: "God's Love is So Wonderful," "Be Kind to One Another," or "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy." Use movements: spread arms wide during "wonderful," point to each other during "be kind," and jump during "joy."

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape on the floor. Today we're going to hear about someone who chose to be really, really kind when everyone expected him to be mean instead!

### 2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

**Formation:** Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when you're Mephibosheth, sound strong and kind when you're David.

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Today we're going to meet King David, who was strong and brave and loved God very much!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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King David had just won a big war against another king named Saul. King Saul had been mean to David for a long time. But now Saul was gone, and David was the king of all the people.

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*[Use confident, kingly voice]*

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Most kings would think, "Good! Now I need to make sure no one from Saul's family can ever bother me again." But David was different. Instead of being scary, David asked his helpers, "Is there anyone left from Saul's family that I can be kind to?"

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look curious]*

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His helpers looked for someone from Saul's family. They found a man named Mephibosheth. He was Jonathan's son, and Jonathan had been David's very best friend! But Mephibosheth couldn't walk very well. His feet were hurt, so it was hard for him to get around.

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*[Move to center, sound excited]*

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When David heard about Mephibosheth, he said, "Bring him to me!" So his soldiers went to get Mephibosheth.

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*[Move to side, sound scared and worried]*

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Oh no! Can you imagine how scared Mephibosheth felt? When the king's soldiers came to his house, he probably thought, "Uh oh! David is going to hurt me because my grandfather Saul was mean to him!"

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**2 Samuel 9:7a (NIV)**

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*7 "Don't be afraid," David said to him, "for I will surely show you kindness for the sake of your father Jonathan."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you think Mephibosheth was surprised to hear David say "Don't be afraid"? Yes! He thought David would be angry, but David was kind instead!

*[Move to center, speak with warm authority]*

But David wasn't done being kind. He said something even more amazing!

**2 Samuel 9:7b (NIV)**

*7b I will restore to you all the land that belonged to your grandfather Saul, and you will always eat at my table."*

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

David gave Mephibosheth back all his family's land! That meant he could have a nice house and food and everything he needed. But the most special part was that David said, "You will always eat at my table!"

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

Do you know what it means to eat at someone's table? It means you're part of their family! David was telling Mephibosheth, "You can come to my house every day and eat dinner with me and my family, just like you're my own son!"

*[Speak with excitement]*

Mephibosheth couldn't believe it! He went from being scared and alone to being part of the king's family! He got to live in the palace and eat with David every single day!

*[Pause dramatically]*

David shows us what God's love looks like. God doesn't want to hurt us, God wants to bring us into His family and take care of us!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in our lives, people are mean to us. Maybe a brother or sister is mean, or a kid at school, or someone on the playground. When that happens, we might want to be mean back. But David shows us a different way!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone has been mean to you, you can choose to be kind instead. It's not always easy, but God can help you choose kindness even when your feelings are hurt.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God helps us have brave, kind hearts like David. When we choose kindness, amazing things can happen, just like with David and Mephibosheth!

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### **3. Discussion (5 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

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Find a partner and stand somewhere in the room where you can talk. I'm going to give each pair one question, and you'll have about one minute to talk about it together. There are no wrong answers, just tell each other what you think!

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**Teacher Circulation:** Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

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### **Discussion Questions**

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*Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.*

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1. How do you think Mephibosheth felt when the soldiers came to get him?
  2. How would you feel if a king invited you to eat dinner at his house every day?
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3. Why do you think David chose to be kind instead of mean?

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4. What would you do if someone who used to be mean to you needed help?

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5. What changed for Mephibosheth after David was kind to him?

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6. How does God want us to treat people who have been mean to us?

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7. What's the difference between being kind and being mean?

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8. When is it hard to choose kindness at school?

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9. When is it hard to choose kindness with your family?

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10. Who do you know who is really good at being kind?

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11. Why did David call Mephibosheth part of his family?

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12. How can we be like David when someone is mean to us?

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13. What does God do when we're scared or sad?

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14. How does it feel when someone chooses to be kind to you?

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15. What if someone laughed at you but then needed your help?

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16. What did we learn about God's love from this story?

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17. What's one way you can choose kindness this week?

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18. How can we pray for people who are mean to us?

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19. What would happen if everyone chose kindness like David?

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20. How can we remember to be kind when our feelings are hurt?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together in our circle. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

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#### **4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Standing in straight lines facing forward

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Choose a song about kindness or helping others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "If You're Happy and You Know It" (with kind actions), or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: hug yourself during "love," do kind actions like helping up, sharing, or high-fives during the happy song, or hold up one finger like a candle during "little light."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down in our rows for prayer time. Fold your hands and bow your heads.

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## 5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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**Formation:** Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

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*Dear God, thank you for King David and how he chose to be kind...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us choose kindness too, especially when someone has been mean to us. Help us remember that you love everyone and want us to be kind...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you want to bring us into your family just like David brought Mephibosheth into his family. Thank you for your love. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind. Examples: "God, help me be kind to my brother" or "Thank you for David's kindness."

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Remember, God helps us choose kindness even when it's hard. Have a wonderful week, and look for ways to be kind like David!

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# Staying Changes Everything

*When Enemies Become Family, Why didn't Paul run when the prison doors opened?*

**Acts 16:16-34**

## Instructor Preparation

Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

## The Passage

**Acts 16:16-34 (NIV)**

***16** Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. **17** She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." **18** She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.*

***19** When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. **20** They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar **21** by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." **22** The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. **23** After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. **24** When he received these orders, he put them in the inner cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.*

*25 About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. 26 Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. 27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" 29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

*31 They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." 32 Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. 33 At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. 34 The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and his whole household.*

## Context

Paul and Silas are on their second missionary journey, spreading the Gospel through Asia Minor and Greece. After casting out a fortune-telling spirit from a slave girl, they've been beaten, arrested, and imprisoned by Roman authorities on trumped-up charges. The jailer represents the Roman state's power over them, their captor, their enemy, the enforcer of their unjust punishment.

The earthquake at midnight creates a perfect escape opportunity. All doors open, all chains fall off. In Roman culture, a jailer who lost prisoners faced execution, which is why the jailer prepares to kill himself rather than face that shame. Paul's intervention saves his enemy's life when he could have simply walked away free.

## The Big Idea

**Paul chooses to stay and intervene for his captor's wellbeing rather than escape, transforming an enemy relationship into family through crisis.**

This isn't about manufacturing crises or staying in abusive situations. It's about being ready to act for an enemy's good when unexpected opportunities arise, even when escape would be justified. The

motivation question (strategic versus compassionate) acknowledges that pure motives are rare, but transformation can happen regardless.

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## Theological Core

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- **Enemy intervention.** When we have opportunity to let enemies face deserved consequences, choosing their wellbeing over our advantage can produce unexpected transformation.
  - **Role reversal through crisis.** The earthquake creates conditions where captor and captive roles completely reverse, the jailer becomes the one seeking salvation from his former prisoners.
  - **Staying over escaping.** Sometimes remaining in difficult situations enables outcomes that escape would forfeit, though this requires wisdom about when staying serves good purposes.
  - **Transformation through maintained relationship.** Paul's commitment to the person rather than just his own freedom creates space for the jailer's conversion and the dramatic hospitality reversal.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- When enemies face crisis, intervention for their wellbeing (rather than exploitation) can produce transformation
  - Some situations require wisdom about whether staying serves good purposes or enables harmful patterns
  - Commitment to the person rather than just personal freedom creates space for relationship change
  - Pure motives are rare, transformation can happen even when our reasons are mixed
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- Helping someone who's been mean to you can completely change your relationship with them
- Sometimes staying in hard situations produces better outcomes than running away
- When people are in trouble, helping them often changes how they see you
- Your feelings about someone can be hurt or angry, and you can still choose to help them

### Grades 1, 3

- God can change mean people into friends who love God
- Paul helped the man who locked him up, and that man became kind
- When God gives us chances to help people, good things can happen

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Encouraging unsafe staying.** This passage isn't about remaining in abusive relationships or dangerous situations. The earthquake was supernatural, we can't manufacture such crisis opportunities and shouldn't seek them out.
- **Demanding pure motives.** Paul's intervention might have been strategic, compassionate, or both. Transformation can happen regardless of whether our reasons are entirely selfless or include practical considerations.
- **Minimizing the risk.** Paul's choice was genuinely costly, he gave up certain freedom for uncertain outcomes. Don't make his decision sound easy or obvious; honor the real sacrifice involved.
- **Creating formulas.** This isn't a guaranteed method for changing enemies. The principle is readiness to intervene for enemy wellbeing when crisis creates opportunity, not a promise that such intervention always produces conversion.

## Handling Hard Questions

## **"What if Paul's motives were selfish, like wanting to start a church in Philippi?"**

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That's a thoughtful question about mixed motives. Paul's intervention might have been purely compassionate, strategically motivated, or both, and the text doesn't tell us. What matters is that he acted for the jailer's good when he could have let him suffer. Most of our choices involve mixed motives, but that doesn't invalidate the good we do. God can work through our complicated reasons to produce genuine transformation.

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## **"How do we know when to stay in difficult situations versus protect ourselves?"**

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This requires wisdom that comes from understanding the difference between temporary crisis (like the earthquake) and ongoing harmful patterns. Paul stayed through a supernatural crisis that created transformation opportunity. This doesn't mean staying in abusive relationships or dangerous situations where no good outcome is possible. The key is discerning whether staying serves good purposes or enables continued harm.

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## **"Why would God use an earthquake, doesn't that seem manipulative?"**

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The earthquake reveals something important: God can create opportunities for transformation, but we still choose how to respond. Paul could have used the earthquake selfishly (to escape) or redemptively (to save and transform an enemy). The supernatural element shows God's power, but the human choice shows our responsibility. God often works through crisis to create possibility, what we do with that possibility is up to us.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**When crisis gives us opportunity to harm or help an enemy, choosing their wellbeing over our advantage can transform the entire relationship, though this takes wisdom about when such staying serves good purposes.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

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## **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between self-protection and enemy intervention. Help them explore when staying in difficult relationships might produce transformation versus when it enables harm.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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If you had a perfect chance to escape someone who'd hurt you, but helping them instead might change everything, what would you do?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their instinct for self-protection, it makes sense and is often right
  - Honor the complexity, this requires wisdom, not just blanket advice about helping enemies
  - Let them wrestle with motivation questions rather than demanding pure motives
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## **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Think about someone at school who makes your life harder, maybe they spread rumors about you, exclude you from groups, or just consistently treat you like you don't matter. Now imagine you're walking home and you see them sitting on a curb, crying because they just got devastating news. You could keep walking. They've never shown you kindness, so why should you stop?

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But something in you wonders, what if this moment could change everything between you? What if your choice to stop or keep walking determines whether this person becomes a lifelong enemy or something completely different? The smart part of your brain says "keep walking", they've earned whatever they're dealing with.

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Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the stakes were higher. Paul and Silas had been beaten and imprisoned by Roman authorities, chained up in the darkest cell by a jailer who made sure they suffered. Then an earthquake gave them a perfect escape opportunity.

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As we read, pay attention to Paul's choice when he could have walked away free. Notice what the jailer was about to do, and what Paul's decision cost him. Ask yourself: was Paul smart or foolish? Was he thinking strategically about ministry opportunities, or was he genuinely concerned about his captor's life?

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Open your Bibles to Acts 16, starting at verse 16. We'll read silently first, then talk about what strikes you most.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with pronunciation of names like Silas or difficult words. Watch for students who finish early, let them sit quietly and think about what they've read. Some will need the full five minutes to process the drama and emotional weight of this story.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What led to Paul and Silas being imprisoned, and how were they treated?
- Why was the jailer about to kill himself, and what would that have cost Paul?
- What options did Paul have when the prison doors opened?
- How do you think you would have responded in Paul's situation?

### Acts 16:16-34 (NIV)

*16 Once when we were going to the place of prayer, we were met by a female slave who had a spirit by which she predicted the future. She earned a great deal of money for her owners by fortune-telling. 17 She followed Paul and the rest of us, shouting, "These men are servants of the Most High God, who are telling you the way to be saved." 18 She kept this up for many days. Finally Paul became so annoyed that he turned around and said to the spirit, "In the name of Jesus Christ I command you to come out of her!" At that moment the spirit left her.*

*19 When her owners realized that their hope of making money was gone, they seized Paul and Silas and dragged them into the marketplace to face the authorities. 20 They brought them before the magistrates and said, "These men are Jews, and are throwing our city into an uproar 21 by advocating customs unlawful for us Romans to accept or practice." 22 The crowd joined in the attack against Paul and Silas, and the magistrates ordered them to be stripped and beaten with rods. 23 After they had been severely flogged, they were thrown into prison, and the jailer was commanded to guard them carefully. 24 When he received these orders, he put them in the inner*

cell and fastened their feet in the stocks.

**25** About midnight Paul and Silas were praying and singing hymns to God, and the other prisoners were listening to them. **26** Suddenly there was such a violent earthquake that the foundations of the prison were shaken. At once all the prison doors flew open, and everyone's chains came loose. **27** The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. **28** But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!" **29** The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. **30** He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"

**31** They replied, "Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household." **32** Then they spoke the word of the Lord to him and to all the others in his house. **33** At that hour of the night the jailer took them and washed their wounds; then immediately he and all his household were baptized. **34** The jailer brought them into his house and set a meal before them; he was filled with joy because he had come to believe in God, he and his whole household.

### 3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

#### Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic sections, especially Paul's shout and the jailer's question.

**Reader 1:** Verses 16, 24 (the setup and imprisonment) **Reader 2:** Verses 25, 30 (the earthquake and intervention) **Reader 3:** Verses 31, 34 (the conversion and role reversal)

Listen for the emotions in this story, fear, desperation, surprise, joy. This isn't just information; it's human drama with life-and-death stakes.

#### Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for each group to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you most?" or "What would have been hardest for you?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two questions about what we just read, not questions you think I want to hear, but things you're actually curious about. Good questions might start with "Why did..." or "What if..." or "How could..." You have three minutes to discuss and choose your best questions. These will drive our discussion.

---

### **Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)**

**Remember:** Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Write their questions on the board and look for themes to explore.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions and write them on the board. We'll start with the ones most people relate to and see where they take us.

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### **Probing Questions (to go deeper)**

- "What evidence do you see that Paul and Silas were treated as enemies by the jailer?"
- "Why do you think Paul intervened to save the jailer's life instead of just escaping?"
- "Does it matter whether Paul's motives were purely compassionate or partly strategic?"
- "What makes this situation different from staying in an abusive relationship?"
- "How do you decide when helping an enemy is wise versus when it's enabling?"
- "Where do you see this pattern in modern life, crisis creating opportunity to transform enemy relationships?"
- "What if Paul had chosen differently, would we think less of him for escaping?"
- "Why does this story matter for us today, since we can't manufacture earthquakes?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

Do you notice what's happening here? The earthquake gives Paul a choice between his freedom and his enemy's life. He chooses the jailer's wellbeing, and that choice transforms everything. The man who locked him up ends up washing his wounds and serving him dinner. This isn't about manufacturing crisis or staying in harmful situations, it's about being ready to choose someone's good over our advantage when unexpected opportunities arise.

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#### 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. You probably won't face earthquake prison breaks, but you will face moments when someone who's hurt you is vulnerable, and you have to choose between taking advantage and helping them. Think about school, family, social media, friendships, where do you see these choice points happening?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- A classmate who spreads rumors about you gets publicly humiliated, do you join the pile-on or defend them?
  - A sibling who constantly annoys you faces serious consequences for something they did, do you make it worse or help them?
  - Someone who excluded you from a group is now being excluded themselves, do you stay silent or speak up?
  - A person who trolled you online gets doxxed and harassed, do you share the drama or report the harassment?
  - Someone who hurt your friend is now struggling with family problems, how do you respond to their crisis?
  - A former friend who betrayed you asks for help with something important, do you refuse or reconsider?
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to give answers. Acknowledge that some situations call for different responses. Help them think through wisdom and discernment rather than giving blanket advice about always helping enemies.

#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone choose an enemy's good over their own advantage, and what happened?"
- "What would help you make wise choices in moments like these?"
- "How do you tell the difference between a crisis that creates transformation opportunity and a pattern that enables harm?"
- "What's the difference between healthy enemy intervention and being a doormat?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: When crisis gives you opportunity to harm or help an enemy, choosing their wellbeing over your advantage can transform the entire relationship. This doesn't mean staying in harmful situations or being naive about people who consistently hurt you. But it does mean being ready for those earthquake moments when your choice to intervene might change everything.

This week, pay attention to small moments when someone who's been difficult is vulnerable. Notice your impulse to take advantage or walk away. Ask yourself: what if this moment could transform how we relate to each other? You don't have to be the hero in every situation, but be open to the possibilities that crisis can create.

You did excellent thinking today about complex situations that don't have easy answers. Keep wrestling with these questions, they're the kind that make you wise. The world needs people who can think carefully about when to intervene for enemies and when to protect themselves.

## Grades 4, 6

Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that helping someone who's been mean to you can completely change your relationship with them, even when your feelings are still hurt.

### If Kids Ask "Why didn't Paul just run away when he could?"

Say: "That's exactly what most people would do! Paul chose to help the man who locked him up, and that choice changed everything between them."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had someone be really mean to you at school, maybe they called you names, left you out of games, or made you feel bad about yourself. Keep your hand up if it made you not want to help them with anything, ever. I totally understand that feeling.

---

Now here's a harder question, raise your hand if you've ever seen that same person get in trouble or have something bad happen to them. Maybe they got yelled at by the teacher, or other kids started being mean to them, or they got hurt on the playground. Part of you might have thought, "Well, they deserve it because of how they treated me."

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Those feelings make complete sense! When someone hurts you, your brain wants to protect you from them. It's normal to feel like they should face consequences for being mean. But sometimes there's a little voice inside that wonders, "What if I helped them instead? What would happen then?"

---

It's like in the movie "Zootopia" when Judy has every reason to distrust Nick the fox because he tricked her. But when he's in danger, she chooses to save him anyway, and that changes their whole relationship. Or in "Monsters Inc." when Sulley protects Boo even though he's supposed to be scared of human children.

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The tricky part is figuring out when helping someone who's been mean might actually change things between you, versus when you need to protect yourself from someone who keeps hurting people. It takes wisdom to know the difference.

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Today we're going to hear about a man named Paul who was locked up in prison by someone who made sure he suffered. Then an earthquake gave Paul a perfect chance to escape and be free. But Paul made a choice that nobody expected. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to being hurt by others and wanting them to "get what they deserve."

Acknowledge these feelings as normal while building curiosity about what different choices might produce.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Paul and his friend Silas were traveling to different cities, telling people the good news about Jesus. They were in a city called Philippi, trying to help people know God's love.

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But some people in the city got angry at Paul and Silas. These people lied about them to the Roman soldiers and judges. They said Paul and Silas were causing trouble and breaking the law.

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The Roman officials believed the lies. They ordered Paul and Silas to be beaten with rods, imagine getting hit over and over with thick sticks. It hurt terribly, and they were bleeding and bruised.

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Think about how that would feel, being punished for something you didn't do, being hurt when you were only trying to help people. Paul and Silas must have felt confused, angry, and really hurt.

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After the beating, they were thrown into the darkest, most uncomfortable part of the prison. The jailer, the man in charge of watching prisoners, put heavy chains on their feet so they couldn't move around.

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This jailer wasn't kind to them. He followed his orders to "guard them carefully" by making sure they suffered as much as possible. He put them in the worst cell and locked their feet in painful metal stocks.

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But here's something amazing: instead of complaining or feeling sorry for themselves, Paul and Silas started praying and singing songs to God. It was midnight, and their voices echoed through the prison.

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The other prisoners were listening. They'd probably never heard anyone sing in that terrible place. But Paul and Silas trusted God even when everything seemed hopeless.

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Suddenly, the ground started shaking violently. It was a huge earthquake! The prison foundations cracked, every locked door flew open, and all the chains fell off the prisoners.

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Imagine what that moment felt like, one second you're chained up in the dark, the next second you're completely free to walk out the open doors. Paul and Silas could have run away immediately.

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#### **Acts 16:27-28 (NIV)**

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*27 The jailer woke up, and when he saw the prison doors open, he drew his sword and was about to kill himself because he thought the prisoners had escaped. 28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

The jailer woke up and saw all the doors open. In Roman times, if a jailer lost his prisoners, he would be executed, killed as punishment. So he decided to kill himself first rather than face that shame.

But Paul saw what was happening. Even though this man had hurt him and treated him terribly, Paul shouted to save his life. Paul could have escaped quietly and let the jailer face the consequences of his actions.

Instead, Paul stayed. He intervened. He saved the life of his enemy.

**Acts 16:29-30 (NIV)**

*29 The jailer called for lights, rushed in and fell trembling before Paul and Silas. 30 He then brought them out and asked, "Sirs, what must I do to be saved?"*

When the jailer realized what Paul had done, that Paul had saved his life when he could have escaped, everything changed. The man who had been cruel to Paul was now trembling with gratitude and respect.

He brought them out of the dark cell and asked the most important question anyone can ask: "What must I do to be saved?" He wanted to know about this God who could make earthquakes and inspire people to save their enemies.

Paul and Silas told him about Jesus, how God loved him and wanted to forgive him for all the wrong things he'd done. They explained that God could give him a new life and a clean heart.

The jailer believed immediately. He and his whole family decided to follow Jesus that very night.

Then something beautiful happened. The jailer took Paul and Silas to his own house. He washed their wounds, the ones he had indirectly caused by putting them in stocks. He bandaged their cuts and bruises.

Then he and his entire family were baptized to show they were now following Jesus. After that, the jailer cooked them a big meal and served it to them in his home.

Think about that! The man who had locked them in the worst cell was now washing their wounds, feeding them at his table, and treating them like honored guests. The whole relationship was completely reversed.

Sometimes in our lives, we have choices like Paul's. When someone who's been mean to us faces trouble, we can walk away or we can help. When we choose to help, it doesn't always change the relationship like it did here, but sometimes it really does.

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What we learn from Paul is that helping someone who's hurt you, even when your feelings are still wounded, can create possibilities that running away never could. God can use our choice to forgive and help to transform enemies into friends.

---

Paul could have thought, "This jailer deserves whatever happens to him." Instead, he thought, "I can save this man's life." That choice led to the jailer's whole family coming to know Jesus and Paul gaining a friend where he once had an enemy.

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**Pause here.** Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Hurt Feelings

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Imagine you're Paul in that prison cell, feet locked in chains, back bleeding from being beaten for something you didn't do. The man who put you there made sure you were as uncomfortable as possible. Then suddenly you're free, you could escape, but you see this man about to hurt himself. What feelings do you think would be going through your mind?

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**Listen For:** "Angry," "Hurt," "Want to get away," "Confused", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Your heart and brain would be protecting you from more hurt."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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Paul had about three seconds to decide: escape to freedom or shout to save his enemy's life. If you were his friend standing next to him, what would you have told him to do? What would have been the smart choice versus the brave choice?

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**If They Say:** "Run away, it's safer", respond: "That would be the smart, safe choice. What do you think made Paul choose differently?"

### Question 3: The Amazing Result

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By the end of the story, the jailer is washing Paul's wounds and serving him dinner in his own home. How do you think both Paul and the jailer felt about each other by then? What made such a big change possible?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Paul's choice so hard and so amazing, it completely transformed their relationship."

### Question 4: In Our Lives

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Think about your life at school or with siblings or neighborhood kids. When might you have a choice like Paul's, to help someone who's been mean to you when they're in trouble? What do you think could happen if you chose to help instead of walking away?

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**If They Say:** "They might just be mean again", affirm: "That's possible. Paul took a risk that the relationship could change, but he couldn't guarantee it would."

Paul's choice shows us that sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is help someone who's hurt us. It doesn't always work like this story, but it creates possibilities that walking away never could. Let's experience this pattern ourselves.

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## 4. Activity: Escape or Stay Bridge (8 minutes)

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**Zero Props Required** , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

### Purpose

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This activity reinforces the pattern of choosing to help rather than escape by having kids physically experience the difference between running away and staying to help someone in crisis. Success looks like kids discovering that helping someone creates a stronger, better outcome than escaping alone.

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### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

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We're going to play "Escape or Stay Bridge." Half of you will be on one side of our imaginary bridge, and half on the other side. The bridge represents a relationship between two groups that don't trust each other. Your goal is to get everyone safely across to the other side.

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Here's the challenge: the bridge can only hold a few people at a time. If too many people try to cross at once, it "breaks" and everyone has to start over. Each side will want to get their people across first and might be tempted to leave the other side behind.

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But here's the twist: the bridge only stays strong when people from both sides work together to help each other across. If one group tries to escape across without helping the other, the bridge gets weaker and eventually breaks completely.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like Paul's situation, he could have "escaped" and left the jailer behind, but choosing to help created something much stronger than individual escape.

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### **During the Activity(4 minutes)**

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Start by letting each side try to get their people across first. Watch as they realize that when they only focus on their own group, the "bridge" becomes unstable (you'll call out "bridge is shaking!" when they're not cooperating).

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As they struggle, coach them toward cooperation: "I notice your bridge is getting wobbly when people only think about their own side. I wonder if there's a way both groups could help each other that would make the bridge stronger?"

---

Give hints like "What if instead of racing to escape, you tried helping people from the other side across too?" and "The bridge seems strongest when people work together."

---

Celebrate the moment when someone chooses to help a person from the "other side" instead of just getting their own people across. Say "Look! The bridge just got stronger because someone chose to help instead of escape!"

---

Once they're cooperating fully, everyone gets across safely and quickly. Point out how much faster and safer it was when they worked together versus when each side tried to escape independently.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone stops focusing on getting their own group across and starts helping someone from the "other side", this is the physical representation of Paul's choice to help his enemy rather than

just escape.

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### **Debrief(1 minute)**

What did you notice about how it felt when everyone was trying to escape first versus when you started helping people from the other side? When the bridge was strongest, people were choosing to help their "enemies" get across safely too. That's exactly what Paul did, instead of just escaping, he chose to help the jailer, and it created something much stronger than individual freedom.

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### **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

Here's what we learned today: helping someone who's been mean to you can completely change your relationship with them. Paul had every right to escape and leave the jailer to face his consequences, but he chose to save his enemy's life instead. That choice led to the jailer becoming a friend and his whole family following Jesus.

---

This doesn't mean you should stay in dangerous situations or let people keep hurting you. But it does mean that when someone who's been difficult faces trouble, helping them might create possibilities that walking away never could. Sometimes the person who's meanest to you needs help the most.

---

The amazing result is that God can transform enemy relationships into friendships when we choose their good instead of their harm. Paul gained a friend where he once had an enemy, and the jailer's whole family discovered God's love.

---

### **This Week's Challenge**

This week, watch for one moment when someone who's been difficult or mean to you needs help. Instead of walking away or thinking "they deserve it," ask yourself: what if I helped them? You don't have to be best friends, but try one small act of kindness and see what happens.

---

### **Closing Prayer (Optional)**

*Dear God, thank you for the story of Paul and the jailer. Help us be brave like Paul when we have chances to help people who've been mean to us. Give us hearts that care about others even when our feelings are hurt. Help us remember that you can change enemies into friends. In*

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*Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God can change mean people into friends, and Paul helped the man who locked him up.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
  - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
  - **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
  - **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
  - **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
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### If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare the jailer to someone mean at school who becomes nice, then ask "How do you think that happened?"

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### 1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's power to change hearts. Suggestions: "God is So Good," "Jesus Loves Me," or "I've Got the Joy." Use movements: point up to God during "God," put hands on heart during "love," and clap during joyful words.

---

Great singing! I can see God's joy in your hearts. Now sit in our story horseshoe so I can tell you about someone God changed from mean to kind. This is going to be exciting!

---

## 2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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**Formation:** Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when you're the jailer, sound strong when you're Paul, sound happy when talking about God's love.

---

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who loved Jesus very much!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Paul was telling people about Jesus in a big city. But some mean people didn't like Paul. They told lies about him to the soldiers.

---

*[Use angry face and stern voice]*

---

The soldiers hurt Paul and his friend Silas very badly. Then they put them in jail, in the darkest, coldest room.

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change to worried tone]*

---

There was a man called the jailer. His job was to watch the prisoners. He was not nice to Paul and Silas. He locked their feet in heavy chains so they couldn't move.

---

*[Move to center, speak with joy]*

---

But guess what Paul and Silas did in that dark jail? They prayed to God and sang happy songs! Even when they were hurt and locked up, they trusted God!

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*[Make shaking motions with whole body]*

---

Then God sent a big earthquake! The ground shook so hard that all the jail doors flew open and all the chains fell off!

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**Acts 16:28 (NIV)**

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*28 But Paul shouted, "Don't harm yourself! We are all here!"*

*[Look scared and worried]*

---

The jailer woke up and saw all the doors open. He thought all the prisoners ran away! He was so scared he was going to get in big trouble that he wanted to hurt himself.

---

*[Cup hands around mouth and shout]*

---

But Paul shouted really loud: "Don't hurt yourself! We're all still here!" Paul could have run away, but he stayed to help the mean jailer!

---

*[Move slowly around the horseshoe, speaking with amazement]*

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The jailer couldn't believe it! Paul saved his life! The man who was mean to Paul was now safe because Paul helped him!

---

*[Stop and face children directly]*

---

The jailer asked, "How can I be saved like you?" He wanted to know about this Jesus who made Paul so good and kind!

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

Paul told him about Jesus! The jailer and his whole family decided to love Jesus that very night! Then do you know what happened?

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*[Pretend to wash hands gently]*

---

The jailer took Paul and Silas to his house! He washed their hurt places and put bandages on them. He cooked them a big dinner!

---

*[Speak with joy and amazement]*

---

The mean man who locked Paul up was now taking care of Paul like he was family! God changed his heart completely!

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*[Move closer to children]*

---

Sometimes people are mean to us at school or at home. But God can change mean people into kind people! And when we help people who are mean to us, sometimes God uses that to change their hearts!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

Paul chose to help instead of run away, and God did something amazing! God can help us be kind to mean people too, and He can change their hearts!

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### **3. Discussion (5 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

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Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'm going to give each pair a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think!

---

**Teacher Circulation:** Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

---

### **Discussion Questions**

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*Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.*

---

1. How do you think Paul felt when the jailer was mean to him?
  2. What would you have done if you could escape from jail?
  3. Why do you think Paul helped the jailer instead of running away?
  4. How do you think the jailer felt when Paul saved him?
  5. What changed about the jailer by the end of the story?
  6. Who helped the jailer's heart change?
  7. Have you ever seen someone mean become nice?
  8. What would you do if someone mean to you needed help?
-

9. How can we be kind to people who aren't kind to us?

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10. Who do you know that needs God to change their heart?

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11. What happened when Paul chose to help instead of escape?

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12. How did God help Paul be brave?

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13. What did God do to the jailer's family?

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14. Why is it good to help people even when they're mean?

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15. How can God help us when someone is mean?

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16. What did you learn about God's power?

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17. What do you want to remember from this story?

---

18. How can we pray for mean people?

---

19. What if Paul had been scared to help?

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20. How can we be like Paul?

---

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our circle. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

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#### **4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Standing in straight lines facing forward

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Select a song about God's love and power. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "God is Bigger," or "Love One Another." Include movements: spread arms wide for God's love, point up for God's power, and hug yourself during songs about love.

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for prayer time. Sit criss-cross-applesauce in your rows and fold your hands. Let's thank God together.

---

#### **5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

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*Dear God, thank you for Paul who helped the mean jailer...*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Please help us be kind to people who are mean to us. Give us brave hearts like Paul. Help us remember that you can change mean people into kind people...*

---

*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you love everyone and want to change their hearts. Help us trust you when people are mean to us...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for your great big love and power. Thank you that you can make enemies become friends. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping mean people. Examples: "God, help me be nice to kids who aren't nice" or "Thank you that you can change hearts."

Remember, God can change mean people into friends! When God gives you chances to help people, wonderful things can happen. Have a great week!

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# Homecoming Joy

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*God's Perfect Restoration, How can mercy and righteousness work together in God's plan?*

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**Baruch 5:1-9**

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## Instructor Preparation

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Read this section before teaching any age group. It provides the theological foundation and shows how the lesson adapts across developmental stages.

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## The Passage

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**Baruch 5:1-9 (NIV)**

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*1 Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. 2 Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. 3 For God will show your splendor everywhere under heaven. 4 For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." 5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. 6 For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. 7 For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. 8 The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. 9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

## Context

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The book of Baruch speaks to Israel during the Babylonian exile, addressing a people devastated by the loss of their homeland, temple, and identity. Jerusalem lies in ruins, its people scattered across foreign lands, wondering if God has abandoned them forever. The exile represents not just physical

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displacement but spiritual crisis, questions of whether God's promises still hold true.

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This prophetic poem comes as a word of hope in the midst of despair. Baruch calls Jerusalem to prepare for restoration, using the imagery of changing clothes, from mourning garments to royal robes. The immediate context shows God actively working to bring his people home, not reluctantly or grudgingly, but with joy and celebration that reflects his own character.

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## The Big Idea

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When God restores his people, he does it with joy that flows from his perfect character, combining mercy and righteousness in ways that exceed our expectations.

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This isn't restoration that compromises either God's justice or his love. Instead, it reveals how divine mercy and righteousness work together rather than against each other. God's restoration process reflects his complete character, he doesn't have to choose between being merciful or righteous because his perfect nature encompasses both.

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## Theological Core

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- **Divine Joy in Restoration.** God doesn't restore reluctantly or grudgingly but with genuine joy that flows from his love for his people and his commitment to his purposes.
  - **Glory as Divine Light.** God's glory isn't just his majesty but his revealed presence that guides and illuminates the path forward, making restoration possible and visible.
  - **Mercy in Action.** Divine mercy isn't mere sentiment but active compassion that reaches into broken situations and brings healing, forgiveness, and new beginnings.
  - **Righteousness as Foundation.** God's righteousness ensures that restoration is built on justice and truth, creating lasting peace rather than temporary fixes that ignore underlying problems.
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## Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- God's restoration work reflects his complete character, mercy and righteousness working together rather than competing
  - Divine joy in restoration comes from God's nature, not from our performance or worthiness
  - True restoration addresses both hurt and justice, creating lasting healing rather than surface-level fixes
  - Discerning between cheap grace and costly grace requires understanding both mercy and righteousness
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## Grades 4, 6

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- When God fixes broken things, he does it with both kindness and fairness
  - God's restoration makes things truly better, not just temporarily patched up
  - The joy in God's restoration comes from his love and his commitment to doing what's right
  - We can trust God's restoration because it addresses the real problems, not just the symptoms
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God brings his people home with joy because he loves them
  - God is both kind and good, and his love makes everything better
  - When God helps us, he is happy to help us
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Presenting mercy and righteousness as opposing forces.** These attributes of God work in harmony, not tension. Avoid suggesting God has to choose between being loving or just. Instead, show how his perfect nature encompasses both qualities simultaneously.
  - **Minimizing the reality of exile and pain.** Don't rush past the genuine suffering that exile represents. The joy of restoration is meaningful precisely because the pain of exile was real and
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deep. Honor the difficulty before celebrating the solution.

- **Making restoration about human effort or worthiness.** The text emphasizes God's initiative and character as the source of restoration. Avoid implications that people earn or deserve restoration through good behavior or spiritual performance.
- **Treating this as purely future or abstract promise.** While the ultimate fulfillment is eschatological, God's restoration work happens in the present as well. Help students see both the current and future dimensions of divine restoration.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"If God is both merciful and righteous, why do bad things still happen to good people?"**

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This passage helps us see that God's mercy and righteousness work together in his restoration plan, not that they prevent all suffering in the present. God's righteousness ensures that injustice won't have the final word, while his mercy means he actively works to heal and restore. The exile itself shows that God allows consequences for actions while never abandoning his people completely. Our trust is in God's ultimate restoration, not in immunity from all difficulty.

### **"How is this different from just telling people everything will work out fine?"**

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The difference lies in the source and character of the promise. This isn't optimism based on wishful thinking but hope grounded in God's revealed character. The text specifies that restoration comes through God's mercy and righteousness, meaning it addresses real problems with real solutions, not just positive thinking. The joy isn't naive but informed by understanding who God is and how he works.

### **"What about people who never see restoration in their lifetime?"**

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The prophetic vision spans both present and future restoration. Some of God's restoration work happens now, some happens over generations, and some awaits ultimate fulfillment. The promise doesn't guarantee that every individual will see complete restoration in their lifetime, but it does guarantee that God's character-driven restoration work will ultimately prevail. This gives meaning to present suffering and hope for future completion.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**God's restoration brings joy precisely because it flows from his perfect character, where mercy and righteousness work together to create lasting healing, not just temporary relief.**

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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Ages 12, 14+ • 30 Minutes • Student-Centered Discussion

### Your Main Job Today

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Guide students to wrestle with how mercy and righteousness can work together in restoration rather than conflicting. Help them discover that God's joy in restoration comes from his complete character, not from ignoring either justice or love.

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### The Tension to Frame

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How can mercy and righteousness both be part of restoration? Don't they pull in opposite directions, one toward forgiveness and the other toward consequences?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their experiences of situations where mercy and justice seemed to conflict
  - Honor the complexity without rushing to simple answers, let them wrestle with the tension
  - Let students discover insights through questioning rather than delivering pre-packaged answers
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Imagine you're watching a courtroom scene where someone you care about has been hurt. The person who hurt them is standing in front of the judge, and you find yourself torn. Part of you wants justice, real consequences that match the harm done. Another part of you wants mercy, a chance for healing and redemption rather than just punishment. You want both, but they seem to pull in opposite directions.

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Maybe you've felt this tension in your own life when you've messed up. Part of you knows you deserve consequences, but you desperately want another chance. Or when someone has hurt you, you want them to understand the impact of their actions, but you also want the possibility of reconciliation and healing.

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Today we're looking at a promise from God about restoration that seems almost too good to be true. It claims that God's restoration includes both mercy and righteousness, working together rather than competing. The setting is Israel's return from exile, a situation where both justice and mercy are desperately needed.

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As we read, notice how the text describes the character of God's restoration work. Pay attention to what drives God's joy in bringing his people home, and see if you can identify how mercy and righteousness show up in this restoration process.

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Let's read this promise together and see what it reveals about how God approaches restoration. Please open your Bibles to Baruch chapter 5 and begin reading silently.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students, helping with difficult words like "diadem" or "everlasting." Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread for emotional tone. Let them feel the drama of transformation from exile to homecoming.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What emotions and images does this passage use to describe restoration?
  - What motivates God to bring his people back home?
  - Where do you see evidence of both mercy and righteousness in this restoration?
  - How would you feel if you were part of this homecoming procession?
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### Baruch 5:1-9 (NIV)

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*1 Take off the garment of your sorrow and affliction, O Jerusalem, and put on forever the beauty of the glory from God. 2 Put on the robe of the righteousness that comes from God; put on your head the diadem of the glory of the Everlasting. 3 For God will show your splendor everywhere*

*under heaven. 4 For God will give you evermore the name, "Righteous Peace, Godly Glory." 5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. 6 For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne. 7 For God has ordered that every high mountain and the everlasting hills be made low and the valleys filled up, to make level ground, so that Israel may walk safely in the glory of God. 8 The woods and every fragrant tree have shaded Israel at God's command. 9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

### 3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

#### Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who read confidently. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose readers who can bring emotional weight to the transformation narrative.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1, 3 (Jerusalem's transformation from mourning to glory) **Reader 2:** Verses 4, 6 (The homecoming of scattered children) **Reader 3:** Verses 7, 9 (God's preparation and leadership for the return)

Listen for the contrast between exile and restoration. Notice how God doesn't just undo the exile but transforms the entire situation into something glorious.

#### Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this passage?" or "What confused you?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Don't worry about having the "right" questions. The best questions are the ones you really want to explore. For example, you might wonder about specific word choices, about the imagery, about how this applies today, or about apparent contradictions. You have three minutes to discuss and agree on your questions.

## Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Build on their curiosity to explore the tension between mercy and righteousness.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around imagery, God's motivation, the relationship between mercy and righteousness, and contemporary application.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that this exile was genuinely traumatic, not just inconvenient?"
  - "How does the language about clothing and transformation connect to God's character?"
  - "Where specifically do you see mercy in action in this passage? Where do you see righteousness?"
  - "Why do you think the text emphasizes God's joy in leading Israel home?"
  - "How might mercy and righteousness work together rather than compete in this restoration?"
  - "What current situations remind you of this pattern of exile and restoration?"
  - "What if Israel had been restored without righteousness? What would be missing?"
  - "Why might this vision of restoration give hope rather than just wishful thinking?"
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### Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? God's restoration isn't about ignoring what went wrong or pretending it never happened. Instead, his mercy addresses the pain while his righteousness addresses the underlying problems. The joy comes from the fact that both his love and his justice are fully expressed in the restoration. This isn't cheap grace that ignores justice, or harsh justice that ignores mercy, it's complete restoration that flows from God's complete character.

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### 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see situations that need both mercy and justice, not one or the other, but both working together? Think about broken relationships, school conflicts, family tension,

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social media drama, or larger issues in your community.

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### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Friend conflicts where someone was hurt but you want the friendship restored, not just forgotten
  - Family situations where consequences are necessary but healing is also needed
  - School incidents involving bullying, cheating, or exclusion that require both accountability and restoration
  - Social media conflicts where public wrongs need both acknowledgment and forgiveness
  - Community or social justice issues where both healing and structural change are needed
  - Personal failures where you need both to face consequences and receive grace
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Different situations may require different approaches. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice. Some restoration takes time.

### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen mercy and justice work together to create real healing?"
  - "What helps you discern when a situation needs both accountability and grace?"
  - "How do you tell the difference between true restoration and just sweeping things under the rug?"
  - "What would it look like to approach conflict with both God's mercy and righteousness in mind?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: God's restoration brings joy precisely because it flows from his complete character. He doesn't have to choose between mercy and righteousness, they work together in his nature. This means that real restoration in our lives will also involve both grace and truth, both healing and accountability. It's not easy or simple, but it's complete.

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This week, pay attention to situations in your relationships or community where both mercy and justice might be needed. Instead of assuming they conflict, ask yourself: how might both be part of the solution? Notice when cheap grace ignores real problems, and when harsh judgment ignores the possibility of healing.

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You did excellent thinking today, wrestling with a genuine tension instead of accepting easy answers. Keep asking hard questions about how God's character shows up in real-world restoration. The world needs people who understand that mercy and justice belong together.

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## Grades 4, 6

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Ages 9, 11 • 30 Minutes • Interactive Storytelling + Activity

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God's restoration includes both kindness and fairness, creating healing that really lasts and really fixes the problem.

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### If Kids Ask "Why did God let his people get taken away in the first place?"

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Say: "Sometimes when people make harmful choices, there are real consequences. But God never stopped loving them or planning to help them. The exciting part is how God brings them back."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had something broken that you really cared about, maybe a favorite toy, a phone, a friendship, or something else important to you. Now raise your hand if someone tried to "fix" it but didn't really fix the problem underneath, so it broke again later.

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Here's a harder question: Imagine your friend borrowed something precious to you and broke it, but they also felt genuinely sorry and wanted to make things right. Part of you might want them to understand how much they hurt you and face some consequences. But another part of you might want your friendship back and for them to have a chance to show they've changed.

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Those feelings make complete sense. You want fairness, for them to understand the impact and take responsibility. But you also want kindness, for healing and restoration to be possible. Sometimes adults tell us we have to choose between being fair and being kind, but what if we don't have to choose?

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This reminds me of the movie "Inside Out" where Riley's feelings seem to compete with each other until they learn to work together. Or like in "Frozen" where Elsa has to learn that love and responsibility can both be part of the solution, not competing against each other.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to have both fairness and kindness at the same time. How do you hold someone accountable while also leaving room for healing? How do you address real problems while still showing love?

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Today we're going to hear about God's people who had been separated from their home because of bad choices and their enemies' actions. But God had a plan to bring them back that included both his fairness and his kindness working together. Let's find out what happened and how God's restoration really works.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to broken items and friend conflicts. Acknowledge their experiences briefly: "That sounds frustrating" or "That makes sense." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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A long time ago, God's people lived in a beautiful city called Jerusalem. It was their home, where their families had lived for generations, where their temple stood, where they felt safe and close to God.

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But over time, some of the people made choices that hurt others and turned away from God. There were also enemies who wanted to destroy their city. Eventually, Jerusalem was attacked and many people were taken far away from home as prisoners.

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Imagine how that would feel. You wake up one day and soldiers force you to leave everything behind, your house, your pets, your favorite places, even your family members. You have to walk for weeks to a strange country where nobody speaks your language.

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Think about what that would be like. You'd feel scared, angry, sad, and confused. You might wonder: Does God still care about us? Will we ever see home again? Did God forget about us because we made mistakes?

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The people lived in this foreign country for many years. Some of them had children who had never even seen Jerusalem. Some of the older people wondered if they would die before ever seeing home again.

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But God hadn't forgotten them. Even when they couldn't see him working, God was making a plan. He was preparing something amazing, not just to bring them back, but to make their return even more wonderful than they could imagine.

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God spoke through his prophet, giving them a message that would change everything. The message wasn't just "You can come home now." It was much bigger and more exciting than that.

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God told them to get ready because something incredible was about to happen. Instead of the sad, torn clothes they'd been wearing during their time of sadness, God said they would put on beautiful clothes that showed God's glory.

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But here's what made this restoration so special, it wasn't just God being kind and ignoring the problems. And it wasn't just God being fair and making them stay in exile forever. Instead, God found a way to be both perfectly kind and perfectly fair at the same time.

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God said to his people, "Look toward the east and see your children being gathered from everywhere, from the west and the east, because I have remembered them and I am bringing them home."

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#### **Baruch 5:5-6 (NIV)**

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*5 Arise, O Jerusalem, stand upon the height; look toward the east, and see your children gathered from west and east at the word of the Holy One, rejoicing that God has remembered them. 6 For they went out from you on foot, led away by their enemies; but God will bring them back to you, carried in glory, as on a royal throne.*

Can you imagine the excitement? These people had walked away from their home as prisoners, tired and sad. But God was bringing them back like royalty, carried in glory! It was like going from being a prisoner to being a prince or princess.

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But God wasn't finished. He wanted to make sure the journey home was safe and beautiful. So God commanded the mountains to become lower and the valleys to be filled up, creating a smooth, safe path for his people to walk on.

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Even the trees provided shade for the travelers! Everything in creation was working together to welcome God's people home.

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And then came the most beautiful part of all. The Bible says God wasn't reluctantly bringing them back or doing it because he had to. Instead, God was leading them with joy!

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**Baruch 5:9 (NIV)**

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*9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

Did you hear that? God leads with joy, mercy, and righteousness all at the same time. His mercy meant he was incredibly kind, forgiving their mistakes and healing their hurts. His righteousness meant he was completely fair, making sure the real problems were solved and justice was done.

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This is amazing because it shows us that God doesn't have to choose between being kind and being fair. His character is so complete that both mercy and righteousness flow from who he is.

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The people experienced a homecoming like no other. They went from exile to celebration, from sadness to joy, from separation to reunion. And it all happened because God's restoration involved both his kindness and his fairness.

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What happened next was that families were reunited, the city was rebuilt, and the people learned that God's love never stopped, even during the hardest times. They discovered that God's way of restoring things doesn't just put a bandage on the problem, it actually heals and fixes what was broken.

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The immediate result was celebration, gratitude, and a deeper understanding of who God is. People who thought they were forgotten realized they had always been remembered. People who thought they were condemned realized they were beloved.

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This homecoming became a story that people told for generations, reminding them that God's restoration is both kind and fair, both loving and just. It became a picture of how God works in all of our lives.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face situations where things are broken and need to be fixed. Maybe it's a friendship that's been hurt, a family situation that's difficult, or consequences from choices we've made.

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What we learn from this story is that God's way of restoration includes both mercy and righteousness. He doesn't ignore the real problems, but he also doesn't ignore the possibility of healing and new beginnings.

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The core truth is this: when God restores things, he does it with joy because both his kindness and his fairness are part of the solution. This means we can trust that God's restoration really works and really lasts.

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**Pause here.** Let the story sink in for 5 seconds before moving on.

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine you had to leave your home and everything you loved because enemies forced you out. You've been away for years, and suddenly someone tells you that you can come home, but not just walking back sadly, you get to come back like royalty with everyone celebrating. How do you think you would feel hearing that news?

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**Listen For:** "Excited," "happy," "can't believe it's real", affirm: "Yes! It would be almost too good to believe after being sad for so long."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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In our story, God could have just said "Come home" or he could have said "Stay in exile forever because of your mistakes." Instead, he did something that included both mercy and justice. Why do you think God chose to include both kindness and fairness in his restoration plan?

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**If They Say:** "Because God is nice", respond: "Yes, and what else? What would happen if he was only nice but not fair, or only fair but not kind?"

#### Question 3: The God Way

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The story says God led his people with joy. He wasn't grumpy about helping them or reluctant to bring them home. He was actually happy to do it! What does this tell us about what God is like when he helps

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us with our problems?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why God's restoration feels so different from just getting a second chance, he actually delights in helping us."

#### Question 4: The Real World

Think about a situation where someone hurt you or you hurt someone else. If you wanted to fix the problem using both kindness and fairness like God did, what would that look like? What would be different from just ignoring what happened or just being mad forever?

**If They Say:** "You'd have to talk about it", encourage: "Good! What else would need to happen for both people to feel like it was truly resolved?"

These are really thoughtful answers. You're starting to see how God's way of fixing things is different from our usual ways. Instead of choosing between kindness and fairness, God shows us that both can work together to create healing that really lasts. Now let's experience what this kind of cooperation feels like.

#### 4. Activity: The Homecoming Bridge (8 minutes)

**Zero Props Required** , This activity uses only kids' bodies and empty space.

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces that mercy and righteousness work together by having kids physically experience how cooperation creates a pathway home that neither mercy nor righteousness could create alone. Success looks like kids discovering that the best solutions require both elements working together, not competing.

##### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to build "The Homecoming Bridge." I need you to divide into three groups. Group 1, you are the "Mercy" team, your job is to make the journey as comfortable and gentle as possible. Group 2, you are the "Righteousness" team, your job is to make sure the path is safe and stable. Group 3, you are

the "People Coming Home", you'll travel across the bridge the other teams create.

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Here's the challenge: Mercy team, you can only use soft, gentle movements and you want to make everything comfortable. Righteousness team, you can only make strong, stable structures and you want to make sure everything is secure. The tricky part is that the bridge won't work unless both teams cooperate.

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At first, I want each team to try building their part of the bridge separately. Mercy team, make the most comfortable path you can imagine. Righteousness team, make the strongest, most secure path possible. Let's see what happens when you work separately first.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like God's restoration, mercy and righteousness have to work together to create a pathway home that is both safe and healing.

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### **During the Activity(4 minutes)**

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Phase 1: Let each team try to build their version of the bridge separately for 2 minutes. The mercy team will create something comfortable but probably unstable. The righteousness team will create something sturdy but probably uncomfortable.

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The struggle will become obvious quickly. When the "People Coming Home" try to cross the mercy-only bridge, it will be comfortable but unsafe. When they try the righteousness-only bridge, it will be stable but harsh. Both have problems.

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Coaching phrases: "I notice the mercy bridge feels good but seems wobbly... I notice the righteousness bridge is strong but might be hard to cross... I wonder if there's a way both teams could help each other..."

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The breakthrough comes when teams realize they need to combine their strengths. Encourage them: "What if righteousness provides the foundation and mercy provides the comfort?" or "What if mercy makes it welcoming and righteousness makes it last?"

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Once they've succeeded in building a bridge that's both stable and comfortable, have the "People Coming Home" cross it and celebrate how both elements made the journey possible.

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**Watch For:** The moment when teams start cooperating instead of competing, this is the physical representation of mercy and righteousness working together in restoration.

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## **Debrief(1 minute)**

What did you notice about how it felt when mercy and righteousness tried to work separately versus when they worked together? The mercy-only bridge felt good but wasn't safe for the long journey. The righteousness-only bridge was strong but wasn't comfortable or welcoming. But when both teams cooperated, you created something that was both safe and healing, just like God's restoration. The people coming home got both the security they needed and the comfort they deserved.

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## **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

Here's what we learned today: God's restoration includes both mercy and righteousness because both are part of who he is. He doesn't have to choose between being kind and being fair, they work together in his character. When God fixes broken things in our lives, he does it with both healing kindness and lasting fairness.

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This doesn't mean that restoration is always easy or that it happens immediately. Sometimes real healing takes time because God is addressing the real problems, not just covering them up. But we can trust God's restoration because it includes both his mercy and his righteousness.

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The amazing result is that when God restores things, they don't just go back to how they were before, they become better. The healing is real, the solutions last, and the joy comes from knowing that both love and truth were part of the process.

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## **This Week's Challenge**

When you face a conflict or problem this week, ask yourself: "How might both kindness and fairness be part of the solution?" Instead of choosing one or the other, look for ways that mercy and justice could work together. Notice when problems get truly solved versus just temporarily ignored.

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## **Closing Prayer (Optional)**

*Dear God, thank you for showing us that mercy and righteousness work together in your character. Help us learn to solve problems the way you do, with both kindness and fairness. When we face difficult situations this week, help us remember that your restoration brings real healing and lasting solutions. Amen.*

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# Grades 1, 3

Ages 6, 8 • 15, 20 Minutes • Animated Storytelling + Songs

## Your Main Job Today

Help children understand that God brings his people home with joy because he loves them and wants to help them.

## Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
- **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

## If Kids Don't Understand

Compare God bringing his people home to a parent joyfully welcoming their child home after being away, then ask "How does it feel when someone is happy to see you?"

## 1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love and joy. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God Is So Good," or "This Is the Day." Use movements: clap hands during joy lyrics, point up to God during verses about God, hug yourself during love lyrics.

Great singing! I could hear the joy in your voices. Let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because I have an exciting story to tell you about how God brings his people home with joy, just like we were singing about.

## 2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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**Formation:** Kids sitting in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing you. Move around inside the horseshoe as you tell the story.

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound sad when describing exile, sound joyful when describing homecoming, sound strong and warm when you're speaking as God.

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Today we're going to meet God's special people who lived in a city called Jerusalem. They loved their home very much.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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But one day, something very sad happened. Bad people came and made God's people leave their home. They had to walk far, far away to a different country where they didn't know anyone.

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*[Use sad voice and facial expression]*

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The people felt very sad and scared. They missed their home so much. They wondered, "Does God still love us? Will we ever see our home again?"

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change to hopeful tone]*

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But God had not forgotten his people! Even though they couldn't see him, God was making a wonderful plan to bring them home.

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*[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]*

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God said to his people, "Get ready! Take off your sad clothes and put on beautiful, happy clothes! I am going to bring you home, and it's going to be amazing!"

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*[Move to side, sound excited]*

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The people could hardly believe it! They were going to see their home again!

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**Baruch 5:9 (NIV)**

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*9 For God will lead Israel with joy, in the light of his glory, with the mercy and righteousness that come from him.*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you know what this means? God wasn't grumpy about helping his people. He wasn't sad about bringing them home. God was HAPPY to help them! God felt joy!

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

But God didn't just say "Walk home by yourselves." No way! God made the mountains smaller and the valleys higher so the path would be smooth and easy to walk on.

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

God even made the trees give shade to keep his people cool! Everything was working together to help God's people come home safely.

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

And you know what? When God's people walked home, they didn't walk like sad prisoners anymore. They walked like princes and princesses! They were so happy!

*[Speak with great excitement]*

Families that had been separated for years got to hug each other again! Children got to see their grandparents! Everyone was celebrating because they were home!

*[Pause dramatically]*

God brought his people home with joy because he loves them so much. God is both very kind and very good. He doesn't just help us because he has to, he helps us because he wants to!

*[Speak directly to the children]*

Sometimes in our lives, we feel sad or scared or far away from home. Maybe we feel lonely at school, or worried about our family, or sad about something that happened.

*[Move closer to the children]*

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When those things happen, you can remember this story. God loves you just like he loved his people. When God helps you, he's happy to help you. He wants good things for you!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God's love is both kind and good. He takes care of you because he loves you, and his love makes everything better. You are never forgotten by God!

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### **3. Discussion (5 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Have kids stand up and find a partner. Pairs scatter around the room with space to talk.

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Find a partner and stand facing each other! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk.

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**Teacher Circulation:** Walk around to each pair. Listen to their discussions. If a pair is stuck, ask "What do you think?" or rephrase the question more simply. Give them time to think, some kids need extra processing time.

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#### **Discussion Questions**

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*Select one question per pair based on class size. Save unused questions for next time.*

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1. How do you think God's people felt when they heard they could come home?
  2. What would it feel like to walk on the smooth path God made for them?
  3. Why do you think God was happy to help his people come home?
  4. What would you want to do first if you came home after being away for a long time?
  5. How do you think the families felt when they saw each other again?
  6. What does it mean that God helped his people with joy?
  7. When have you felt happy that someone was coming home?
  8. How is God's love like a parent who misses their child?
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9. What are some ways God shows he loves you?

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10. When do you feel close to God?

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11. Why did God make the mountains smaller for his people?

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12. How do you think God feels when he helps you?

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13. What would you want to tell God about this story?

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14. When have you felt far away and then felt better?

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15. How can you remember that God loves you when you're sad?

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16. What's the best part about coming home?

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17. How does it feel when someone is excited to see you?

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18. What would you thank God for in this story?

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19. How can we show love to others like God shows love to us?

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20. What do you want to remember about God from this story?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

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#### **4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Standing in straight lines facing forward

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Select a song about God's care and love. Suggestions: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," "God Will Take Care of You," or "Amazing Love." Use movements: spread arms wide for "whole world," point to self for "you," make heart shape with hands for "love."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Remember how God brought his people home with joy? We can talk to that same loving God right now.

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#### **5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)**

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**Formation:** Sitting cross-legged in rows, heads bowed, hands folded

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*Dear God, thank you for bringing your people home with joy...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you love us and are happy to help us when we need you. When we feel sad or scared, help us remember this story...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for being both kind and good. Thank you for loving us so much. Help us show your love to others this week...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that your love makes everything better. We love you, God. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about God's love. Examples: "Thank you that you're happy to help us" or "Thank you for loving us like the people in the story."

Remember, God loves you with joy! When you need help this week, you can know that God is happy to help you, just like he was happy to bring his people home. Have a wonderful week!

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