

Character and Integrity

Volume 22

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Character and Integrity

Volume 22

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About This Series

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

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

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

True Love

When Love Means Speaking Up, How do you love someone while confronting their wrongs?

Leviticus 19:9-18

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

Leviticus 19:9-18 (NIV)

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

11 Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.

12 Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

13 Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

14 Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.

15 Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

16 Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord.

17 Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. 18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Context

These commands come from the Holiness Code in Leviticus, where God is teaching Israel how to live as a holy nation. The chapter begins with "Be holy because I, the Lord your God, am holy" and then provides specific, practical instructions for community life. This isn't abstract theology, it's a manual for daily relationships.

The famous "love your neighbor as yourself" command sits at the end of a series of very specific prohibitions about how not to treat people. God builds toward love through concrete examples of what love does and doesn't do in conflict, business, justice, and daily interaction. The progression is intentional: from external behaviors to internal attitudes to the positive command to love.

The Big Idea

Love your neighbor isn't about being nice, it's about choosing honest confrontation over hidden hatred, released grievances over stored revenge, and active concern over passive tolerance.

This challenges our culture's equation of love with niceness or conflict avoidance. True love requires difficult conversations, honest rebuke, and the courage to speak truth when someone is doing wrong. It means caring enough about the relationship to work through conflict rather than stuffing resentment or walking away bitter.

Theological Core

- **Heart versus behavior matters to God.** Hidden hatred in your heart is just as serious as outward revenge, both destroy community and contradict love.
- **Frank rebuke serves love.** Confronting someone directly about their wrong protects the relationship from the poison of unexpressed resentment and gives them opportunity to change.
- **Grudges are active choices to withhold love.** Bearing a grudge means choosing to keep someone's debt against them rather than releasing them to love, which blocks the relationship God desires.
- **Self-referential love provides the standard.** Loving your neighbor "as yourself" means wanting their good with the same intensity and practical concern you have for your own well-being.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Love sometimes requires difficult conversations that feel uncomfortable but serve the relationship's health and the person's good
- Hidden resentment and stored grievances are actually forms of hatred that destroy community from within
- Frank rebuke must be distinguished from hostile criticism through motive, method, and desired outcome
- Choosing to release grudges and actively seek someone's good even after they've wronged you reflects God's character

Grades 4, 6

- When someone does something wrong, it's better to talk to them about it than to stay quiet and get angry
-

- Keeping angry feelings inside makes relationships worse, not better
- Forgiving someone means choosing not to stay mad or get them back
- Sometimes doing the loving thing doesn't feel good, but it helps the other person and protects the friendship

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to love people by helping them do what's right
- God helps us not stay mad at people who hurt us
- We can choose to forgive and be kind instead of being mean back

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Equating love with niceness.** True biblical love sometimes requires difficult conversations and honest confrontation. Teaching kids that love means "being nice" sets them up to avoid necessary conflicts and enables harmful behavior in others.
- **Promoting conflict avoidance as virtue.** The command to rebuke frankly directly contradicts the cultural preference for keeping peace by staying silent. False peace that suppresses conflict actually breeds hidden resentment.
- **Ignoring the progression from heart to behavior.** The passage moves deliberately from internal attitudes (hatred in heart) to external actions (revenge, grudge) to positive command (love). All three levels matter to God.
- **Missing the self-referential standard.** "Love your neighbor as yourself" isn't about self-esteem but about applying the same practical concern for their welfare that you naturally have for your own. This provides concrete guidance for what love looks like.

Handling Hard Questions

"What if someone won't listen when you try to rebuke them?"

The goal of frank rebuke isn't to control the outcome but to fulfill your responsibility in love. You speak truth clearly and kindly, then release the results to God. If they refuse to listen, you've still chosen love over hidden resentment. The rebuke protects your heart from hatred and gives them the opportunity to change, even if they don't take it immediately.

"How do you know when rebuke is loving versus just being mean?"

Loving rebuke aims to restore the relationship and help the person, while mean criticism aims to hurt or control. Ask yourself: Am I speaking because I want their good or because I want them to feel bad? Am I addressing their behavior or attacking their character? Am I willing to forgive if they change, or am I just looking for an excuse to reject them?

"What if forgiving someone just lets them keep hurting you?"

Forgiveness and boundaries are different things. Releasing your grudge doesn't mean accepting ongoing harm. You can forgive someone's debt against you while still protecting yourself from future damage. Love sometimes requires saying "I forgive you, but I won't put myself in position to be hurt this way again" until they demonstrate real change.

The One Thing to Remember

Real love is not the absence of conflict but the courage to work through conflict honestly, releasing resentment and choosing the other person's good even when it's hard.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the central tension between love and confrontation, helping them discover that biblical love sometimes requires difficult conversations rather than conflict avoidance. Let them explore the complexity rather than providing simple answers.

The Tension to Frame

How do you love someone while confronting their wrongs? When does speaking up serve love, and when does it become destructive criticism?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate that this feels counterintuitive, most students equate love with "being nice" and avoiding conflict
 - Honor the difficulty of distinguishing loving rebuke from hostile criticism, this requires wisdom and maturity
 - Let students wrestle with real scenarios from their lives rather than giving them theoretical answers to apply
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine your best friend starts spreading rumors about people in your group. At first you ignore it, hoping it will stop. But it gets worse. Now you're watching friendships fall apart because of lies, and you know exactly who's causing it. Part of you wants to confront your friend directly, but another part says "If I really loved them, I'd just stay out of it and keep being nice."

Most of us were taught that love means being supportive and avoiding conflict. We think confronting someone about their wrong behavior is the opposite of love, something angry or judgmental people do. So we stay silent, try to be patient, and hope the problem goes away. Meanwhile, the behavior continues and our friendship slowly dies from hidden resentment.

But what if everything we've been taught about love and conflict is backwards? What if staying silent when someone is hurting themselves or others isn't actually loving at all? What if real love sometimes requires the courage to have difficult conversations that feel uncomfortable but serve the relationship's health?

Today we're looking at one of the most famous commands in the Bible, "love your neighbor as yourself", except it's buried in the middle of some very specific instructions about conflict, resentment, and honest confrontation. Pay attention to what comes right before the love command. Notice what God says about hatred, rebuke, revenge, and grudges.

Open your Bibles to Leviticus 19:9-18 and begin reading silently. Ask yourself: What does this teach me about what love actually looks like when relationships get messy?

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students. Help with pronunciation if needed. Watch for early finishers and let them re-read or think about the questions. Let the weight of these commands sink in, this isn't just about being nice.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors does God prohibit in these verses?
 - Why might God command people to "rebuke frankly" rather than stay silent?
 - What's the connection between hatred in your heart and revenge in your actions?
 - How would you feel if someone followed these instructions with you when you did something wrong?
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Leviticus 19:9-18 (NIV)

9 When you reap the harvest of your land, do not reap to the very edges of your field or gather the gleanings of your harvest. 10 Do not go over your vineyard a second time or pick up the grapes that have fallen. Leave them for the poor and the foreigner. I am the Lord your God.

11 Do not steal. Do not lie. Do not deceive one another.

12 Do not swear falsely by my name and so profane the name of your God. I am the Lord.

13 Do not defraud or rob your neighbor. Do not hold back the wages of a hired worker overnight.

14 Do not curse the deaf or put a stumbling block in front of the blind, but fear your God. I am the Lord.

15 Do not pervert justice; do not show partiality to the poor or favoritism to the great, but judge your neighbor fairly.

16 Do not go about spreading slander among your people. Do not do anything that endangers your neighbor's life. I am the Lord.

17 Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. 18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who read clearly and confidently. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose readers who can handle the weight and authority of these commands.

Reader 1: Verses 9-12 (Commands about generosity and honesty) **Reader 2:** Verses 13-16 (Commands about justice and neighbor protection) **Reader 3:** Verses 17-18 (Commands about conflict and love)

Listen for the tone and intensity, these aren't suggestions but commands from God about how his people treat each other in community.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups by asking "What surprised you most about these commands?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 real questions about what we just read. Not questions you already know the answers to, but things you're genuinely curious or confused about. For example, "Why does God put 'rebuke your neighbor' right next to 'love your neighbor'?" or "How is holding back wages the same as lying or stealing?" Ask what you're actually wondering about. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the tension between rebuke and love.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board or flip chart. Look for themes around conflict, love, and practical application. Start with questions most students will relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do you notice about the progression from verse 17 to 18, hatred to rebuke to revenge to love?"
 - "Why might staying silent when someone does wrong actually be unloving rather than loving?"
 - "What's the difference between 'bearing a grudge' and having normal hurt feelings after someone wrongs you?"
 - "How would frank rebuke protect you from 'sharing in their guilt', what does that mean practically?"
 - "When you think about loving someone 'as yourself,' what does that look like in terms of wanting their good?"
 - "What makes rebuke 'frank' versus harsh or mean, what would distinguish loving confrontation from hostile criticism?"
 - "If someone followed these instructions with you when you did something wrong, how would you want them to approach you?"
 - "Why do you think this command about loving neighbors is considered one of the most important in the Bible?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? God puts the famous "love your neighbor" command right after very specific instructions about conflict management. It's like he's saying, "Here's what love actually looks like when relationships get messy: don't hide your hatred, do speak honestly, don't seek revenge, don't hold grudges, and then actively seek their good." Love isn't the absence of conflict; it's the courage to work through conflict in ways that heal rather than destroy.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension playing out, the choice between staying silent to "keep the peace" versus speaking up because you care? Think about school, family, friendships, social media, even bigger issues in our community or world.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a friend is making destructive choices (drinking, harmful relationships, cheating) and you're torn between loyalty and honesty
 - Family dynamics where people avoid conflict by staying silent, leading to years of built-up resentment
 - Friend group drama where gossip and passive-aggression replace honest conversation
 - Social media culture that encourages public shaming rather than private, honest confrontation
 - Witnessing bullying, racism, or injustice and choosing between personal comfort and speaking up for what's right
 - Personal relationships where you stuff anger and resentment rather than addressing the real issues
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Facilitation: Let students share specific examples without rushing to provide answers. Some situations are genuinely complex and call for wisdom. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone confront another person in a way that actually strengthened their relationship?"
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- "What would help you distinguish between loving rebuke and just venting your frustration at someone?"
- "How do you decide when to speak up about someone's behavior and when to let it go?"
- "What's the difference between forgiveness and just pretending everything is fine?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Real love is not the absence of conflict but the courage to work through conflict honestly. Sometimes love means having difficult conversations that feel uncomfortable but serve the relationship's health and the other person's good. This isn't easy, it requires wisdom, courage, and genuine care for the person, not just your own comfort.

This week, pay attention to moments when you're tempted to stay silent while resentment builds inside you. Ask yourself: "What would it look like to address this honestly in a way that serves love rather than just venting my frustration?" Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is refuse to let someone continue in behavior that's hurting them or others.

I'm genuinely impressed by the depth of thinking you did today. These are complex issues that many adults struggle with. Keep wrestling with hard questions about what love actually looks like when life gets messy. You have the wisdom and courage to love people well, even when it requires difficult conversations.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that love sometimes means speaking up when someone is doing wrong, rather than staying silent and getting angry inside.

If Kids Ask "What if they get mad at me for saying something?"

Say: "That might happen, and it's okay to feel scared about that. But sometimes doing the loving thing is hard. If you say it kindly and because you care about them, you're doing the right thing even if they don't like it at first."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever seen someone doing something they shouldn't be doing, maybe cheating, being mean to someone, breaking a rule, and you weren't sure whether to say something or just stay quiet. Keep your hands up if it was hard to decide what to do.

Now here's a harder question: Have you ever stayed quiet when someone was doing something wrong, but then you started feeling angry or frustrated with them inside your head? Maybe you thought things like "That's not fair" or "They shouldn't be doing that" but you never actually said anything to them?

That feeling makes total sense. Part of you wants to speak up because you know what they're doing is wrong. But another part of you thinks "If I really cared about them, I'd just be understanding and not make them feel bad." So you try to be nice and stay quiet, but inside you're getting more and more frustrated.

It's like when Elsa in Frozen tries to hide her powers to protect everyone, but the more she hides them, the more dangerous and out-of-control they become. Sometimes trying to avoid conflict by staying quiet actually makes things worse, not better.

The tricky part is figuring out when being loving means speaking up about something wrong, even if it feels uncomfortable. How do you know when to say something and when to let it go? How do you say it in a way that helps instead of just making them mad?

Today we're going to hear about some instructions God gave his people about exactly this situation. God told them how to love their neighbors when those neighbors were doing things that were hurting themselves or others. And what God said might surprise you, because it's different from what most people think love looks like. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to the dilemma of wanting to speak up but being afraid. Affirm their instincts briefly and keep moving toward the story to find answers together.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture this: God has rescued the Israelites from slavery in Egypt, and now they're learning how to live as free people who follow God. They're camped in the wilderness, and Moses is teaching them God's rules for how to treat each other in their new community.

These weren't just random rules, they were instructions for people who had to live together, work together, and solve problems together. Some people were rich, some were poor. Some were honest, some were tempted to cheat. Some had power, some didn't. They needed to know how to love each other when life got complicated.

So God started giving them very specific examples of what love looks like in real life. He didn't just say "be nice to each other." He gave them detailed instructions about fairness, honesty, justice, and how to handle conflict when people did things wrong.

Imagine you're sitting around the campfire, listening to Moses speak God's words. The fire crackles as his voice carries across the camp, and everyone is listening carefully because these are the rules that will shape their new life together.

Moses begins: "When you harvest your crops, don't take every single thing for yourself. Leave some for people who don't have enough, the poor and the foreigners living among you. Share what God has given you."

"Don't steal from each other. Don't lie to each other. Don't cheat each other or break promises you make in God's name. Don't hold back someone's paycheck when you owe it to them."

The people nod, this makes sense. These are ways to treat people fairly and honestly. But then Moses continues with something that might have surprised them.

"Don't make fun of people who can't hear you, and don't put obstacles in front of people who can't see them. Don't be unfair in court just because someone is rich or poor, judge everyone honestly."

You can imagine some people thinking, "Okay, but what about when someone IS doing something wrong? What if they're hurting people or making bad choices? Are we supposed to just ignore it and pretend everything is fine?"

That's when Moses delivered the part that probably shocked everyone, because it was so different from what they expected.

Leviticus 19:17 (NIV)

17 Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt.

Wait, God said to rebuke your neighbor? That means to tell them directly when they're doing something wrong. Not whisper about it to other people, not just hope they figure it out, not pretend it's okay when it's not. Speak up frankly and honestly.

This probably felt scary to some people. "But what if they get mad at me? What if they don't want to be my friend anymore? Isn't it more loving to just be patient and understanding?"

But God explained why frank rebuke is actually more loving than staying silent: if you don't speak up when someone is doing wrong, you end up sharing in their guilt. Their bad choices start affecting you and the whole community.

Leviticus 19:18 (NIV)

18 Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself. I am the Lord.

Then came the famous command that Jesus would later call one of the most important rules of all: "Love your neighbor as yourself." But notice where God put this command, right after instructions about honest rebuke and not holding grudges.

God was teaching them that real love isn't just being nice when everything is going well. Real love means caring enough about someone to speak up when they're making bad choices that hurt themselves or others. It means not letting angry feelings build up inside your heart until you're secretly hating them.

When you love someone "as yourself," you want good things for them just like you want good things for yourself. If you were doing something that was hurting you or other people, you'd want someone who cared about you to help you see it and change, right?

The people listening began to understand: Love isn't about avoiding all conflict. Love is about handling conflict in a way that heals relationships instead of destroying them. It's about speaking truth because you care, not because you want to hurt someone.

When someone does something wrong and you stay silent while getting angry inside, that's not love, that's hiding your true feelings and letting resentment grow. When someone does something wrong and you lash out to hurt them back, that's revenge, not love.

But when someone does something wrong and you speak to them honestly because you want their good and the good of your community, that's what God calls real love. It's hard, it takes courage, and it doesn't always feel good, but it's what heals relationships and helps people grow.

Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice those Israelites did: Do we speak up when someone is doing wrong, or do we stay silent and hope the problem goes away? God's answer is clear, love speaks up, but it speaks up to help, not to hurt.

What we learn from this is that loving someone means wanting their good so much that you're willing to have difficult conversations when necessary. It means choosing honest words over hidden anger, and forgiveness over getting revenge.

This is still one of the hardest things about loving people well, knowing when and how to speak truth that serves their good, even when it's uncomfortable for both of you.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Inside Feelings

Think about a time when someone was doing something that bothered you or seemed wrong, but you didn't say anything. Maybe a friend was being mean to someone else, or someone was cheating, or breaking a rule that affected you. What did it feel like inside when you stayed quiet? Did those feelings get better or worse over time?

Listen For: "Angry," "frustrated," "like it wasn't fair", affirm: "Those feelings make sense. When we see wrong and can't do anything about it, it bothers us inside."

Question 2: The Fear Factor

What makes it scary to speak up when someone is doing something wrong? What are you worried might happen if you say something? Now flip it around, if you were doing something that was hurting yourself or others, how would you want a friend to approach you about it?

If They Say: "They might get mad" or "They might not be my friend anymore", respond: "Those are real worries. What would help you feel brave enough to do the right thing anyway?"

Question 3: The Love Connection

God says that speaking up when someone is doing wrong can actually be a way of loving them. How does that work? How is it possible that telling someone they're making a bad choice could be more loving than just staying quiet and being supportive?

Connect: "This is exactly what made God's instructions so surprising, real love sometimes means difficult conversations."

Question 4: The Results

What do you think happens to friendships when people never talk honestly about problems? What about when people do talk honestly but in a kind way? And what happens when people just get revenge or stay mad instead of working things out?

If They Say: "The friendship gets worse" for the first scenario, affirm: "Yes, hidden problems usually grow bigger, not smaller."

You're picking up on something really important: Love isn't always comfortable, but it always wants what's best for the other person. Sometimes that means having conversations that feel hard but help both of you grow.

4. Activity: Bridge Building (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that love means choosing to stay connected and work through problems rather than walking away or building walls. Success looks like kids discovering that they need honest communication and mutual effort to "rebuild" their connection when something goes wrong.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Bridge Building. Everyone find a partner and stand facing each other about arm's length apart. You and your partner are going to create a "bridge" by holding hands or linking arms, you're connected.

Here's the challenge: I'm going to call out different "problems" that happen in relationships. When I call out a problem, you have to decide together how to respond. You can either stay connected and work through it together, or you can "break the bridge" by letting go and turning away from each other.

But here's the twist: if you break the bridge, you'll need to figure out how to rebuild it before the next round. And we're doing this because it's exactly like what God was teaching about loving your neighbors, choosing to stay connected and work through problems instead of just walking away or staying angry.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round one: "Your partner borrowed something of yours and broke it." Watch what happens, some pairs will stay connected and talk it through, others will "break the bridge" by turning away or letting go.

If pairs break their bridge, call out: "Broken bridges need to be rebuilt! Figure out how to reconnect before the next problem." Watch them struggle to reconnect, some need to apologize, some need to talk, some just need to choose to link arms again.

Coaching phrases during rounds: "I notice some bridges are getting shaky, what do you need to say to each other? Remember, love chooses to stay connected and work it out. What would help you rebuild this bridge?"

Continue with: "Your partner didn't include you in something important," then "Your partner said something that hurt your feelings." Celebrate when pairs choose to stay connected and talk rather than break apart.

Final round: Have everyone look around at the bridges that stayed connected versus those that broke. Ask them to notice the difference, staying connected requires ongoing choice and communication, but

breaking is easy and leaves you isolated.

Watch For: The moment when pairs realize they have to choose to rebuild their connection after conflict, this is the physical representation of choosing love over grudges.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when your bridge stayed connected through problems versus when it broke apart? When you had to rebuild, what did that require? This is exactly what God was teaching, love chooses to stay connected and work through problems with honest words instead of breaking apart and staying angry. Sometimes the bridge gets shaky, but love does the hard work of rebuilding it.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to love our neighbors by speaking up when they're doing wrong, instead of staying silent and getting angry inside. Real love isn't just being nice when everything is easy, it's caring enough about someone to have difficult conversations that help them.

This doesn't mean being mean or bossy or trying to control everyone around you. It means choosing honest words over hidden anger, and choosing to forgive instead of getting revenge or holding grudges forever.

When we love people the way God wants us to, amazing things happen: friendships get stronger instead of weaker, problems get solved instead of hidden, and people help each other grow instead of just letting each other make mistakes.

This Week's Challenge

Pay attention to moments when someone is doing something that bothers you or seems wrong. Instead of just getting angry inside or talking to everyone else about it, ask God to help you find a kind way to speak directly to that person. Practice saying things like "I noticed... and I was wondering..." or "Can we talk about what happened?"

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for teaching us what real love looks like. Help us be brave enough to speak up when we need to, wise enough to know what to say, and kind enough to say it in a way that helps instead of hurts. Help us forgive people instead of staying mad, and help us love our neighbors the way you love us. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to love people by helping them do what's right and not staying mad at 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 helping someone do right to helping them when they're hurt, sometimes love means doing something that feels hard but helps the person.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or loving others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Love One Another," or "God's Love is So Wonderful." Use movements: point to self during "me," point to others during "one another," and make big spreading motions during songs about God's wonderful love.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our special story circle because I have an important story to tell you about how God wants us to love people. Come sit in a horseshoe shape so everyone can see.

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.

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for God's authoritative commands, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound wise and important when you're speaking God's words, sound like you're teaching something very special.

Today we're going to meet God's people learning how to love each other!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Long, long ago, God's people were living together like one big family. But sometimes people in families don't get along, right? Sometimes people do things that are wrong or mean.

[Look worried, scrunch up your face]

The people had a problem. When someone did something wrong, they didn't know what to do! Should they just be quiet and try to be nice? Should they get mad and be mean back?

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to wise and caring]

So God gave them special instructions about how to love each other. God said, "I want to teach you how to really love your neighbors."

[Move to center, speak with God's authority but warmly]

God said, "When someone does something wrong, don't just get mad inside your heart and stay angry. That's not good for you or for them."

[Move to side, sound like someone asking a question]

"But God," the people wondered, "what should we do instead? How do we love someone who is doing wrong things?"

Leviticus 19:17-18 (NIV)

Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your heart. Rebuke your neighbor frankly so you will not share in their guilt. Do not seek revenge or bear a grudge against anyone among your people, but love your neighbor as yourself.

[Pause and look around at each child]

God told them, "Speak to them honestly and kindly. Help them see what they're doing wrong so they can do better. Don't stay mad or try to get them back. Love them!"

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

This was a new idea! Most people thought being loving meant just being quiet and nice all the time. But God said loving someone means helping them do what's right.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

It's like when you see your little brother about to touch a hot stove. Do you stay quiet because you don't want to hurt his feelings? No! You speak up to help him stay safe!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

God's people learned that real love sometimes means saying, "What you're doing isn't good. I care about you, so I want to help you do better."

[Speak with excitement]

And when someone hurt them, instead of being mean back or staying mad forever, they learned to forgive! They chose to be kind even when it was hard!

[Pause dramatically]

God taught them that loving your neighbor means wanting good things for them just like you want good things for yourself!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, people do things that are wrong or mean. When that happens, God wants us to help them do better, not just ignore it or be mean back.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is being mean or doing wrong things, you can say, "That's not kind. Let's find a better way." And when someone hurts your feelings, you can choose to forgive them instead of staying mad.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you and wants to help you love others well! God will give you brave words to help people and a forgiving heart that doesn't stay angry.

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 them! I'm going to give each pair one 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

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

1. How do you think God's people felt when they learned about helping others do right?
 2. When has someone helped you do the right thing?
 3. What's the difference between being helpful and being bossy?
-

4. What would you do if you saw someone being mean to another person?

5. How does it feel when someone forgives you after you do something wrong?

6. Why do you think God wants us to love people even when they're not nice?

7. What happened when God's people started loving each other this way?

8. When is it hard to help someone do the right thing?

9. How can you love someone in your family who sometimes does wrong things?

10. What would happen if everyone helped each other do right instead of being mean?

11. Why did God tell people not to stay angry?

12. How do you love someone who hurt your feelings?

13. What does God do when we do something wrong?

14. When do you need to be brave to love someone?

15. What's good about forgiving people instead of staying mad?

16. What did you learn about loving your neighbors?

17. How can you remember to help people do right?

18. What can you ask God to help you with?

19. What would happen if no one ever helped anyone do better?

20. How can you be like God's people who learned to love well?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about loving others or helping. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "I Will Be Kind," or "Helper of All." Include movements: hug yourself during "love," point to others during "one another," and reach out helping hands during helping songs.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer. Sit criss-cross in your rows and fold your hands.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us how to love people the right way.

[Pause]

Help us be brave enough to help people do what's right, even when it feels hard to speak up.

[Pause]

Help us forgive people who hurt us instead of staying mad, and help us love our neighbors like you love us.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and helping us love others well. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about loving others. Examples: "Help me forgive my sister" or "Help me be brave when I need to speak up."

Remember, God wants us to love people by helping them do right and forgiving them when they hurt us. Have a wonderful week showing God's love to everyone you meet!

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# Upside-Down Greatness

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*Servant Leadership, How do we tell real servant leadership from fake?*

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**Mark 10:35-45**

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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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**Mark 10:35-45 (NIV)**

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*35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."*

*41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

## Context

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This passage follows Jesus's third prediction of his death and resurrection. The disciples have just heard Jesus explain that he will be handed over to the chief priests, condemned to death, mocked, flogged, and killed, then rise after three days. Despite this sobering prophecy, James and John approach Jesus with an audacious request for positions of power in his coming kingdom.

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The timing reveals everything about the disciples' mindset. They're thinking political kingdom, complete with royal courts and positions of honor, while Jesus is speaking of sacrifice and suffering. When the other ten disciples hear about this power grab, they become "indignant", not necessarily because they're morally outraged, but likely because James and John beat them to the punch.

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## The Big Idea

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**Jesus deliberately contrasts the world's automatic pattern of power, domination and control, with the kingdom pattern of power expressed through service.**

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This isn't naive idealism that ignores how power normally works. Jesus explicitly acknowledges that Gentile rulers "lord it over" people and "exercise authority" over them, he knows exactly how conventional power operates. But he establishes a radical alternative: greatness measured by service, leadership expressed through sacrifice, and authority exercised for others' benefit rather than self-advancement.

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## Theological Core

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- **Power Inversion.** In God's kingdom, the normal power dynamics are turned upside down, the last become first, the servant becomes great, and the leader becomes slave of all.
  - **Jesus as Model.** Christ himself demonstrates this pattern by coming not to be served but to serve, ultimately giving his life as a ransom, the ultimate expression of power through sacrifice.
  - **Contrast with Worldly Authority.** Jesus doesn't eliminate leadership but redefines it, showing that kingdom authority operates on completely different principles than conventional power structures.
  - **Service as Greatness.** True greatness isn't measured by how many people serve you, but by how faithfully you serve others, especially those with less power or status.
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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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- True servant leadership involves examining power structures and motivations, not just individual acts of service
  - The challenge of servant leadership is that it can be performed for appearance while actual power dynamics remain unchanged
  - Jesus's model of leadership requires genuine sacrifice and vulnerability, not just strategic humility
  - Discerning authentic servant leadership requires looking at outcomes for the least powerful, not just good intentions
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### Grades 4, 6

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- Great leaders help other people succeed and feel important
  - Being in charge means taking care of people, not just telling them what to do
  - When you choose to serve others instead of being selfish, everyone benefits
  - Sometimes doing the right thing as a leader feels hard, but it's still the right choice
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### Grades 1, 3

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- Jesus teaches us to be helpers, not bossy people
  - God likes it when we help others instead of just wanting to be first
  - We can be like Jesus by serving other people
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Romanticizing Powerlessness.** Jesus doesn't eliminate leadership but redefines it. Avoid suggesting that all authority is bad or that Christians should never exercise power.
  - **Ignoring Structural Issues.** Don't reduce this to individual niceness while leaving harmful power structures intact. Servant leadership involves examining and changing systems, not just personal attitudes.
  - **Enabling Manipulation.** Be careful not to encourage people to accept poor treatment in the name of "servant leadership." Jesus critiques the abuse of power, not the existence of power.
  - **Missing the Christological Center.** This isn't just about leadership techniques, it's about following Jesus's pattern of sacrificial love. Keep the focus on Christ's model, not just general principles of good management.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"How can we tell if someone is really serving or just trying to look good?"**

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Look at the outcomes for people with less power. Genuine servant leadership consistently empowers others, shares decision-making, and creates space for other people's success. Performative service tends to keep the "servant" at the center of attention and doesn't actually redistribute power or privilege. Ask: Who benefits? Who gets credit? Who has a voice in decisions?

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### **"Doesn't servant leadership just make you a doormat that people walk all over?"**

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Jesus models servant leadership while also challenging injustice, confronting hypocrisy, and standing up to abuse. Servant leadership isn't about avoiding conflict or never saying no, it's about using whatever power you have for others' benefit rather than your own advancement. Sometimes serving people means setting boundaries or challenging harmful behavior.

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### **"This sounds impossible in the real world where you have to compete to succeed."**

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Jesus explicitly acknowledges how worldly power works, he's not naive about competition and hierarchy. But he's establishing an alternative community with different values. While we live in systems shaped by self-interest, we can create pockets of kingdom culture wherever we have influence. The goal isn't to change every system instantly but to live out God's values in whatever sphere we inhabit.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**True greatness is measured not by how many people serve you, but by how faithfully you serve others, and that's a harder, more complex calling than it initially appears.**

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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 servant leadership and performative service. Help them develop discernment about power dynamics and explore what structural servant leadership looks like in practice.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we distinguish authentic servant leadership from strategic humility that manipulates for greater power and influence?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their cynicism about leaders who claim to be servants, many have experienced manipulation disguised as service
  - Honor the complexity of power structures, this isn't about simple individual choices but about systemic change
  - Let them wrestle with hard examples rather than providing easy answers about complicated leadership situations
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about a leader you actually respect, maybe a teacher, coach, boss, political figure, or someone in your family. What makes you respect them? I'm guessing it's not just that they have a title or position. There's something about how they use their power that feels different from leaders who make you want to roll your eyes.

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Now think about leaders who claim to be "servant leaders" or talk about being humble, but something feels off about it. Maybe they say all the right words about serving others, but somehow they always end up getting more power, attention, or credit. You can sense the performance underneath the humility.

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This tension isn't new. In today's passage, we're going to see Jesus address this exact issue with his disciples, who had just asked for power positions in his kingdom. But instead of just telling them not to want power, Jesus does something more interesting, he redefines what power is supposed to look like.

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As we read, pay attention to how Jesus contrasts two completely different approaches to leadership. Notice that he doesn't ignore how power normally works, he explicitly names it, but then establishes a radical alternative.

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Open your Bibles to Mark 10, starting at verse 35. We'll begin with the disciples' request that set up this whole conversation.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Some students will finish quickly, let them sit with the passage rather than rushing ahead. Notice their facial expressions as they read; this passage often generates strong reactions.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What motivated James and John to make their request, and why did the other disciples get angry?
  - How does Jesus describe the way worldly power typically operates?
  - What specific alternative does Jesus propose, and how is it different?
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- How does Jesus's own example illustrate this principle?

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### Mark 10:35-45 (NIV)

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*35 Then James and John, the sons of Zebedee, came to him. "Teacher," they said, "we want you to do for us whatever we ask." 36 "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked. 37 They replied, "Let one of us sit at your right and the other at your left in your glory." 38 "You don't know what you are asking," Jesus said. "Can you drink the cup I drink or be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with?" 39 "We can," they answered. Jesus said to them, "You will drink the cup I drink and be baptized with the baptism I am baptized with, 40 but to sit at my right or left is not for me to grant. These places belong to those for whom they have been prepared."*

*41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. 43 Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who can handle the dramatic tension. Let students pass if they're not comfortable reading aloud. Choose confident readers for Jesus's words.

**Reader 1:** Verses 35-37 (James and John's request) **Reader 2:** Verses 38-40 (Jesus's response about the cup) **Reader 3:** Verses 41-45 (The other disciples' anger and Jesus's teaching)

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Listen for the tension and emotion here. This isn't just a polite theological discussion, there's real conflict, ambition, and frustration happening among people who have been following Jesus together.

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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 and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this passage?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about, confused by, or want to explore further. Good questions often start with "Why do you think..." or "What would happen if..." or "How is this different from..." 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 lecturing. Look for connections between different groups' questions.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around power, motivation, and practical application. Start with questions that will resonate with most students.

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

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- "What evidence do we have about James and John's motivations, were they just being selfish or could there be other factors?"
  - "Jesus says rulers 'lord it over' people. What does that look like in practice, and why is it the default pattern?"
  - "How is being a 'servant' different from being a 'slave of all', is Jesus escalating the language for emphasis or making a distinction?"
  - "What makes servant leadership hard to fake? What would we look for to verify if someone is genuinely serving or performing service?"
  - "Jesus uses himself as the ultimate example. How does 'giving his life as a ransom' demonstrate servant leadership?"
  - "What would structural servant leadership look like in a school, workplace, or government, how do you change systems, not just attitudes?"
  - "What would have happened if James and John had gotten the positions they wanted? How might that have changed the early church?"
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- "Why does this matter for us today? What's at stake if we get leadership wrong?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus doesn't just tell them not to want power, he acknowledges that power exists and will be exercised. But he's establishing a completely different operating system. Instead of power flowing upward to benefit the leader, it flows downward to benefit others. The measure of greatness isn't how many people serve you, but how faithfully you serve others. And that's harder to fake than you might think.

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. You have more power than you probably realize, in friend groups, family dynamics, extracurriculars, social media influence, academic settings. Where do you see this tension between serving and being served playing out in your actual world?

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Group projects where someone takes credit for others' work versus leaders who make sure everyone's contributions are recognized
  - Family situations where older siblings either help younger ones succeed or use their position to control them
  - Social dynamics where popular people either include others or use their influence to maintain exclusive groups
  - Online spaces where influencers either platform others or use followers for their own benefit
  - Student government or team leadership that either empowers others or just enjoys the status
  - Workplace scenarios where managers either develop employees or use their position for personal advancement
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**Facilitation:** Let students share specific examples without rushing to easy answers. Acknowledge that some situations involve complex power dynamics where simple servant leadership isn't sufficient to address systemic problems.

## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone in power genuinely use it to help others succeed, and how did you recognize that it was authentic?"
  - "What would help you exercise whatever power you have more like Jesus describes and less like the typical pattern?"
  - "How do you discern between someone who's genuinely serving and someone who's performing humility for strategic reasons?"
  - "What's the difference between servant leadership and just being a pushover who never challenges anything?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: servant leadership isn't about being nice or avoiding conflict, it's about using whatever power you have for others' benefit rather than your own advancement. That's harder and more complex than it initially sounds, because it requires constantly examining your motivations and outcomes, not just your intentions.

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This week, pay attention to the power dynamics around you. Notice when you see genuine servant leadership in action and when you see performative humility that's really about gaining influence. Notice your own opportunities to choose service over self-promotion, even in small situations. Experiment with what it feels like to measure your success by how well others do, not just how well you do.

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I was impressed by your willingness to wrestle with hard questions today. Keep thinking about this stuff, the world needs leaders who understand the difference between power that serves and power that consumes. You're already developing that discernment, and that gives me hope.

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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 real leadership means helping others succeed and feel important, not just being in charge or telling people what to do.

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### **If Kids Ask "Why did James and John ask for the best seats?"**

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Say: "They thought being important meant having the best positions. But Jesus showed them that being important means helping others feel important too."

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#### **1. Opening (5 minutes)**

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Raise your hand if you've ever been chosen to be the line leader, team captain, or group leader for something. Keep your hand up if it felt really good to be picked for that special job. Now raise your hand if you've ever seen someone be a leader in a way that made you think, "Wow, I wish I could be on their team" versus someone who was bossy and made you think, "I do NOT want them in charge."

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Here's a harder question: Think about a time when you were chosen to be in charge of something, maybe leading a group project, being the older cousin watching younger kids, or being team captain. Part of you probably thought, "This is great! Now I can do things my way and everyone has to listen to me!" But another part might have thought, "Oh no, what if I mess this up? What if people don't like how I do things?"

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Those feelings are totally normal. It feels good to be important and have people respect you. But it can also feel scary because you want to do a good job. Sometimes when we're nervous about leading, we get bossy because we think that's what leaders do. Or sometimes we get excited about the power and forget about taking care of the people we're supposed to lead.

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This is like in the movie Frozen when Elsa becomes queen. She has all this power and responsibility, but she doesn't know how to use it to help people instead of hurting them. Or think about Simba in The Lion King, he has to learn that being king isn't about getting to do whatever you want, but about taking care of everyone in the pride lands.

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The tricky part is figuring out: what does it really mean to be a good leader? Is it about being the smartest, the strongest, or the one who gets to make all the decisions? Or is there something completely different that makes someone truly great?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus's closest friends got into a big fight about who was the most important. But instead of just telling them to stop fighting, Jesus taught them something that

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changed everything about what it means to be great. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will likely relate to wanting to be important and the confusion about how to be a good leader. Acknowledge their experiences briefly and keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Jesus had been traveling around with his twelve special friends, called disciples, for a long time. They had seen him heal sick people, teach amazing things, and do incredible miracles.

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Two of these friends were brothers named James and John. They had big personalities and lots of confidence. People called them "Sons of Thunder" because they were loud and passionate about everything!

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As they walked along the dusty roads with Jesus, James and John started thinking about the future. They believed Jesus was going to become a king and set up an amazing kingdom. And if Jesus was going to be king, that meant there would be important positions in his government!

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Imagine how excited they must have felt! They thought, "We've been with Jesus from the beginning. We're some of his closest friends. Surely we deserve the best jobs when he becomes king!" Their hearts were probably beating fast with anticipation.

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So James and John came up with a plan. They approached Jesus when the other disciples weren't paying attention. "Teacher," they said, trying to sound casual, "we want you to do something special for us."

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Jesus looked at them carefully. He could probably see the excitement and ambition in their eyes. "What do you want me to do for you?" he asked, even though he probably already had a good idea what was coming.

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James and John exchanged glances. This was their big moment! "When you become king and sit on your throne in glory, let one of us sit at your right side and the other at your left side, the most important positions in your kingdom!"

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They were basically asking for the top jobs, like being vice presidents or prime ministers. They wanted everyone to know they were the most special, the most important, the ones closest to the king.

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Jesus looked at them with love, but also with sadness. "You don't understand what you're asking for," he said gently. "The path to real greatness is very different from what you think."

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**Mark 10:41-42 (NIV)**

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*41 When the ten heard about this, they became indignant with James and John. 42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."*

Oh no! The other ten disciples found out what James and John had asked for, and they were MAD. Not just annoyed, they were furious! Why? Because they probably wanted those same important positions for themselves!

Picture the scene: twelve grown men getting into an argument about who was most important, who deserved the best spots, who should be first. They were probably raising their voices, pointing fingers, and generally acting like siblings fighting over the biggest piece of cake.

Jesus saw what was happening and called them all together. He could see their angry faces and hurt feelings. But instead of just telling them to stop fighting, he decided to teach them something that would change their whole understanding of greatness.

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**Mark 10:43-45 (NIV)**

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*43 "Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, 44 and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. 45 For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

Jesus's words hit them like a thunderbolt. "Not so with you", meaning, "You're going to do things completely differently." He was turning their whole world upside down!

Instead of the greatest person being the one who gets served by everyone else, the greatest person would be the one who serves everyone else. Instead of the first person being the one who gets the best treatment, the first person would be the one who makes sure others get the best treatment.

Then Jesus said something that probably made their mouths drop open. "Look at me," he said. "I'm the Son of God, but I didn't come to earth to have people wait on me hand and foot. I came to serve others,

even to the point of giving my life to rescue people."

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The disciples stood there in stunned silence. Everything they thought they knew about being important was wrong. Jesus was showing them that real greatness isn't about being served, it's about serving. Real leadership isn't about having power over people, it's about using your power to help people.

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This was like discovering that the way to win a race is to make sure everyone else crosses the finish line first. It was completely backwards from everything they'd been taught about success and importance.

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Sometimes in our lives, we think being important means getting the best stuff, being first in line, or having people do what we want. But Jesus shows us that real importance comes from helping others succeed, making others feel special, and using whatever abilities we have to make life better for the people around us.

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What we learn is that true greatness isn't measured by how many people serve you, but by how well you serve others. When you choose to help instead of just trying to be boss, amazing things happen, people feel loved, teams work better, and everyone benefits.

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The amazing truth is that when we follow Jesus's example of servant leadership, we discover something wonderful: helping others succeed feels even better than just succeeding ourselves. And that's the secret to real greatness.

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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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Think about James and John asking for the best seats next to Jesus. Imagine you and your best friend went to your teacher and said, "When you pick someone to help you with the special end-of-year party, can we have the most important jobs?" How do you think you would feel asking that question? Excited? Nervous? Proud? A little sneaky?

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**Listen For:** "Excited," "Nervous," "Proud", affirm: "Yes! It would feel exciting to imagine being chosen for something special, and also nervous about asking."

## Question 2: The Anger

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When the other ten disciples heard what James and John had asked for, they got really mad. But think about it, why were they angry? Was it because they thought James and John were being unfair, or was it because they wished they had asked first? What do you think was really going on in their hearts?

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**If They Say:** "They wanted those jobs too", respond "Exactly! Sometimes when we get mad at someone, it's really because they did what we wanted to do."

## Question 3: The Surprise

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Jesus said the way to be great is to be a servant, and the way to be first is to help everyone else. That's the exact opposite of what most people think! If you were one of the disciples hearing this for the first time, what would be going through your mind? Would this sound exciting, confusing, disappointing, or something else?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly how the disciples felt, confused but also curious about what Jesus meant."

## Question 4: The Application

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Think about a time when someone was in charge of you, maybe a team captain, group leader, or older sibling, and they made you feel important and helped you do your best. Then think about a time when someone in charge made you feel small or unimportant. What was different about how these two people used their leadership?

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**If They Say:** Examples of good vs. bad leadership, respond "Great examples! You can tell the difference between someone who serves others and someone who just wants to be boss."

You're getting it! The difference between good leaders and bad leaders isn't about how smart they are or how loud their voice is. It's about whether they use their position to help others succeed or just to make themselves feel important. Now let's experience what this looks like.

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## 4. Activity: The Success Tower (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 servant leadership by having kids physically experience how helping others succeed actually makes the whole group stronger. Success looks like kids discovering that lifting others up creates more stability and joy than trying to climb to the top alone.

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

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We're going to build Success Towers using only ourselves, no props needed! Divide into groups of 6-8. Each group will try to create the tallest, most stable human tower they can, but here's the key: everyone must be supporting or being supported by someone else.

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The challenge is that the traditional way to build towers is to have strong people on bottom and lighter people climb on top. But your job is to make sure every single person feels important and successful, not just the person who gets to be on top. You have to figure out roles for everyone that make them feel valuable.

---

Here's the twist: every 2 minutes, you have to change the design so that people in different positions get to experience both supporting others and being supported. The goal isn't just height, it's making sure everyone feels proud of their contribution.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus taught his disciples: real success comes when everyone in the group succeeds, not when one person gets to be on top while others just serve them.

---

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

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First phase: Let them start building. Watch for groups where some kids immediately take charge and others get relegated to less "important" positions. Notice which groups include everyone in planning versus those where leaders make all the decisions.

---

The struggle: As they realize everyone needs to feel important, some groups will struggle with rotating positions. Some kids will want to stay in "leadership" spots, while others might be content to always support but miss the chance to be valued.

---

Coaching phrases: "I notice some people haven't had a chance to be in a key position yet... I wonder how you could redesign this so everyone feels proud... What if the person who's been supporting others got to try a different role?"

---

The breakthrough: Celebrate when groups figure out ways to make everyone feel valuable, when they cheer for each person's contribution, when they rotate thoughtfully, when they redesign to include everyone's strengths.

---

Completion: Once they've successfully rotated and everyone has contributed meaningfully, have them notice how different this feels from competitive tower-building where only the top person matters.

---

**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to help another person shine instead of claiming the spotlight, this is the physical representation of servant leadership.

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

---

What did you notice about how it felt when everyone in your group was important versus when only some people got the "good" spots? The coolest thing is that when everyone felt valued, your towers were actually stronger and more fun to build! That's exactly what Jesus was teaching: when leaders focus on making others successful, the whole team wins.

---

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

---

Here's what we learned today: real greatness isn't about being the boss or getting the best position. Real greatness is about using whatever power or influence you have to help other people feel important and succeed. Jesus showed us that the best leaders are the ones who serve others, not the ones who demand to be served.

---

This doesn't mean you should let people walk all over you or never have opinions. It means that when you're in charge of something, whether it's a group project, helping with younger kids, or even just planning what games to play, you think about how to make everyone feel included and important, not just how to get your own way.

---

The amazing result is that when you lead by serving others, people actually want to follow you! They trust you, they feel safe with you, and everyone has more fun. That's the secret power of servant leadership.

---

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

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This week, look for one opportunity to be a servant leader. Maybe help a sibling feel important, include someone new in your friend group, or make sure everyone's ideas get heard in a group project. Notice how it feels to measure your success by how well others do, not just how well you do.

---

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

---

*Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us that real greatness comes from serving others. Help us to be leaders who make other people feel important and valued. When we're tempted to just think about ourselves, remind us of your example of love and service. Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids learn that Jesus teaches us to be helpers instead of bossy people.

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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 Jesus being a servant to a parent helping their children, they're still in charge, but they use their power to take care of others, not to be mean.

---

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about helping or serving others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "I Will Follow Jesus," or "Love One Another." Use movements: point to self during "me," spread arms wide for "love," and point to others during "one another."

---

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our special story shape. Today we're going to hear about Jesus teaching his friends something very important about being helpers instead of being bossy.

---

## 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 excited when talking about Jesus, sound silly when the disciples are arguing.

---

Today we're going to meet two of Jesus's friends named James and John!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

James and John were brothers who really, really wanted to be important. They had been following Jesus everywhere and seeing all the amazing things he did!

---

*[Make an excited face and rub hands together]*

---

One day, James and John had a big idea. They thought Jesus was going to be a king, and they wanted the best jobs in his kingdom, right next to his throne!

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak in a sneaky whisper]*

---

So they went to Jesus when the other friends weren't looking. "Jesus," they said, "when you become king, can we have the most special seats right next to you?"

---

*[Move to center, speak like Jesus with love and patience]*

---

Jesus looked at them with love. "You don't understand what you're asking for," he said gently.

---

*[Move to side, sound upset and angry]*

---

Uh oh! When the other ten friends found out what James and John had asked, they got really mad! They started arguing about who was most important!

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**Mark 10:42 (NIV)**

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*42 Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think Jesus was happy to see his friends fighting about who was most important? No! But instead of just telling them to stop, he taught them something amazing!

---

*[Move to center, speak with excitement and love]*

---

Jesus said, "In my kingdom, things are different! If you want to be great, you have to be a helper!"

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Then Jesus said something even more amazing: "Look at me! I'm God's son, but I didn't come to earth to have people wait on me. I came to help others!"

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

The friends' mouths probably dropped wide open! Jesus was turning everything upside down. He was saying that being great means being a helper, not being bossy!

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

This was like finding out that the way to win a game is to help everyone else win first! Jesus was showing them that real greatness comes from helping others, not from telling others what to do!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God loves it when we help others instead of trying to be the boss all the time. When we share, when we're kind, when we help someone who's sad, that makes us great in God's eyes!

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes at school or at home, we might want to be first in line, or get the best toy, or tell everyone what to do. But Jesus shows us something better: helping our friends feel special too!

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When someone is sad, you can be a helper by being kind. When someone needs help, you can share. When someone feels left out, you can include them. That's what Jesus does for us!

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

Jesus loves helpers! And when we help others just like Jesus helps us, we become great in God's family. That's the best kind of greatness there is!

---

### **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!

---

**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 James and John felt when they asked Jesus for the special seats?
  2. Why do you think the other friends got mad at James and John?
  3. What do you think it means to be a helper instead of being bossy?
  4. Can you think of a time when someone helped you feel special?
  5. What's different between a good leader and a bossy leader?
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6. How does it feel when someone helps you versus when someone is mean to you?

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7. What are some ways we can be helpers at school?

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8. What are some ways we can be helpers at home?

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9. Why do you think Jesus wanted to help people instead of being served?

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10. How can we be like Jesus by helping others?

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11. What would happen if everyone tried to be first and no one helped anyone?

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12. What would happen if everyone tried to help each other?

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13. When is it hard to be a helper instead of trying to be first?

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14. How does God feel when we help others?

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15. What's your favorite way to help someone?

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16. Who is someone who helps you a lot?

---

17. How can we remember to be helpers this week?

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18. What's the best thing about helping others?

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19. How does helping others make you feel inside?

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20. What did you learn about Jesus from this story?

---

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 songs about helping and kindness. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Helping Hands," or "Love Each Other." Use movements: clap hands together for "help," point to others for "one another," and make heart shapes with hands for "love."

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Remember what we learned about being helpers like Jesus.

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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 Jesus, thank you for teaching us to be helpers...*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Help us to be kind to our friends and family this week. Help us remember to share and help others instead of just thinking about ourselves...*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for being the best helper ever and for always taking care of us. Help us be like you by helping others...*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for loving us so much and for teaching us how to love others. 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 others. Examples: "Help me share with my sister" or "Thank you for my mom who helps me."

Remember, Jesus loves helpers! Look for ways to help others this week, just like Jesus helps us. Have a wonderful week being great helpers in God's family!

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# Victory by Vulnerability

*The Lamb's Way of Winning, How do we win without becoming what we fight?*

**Revelation 12:1-17**

## 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

**Revelation 12:1-17 (NIV)**

*1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. 6 The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.*

*7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

*10 Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. 12 Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."*

*13 When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. 14 The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. 15 Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. 16 But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. 17 Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.*

## Context

John receives this vision while exiled on Patmos during a time of intense persecution under Roman rule. The churches he's writing to face the daily reality of choosing between Caesar's demands and Christ's lordship, a choice that often meant imprisonment, loss of livelihood, or death. This cosmic vision reveals the spiritual dimensions behind their earthly struggles, showing them that their persecution connects to an ancient cosmic conflict between God's kingdom and the forces of evil.

The immediate context following this vision addresses specific churches facing specific pressures, some compromising with imperial cults to survive, others holding firm despite suffering. John has just described God's throne room and worship, and now reveals the cosmic war that gives meaning to their earthly battles. The vision serves to reframe their understanding of victory and defeat in light of the Lamb's ultimate triumph.

## The Big Idea

**Victory over the forces of evil comes not through matching their violent methods, but through Christ's blood, faithful testimony, and willingness to die rather than compromise.**

---

This challenges our automatic assumption that defeating enemies requires adopting their tactics. The cosmic battle is real and serious, but the weapons are entirely different from worldly warfare. The victory has already been won through vulnerability, the Lamb who was slain, and continues through those who follow the same pattern of sacrificial love rather than retaliatory force.

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## **Theological Core**

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- **The Blood of the Lamb.** Christ's sacrificial death is the foundational victory that enables all other victories over evil, providing both redemption and the pattern for overcoming.
  - **Faithful Testimony.** Truth-telling in the face of opposition becomes a weapon more powerful than lies and propaganda, even when it costs us dearly to speak it.
  - **Death-Acceptance.** Not clinging to life creates an undefeatable stance, those willing to lose everything cannot be coerced or controlled through threats.
  - **Non-violent Victory.** The cosmic pattern established by the Lamb demonstrates that ultimate victory comes through suffering love rather than inflicting suffering on others.
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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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- Victory in spiritual conflict operates by entirely different rules than worldly victory, vulnerability and truth rather than force
  - The tension between non-violent principles and protective instincts requires wisdom and discernment in specific situations
  - Faithful testimony means speaking truth even when it's costly, but this applies to spiritual truth rather than all opinions
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- Death-acceptance doesn't mean seeking death, but rather finding freedom from being controlled by fear of loss
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### Grades 4, 6

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- God's way of solving problems often looks different from the world's way, we win through love, not force
  - Telling the truth when it's hard takes real courage, but it's how we fight against lies and evil
  - Jesus's death defeated the worst thing (death and sin), so we can trust him to help us with our problems
  - Sometimes doing the right thing feels scary, but we can be brave because Jesus has already won
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### Grades 1, 3

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- Jesus is stronger than any bad thing, even when bad things happen, Jesus has already won
  - God helps us be brave when we tell the truth and do what's right
  - When we're scared, we can remember that Jesus loves us and will take care of us
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Pacifism vs. Protection Confusion.** This passage addresses cosmic spiritual warfare, not all earthly conflicts. Avoid making blanket statements about violence that ignore legitimate protection needs while still honoring the principle of non-violent victory.
  - **Judgment Imagery Contradiction.** Revelation contains both victory through vulnerability and divine judgment. Help students hold this tension rather than dismissing either element or forcing artificial harmony between them.
  - **Death-Seeking Misinterpretation.** "Not loving their lives" means freedom from being controlled by fear of death, not actively seeking martyrdom or devaluing life as a gift from God.
  - **Testimony as Opinion-Sharing.** "Word of their testimony" refers specifically to witness about Jesus and spiritual truth, not making every personal belief into a battleground requiring vocal
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defense.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Does this mean we can't defend ourselves or others when someone attacks us?"**

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This passage is specifically about victory over "the accuser", Satan, in spiritual warfare. It's describing how cosmic evil is defeated through Christ's pattern of sacrificial love. That doesn't automatically translate to every earthly situation involving protection or justice. We need wisdom to discern when we're dealing with spiritual opposition that calls for this response versus situations requiring other forms of faithful action, including protection of the vulnerable.

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### **"If God's judgment is coming anyway, why does it matter how we fight evil?"**

---

The pattern matters because it reflects who God is and who we're called to become. The Lamb's way of victory through vulnerability reveals God's character, he defeats evil through love, not by becoming evil himself. When we follow this pattern, we participate in God's true nature rather than mimicking the enemy's methods. Divine judgment belongs to God; our calling is to reflect the Lamb's way of overcoming through love.

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### **"What about when testimony puts other people in danger?"**

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Faithful testimony requires wisdom about when, where, and how to speak truth. The passage emphasizes willingness to die for our own faith, not putting others at risk unnecessarily. Sometimes protecting others requires strategic silence or careful timing. The principle is being uncompromising about truth when the choice is ours to make, while also being wise about consequences that affect others' safety.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**The cosmic battle is won through vulnerability and truth, not through matching evil's methods, and this victory is both already accomplished and still being lived out.**

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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 how non-violent victory through vulnerability applies to real situations where protection seems necessary. Help them explore the tension between cosmic truth and earthly complexity without forcing premature resolution.

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### The Tension to Frame

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How do we translate "not loving our lives" into practical situations where violence seems necessary for protection of ourselves or others?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their protective instincts, the desire to defend others shows love, not spiritual failure
  - Honor the complexity, this passage operates at the cosmic level, earthly applications require wisdom
  - Let them wrestle with apparent contradictions rather than rushing to neat answers
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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You're scrolling through social media and see a video of someone being harmed, maybe bullied at school, attacked on the street, or facing injustice from someone with power. Your immediate reaction is probably anger, maybe a desire to see the perpetrator face consequences or even get hurt back. That's a completely normal human response to witnessing evil.

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Part of your brain says, "They deserve whatever's coming to them," while another part might think, "Someone needs to stop this person before they hurt others." Both responses make sense, you're witnessing real harm, and something inside you wants justice and protection. These are good instincts, not spiritual failures.

---

Today we're looking at a cosmic vision that describes how evil is ultimately defeated, except the victory looks nothing like what we'd expect. Instead of overwhelming force meeting force, we see vulnerability defeating violence, truth overcoming lies, and people winning by being willing to lose everything.

As we read, notice the weapons used in this cosmic battle. Pay attention to what actually defeats the enemy, what breaks the cycle of violence and accusation. And watch for the tension between this cosmic pattern and the complex situations you face in everyday life.

Open your Bibles to Revelation 12. Take the next few minutes to read silently from verse 1 through 17, letting yourself feel both the drama of the cosmic conflict and any questions about how this applies to real life.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students, helping with difficult words like "scepter" or "accuser." Let them feel the weight and strangeness of this apocalyptic vision. Some may struggle with the symbolic language, assure them it's meant to be mysterious and powerful.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly is happening in this cosmic battle, who's fighting whom and how?
- What are the "weapons" mentioned in verse 11, and how do they work?
- What surprises you about how victory is described here?
- How would you feel if you were facing this kind of spiritual conflict?

### Revelation 12:1-17 (NIV)

*1 A great sign appeared in heaven: a woman clothed with the sun, with the moon under her feet and a crown of twelve stars on her head. 2 She was pregnant and cried out in pain as she was about to give birth. 3 Then another sign appeared in heaven: an enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns and seven crowns on its heads. 4 Its tail swept a third of the stars out of the sky and flung them to the earth. The dragon stood in front of the woman who was about to give birth, so that it might devour her child the moment he was born. 5 She gave birth to a son, a male*

child, who "will rule all the nations with an iron scepter." And her child was snatched up to God and to his throne. **6** The woman fled into the wilderness to a place prepared for her by God, where she might be taken care of for 1,260 days.

**7** Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. **8** But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. **9** The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.

**10** Then I heard a loud voice in heaven say: "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. **11** They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death. **12** Therefore rejoice, you heavens and you who dwell in them! But woe to the earth and the sea, because the devil has gone down to you! He is filled with fury, because he knows that his time is short."

**13** When the dragon saw that he had been hurled to the earth, he pursued the woman who had given birth to the male child. **14** The woman was given the two wings of a great eagle, so that she might fly to the place prepared for her in the wilderness, where she would be taken care of for a time, times and half a time, out of the serpent's reach. **15** Then from his mouth the serpent spewed water like a river, to overtake the woman and sweep her away with the torrent. **16** But the earth helped the woman by opening its mouth and swallowing the river that the dragon had spewed out of his mouth. **17** Then the dragon was enraged at the woman and went off to wage war against the rest of her offspring, those who keep God's commands and hold fast their testimony about Jesus.

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers willing to read dramatically. This is cosmic warfare, not quiet narration. Let students pass if they're not comfortable reading aloud.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-6 (The woman, dragon, and child) **Reader 2:** Verses 7-12 (The war in heaven and victory announcement) **Reader 3:** Verses 13-17 (The pursuit on earth)

This is cosmic drama, not just information. Listen for the tension between overwhelming evil and unexpected victory. Notice the emotions behind the cosmic conflict.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to come up with their most genuine questions. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What confused you most?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, not questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually curious or confused about. For example, "How does blood defeat an accuser?" or "What does not loving your life actually look like?" Ask what you genuinely want to understand. You have 3 minutes.

### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guide discovery rather than lecture. Let tension and complexity exist without forcing resolution.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes. Start with questions that reveal the strangeness of this victory pattern.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see in the text for how the victory was actually achieved?"
- "The accuser's primary weapon seems to be accusation, how do these three things defeat accusations?"
- "What would it look like in practice to 'not love your life so much as to shrink from death'?"

- "How do you hold together the non-violent victory here with the violent imagery elsewhere in Revelation?"
- "When might this pattern apply to conflicts in your actual life, and when might it not?"
- "How do we discern the difference between spiritual warfare and situations requiring protection or justice?"
- "If someone used this passage to justify never defending others, what would you say?"
- "Why does the text emphasize that this victory has cosmic significance, what's at stake beyond individual salvation?"

---

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? The victory comes through vulnerability, the blood of the Lamb who was killed, people willing to die rather than compromise, and testimony that reveals truth even when it costs everything. Evil is defeated not by matching its methods, but by maintaining a completely different pattern. It's like defeating a lie not by telling a bigger lie, but by telling the truth even when it hurts.

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

Let's get real about your lives. Most of you won't face literal martyrdom, but you will face situations where the world's way of "winning" conflicts with this pattern. Where do you see the same choice between matching evil's methods or maintaining vulnerability and truth?

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### Real Issues This Connects To

- Standing up to bullying, using social power or humiliation vs. truth-telling and non-participation
  - Family conflicts where you could "win" by manipulating guilt or using others' weaknesses against them
  - Online arguments where you could destroy someone's reputation vs. speaking truthfully about your own experience
  - Social media activism, exposing and shaming vs. bearing witness to truth in costly ways
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- Responding to systemic injustice through violence or through persistent truth-telling and sacrifice
- Personal integrity when lying would solve your problems and no one would ever know

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations are complex and call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket solutions.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone win a conflict through vulnerability or truth rather than force?"
- "What would help you choose the harder path when the easier path would solve your immediate problem?"
- "How do you discern between spiritual opposition that calls for this response vs. situations requiring protection?"
- "What's the difference between wisdom and compromise when it comes to costly truth-telling?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: The cosmic battle is real, evil is real, and the way to defeat evil is real, but it's completely different from what the world teaches us. Victory comes through the Lamb's pattern: sacrificial love, costly truth-telling, and freedom from being controlled by fear of loss. This doesn't make every earthly situation simple, but it gives us a different way to think about what real victory looks like.

This week, pay attention to moments when you could choose between the world's way of winning and the Lamb's way. Notice when you could use power, manipulation, or retaliation versus vulnerability, truth, and trust. You don't have to be perfect, but start observing the choice points and experimenting with different responses.

You asked really good questions today, the kind of questions that show you're taking this seriously instead of accepting easy answers. Keep wrestling with the tension between cosmic truth and earthly complexity. That wrestling is part of growing in wisdom and faith.

# Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God's way of solving problems often looks different from the world's way, we win through love and truth, not through force or fighting fire with fire.

## If Kids Ask "Does this mean we can never fight back when someone hurts us?"

Say: "This story is about how Jesus defeated the worst enemy of all. Sometimes we need to protect ourselves or others, but we always try to solve problems with love and truth first."

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever wanted to get back at someone who was mean to you. Keep your hands up if you've ever thought, "I want to be meaner to them than they were to me." I see a lot of honest hands, that's a completely normal feeling when someone hurts us.

Now here's a harder question: Imagine someone at school starts a rumor about your friend that's not true. The rumor is embarrassing and making your friend really sad. Part of you thinks, "I should start an even worse rumor about the person who did this." Another part thinks, "Maybe I should just ignore it and it'll go away."

Both of those feelings make sense. When we see someone we care about getting hurt, we want to make it stop. Sometimes we want the person who caused the pain to feel pain too. It's hard to know what to do when someone is being mean and you want to help your friend but you don't want to become mean yourself.

It's like that moment in movies when the good guy has the bad guy cornered, and you're not sure if the hero will choose to be like the villain or stay true to who they are. Think about Moana when she faces Te Kā, she could fight fire with fire, but instead she chooses to see the heart of Te Fiti underneath the anger.

The tricky part is figuring out how to stop bad things without becoming bad yourself. How do you fight against lies without telling worse lies? How do you stop meanness without being meaner? How do you win without turning into the thing you're fighting against?

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Today we're going to hear about the biggest battle that ever happened, a battle between good and evil in heaven itself. But the way the good guys win this battle might surprise you, because it doesn't look like winning at all. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids might share stories of times they wanted revenge. Acknowledge these briefly with "That makes sense" before moving toward the story to maintain momentum.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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This story begins in heaven, where something amazing and terrible was about to happen. Picture the most beautiful place you can imagine, brighter than any sunset, more peaceful than any place on earth. This was heaven, God's home.

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But John, who was watching this vision, saw signs appearing in the sky like giant movie screens. The first sign was a woman clothed with the sun itself, standing on the moon like it was her footstool, with twelve stars making a crown around her head. She was pregnant and about to have a baby.

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Then another sign appeared that made John's heart race with fear. An enormous red dragon with seven heads and ten horns. This dragon was so huge and powerful that when it whipped its tail, it knocked stars right out of the sky and sent them crashing to earth.

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Imagine being in a movie theater when the scariest villain you've ever seen appears on screen, except this was real, and the dragon had only one goal: to destroy the baby as soon as it was born. The dragon positioned itself right in front of the woman, waiting.

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But something amazing happened. The woman gave birth to her son, a child who would rule all nations, and at the moment of his birth, God snatched the baby up to safety, right to his throne in heaven. The dragon's plan was ruined!

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**Revelation 12:7-9 (NIV)**

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*7 Then war broke out in heaven. Michael and his angels fought against the dragon, and the dragon and his angels fought back. 8 But he was not strong enough, and they lost their place in heaven. 9 The great dragon was hurled down, that ancient serpent called the devil, or Satan, who leads the whole world astray. He was hurled to the earth, and his angels with him.*

War broke out in heaven itself! Michael the archangel and his angels fought against the dragon and his evil angels. This was the biggest battle ever fought, not with swords and shields, but with spiritual power beyond anything we can imagine.

The dragon was strong, terrifyingly strong. But he wasn't strong enough. God's angels won, and the dragon, who was really Satan, the enemy of everything good, was thrown out of heaven and hurled down to earth like a meteor crashing from the sky.

Then John heard a loud voice from heaven celebrating the victory, and this is what it said:

**Revelation 12:10-11 (NIV)**

*10 "Now have come the salvation and the power and the kingdom of our God, and the authority of his Messiah. For the accuser of our brothers and sisters, who accuses them before our God day and night, has been hurled down. 11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death."*

This is the most important part: how did God's people win this cosmic battle? Not by being meaner than the enemy. Not by fighting fire with fire. They won through three things that might sound weak but are actually the most powerful forces in the universe.

First, they won "by the blood of the Lamb." That means Jesus's death on the cross was what defeated evil. When Jesus died, he looked like he was losing, but actually he was winning the biggest victory of all time. His love was stronger than hate, his sacrifice was stronger than selfishness.

Second, they won "by the word of their testimony." That means they told the truth about Jesus even when it was scary or hard. They didn't fight lies with bigger lies, they fought lies with truth. They didn't spread rumors or try to destroy people's reputations. They just kept telling the truth about God's love.

Third, "they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death." This doesn't mean they wanted to die, it means they weren't controlled by fear. They were so sure of God's love and power that even the worst things couldn't make them give up or compromise.

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Think about this: the dragon's main weapon was being the "accuser." He would point fingers at people and say, "You're not good enough! You've made mistakes! God doesn't love you!" But these three weapons destroyed his accusations completely.

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When someone says, "You're not good enough," the blood of the Lamb says, "Jesus made you good enough." When someone says, "God doesn't love you," their testimony says, "I know God's love is real because I've experienced it." When someone tries to control them with threats, their fearlessness says, "You can't control me with fear."

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The dragon was furious because he had lost his power to accuse and control. But there was still a problem, now he was on earth, and he was angry. He went after the woman and her other children, which means people like us who follow Jesus.

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But here's the amazing thing: the same three weapons that won the cosmic battle still work today. When we trust in Jesus's love, tell the truth, and refuse to be controlled by fear, we're participating in the victory that's already been won.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face smaller versions of this same battle. Someone might lie about us, try to make us feel bad about ourselves, or scare us into doing wrong things. But we can remember that we have the most powerful weapons in the universe: Jesus's love for us, the truth about God, and courage that comes from knowing we're already safe in God's hands.

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The victory looked like losing at first, Jesus dying on the cross, people telling the truth even when it got them in trouble, being brave even when they were scared. But it was actually the greatest victory ever, and it's a victory we can be part of every day.

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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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Imagine you're one of the people watching this cosmic battle happen. You see this enormous dragon with seven heads and you know he wants to destroy everything good. What would you be feeling? Would you want to run and hide, fight back, or try to reason with the dragon? What would your first instinct be?

**Listen For:** "Run away," "Fight it," "Be really scared", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. Your brain would be trying to protect you from real danger."

### Question 2: The Surprising Weapons

The weapons that actually won this battle were Jesus's blood, telling the truth, and not being afraid to lose everything. If you were making a movie about this battle, would those seem like powerful weapons or weak ones? What would most movies show the heroes using instead?

**If They Say:** "Those don't sound like weapons" or "Movies would show swords and magic", respond: "What do you think made these 'weak' weapons stronger than all the dragon's scary power?"

### Question 3: The Real Victory

The dragon's main attack was being "the accuser", pointing at people and saying mean things to make them feel bad or scared. How do you think Jesus's love, telling the truth, and being brave would stop those kinds of attacks? What happens when someone tries to make you feel bad but you know you're loved?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why these weapons were so powerful, they attacked the real problem, not just the surface problem."

### Question 4: Our World Today

Think about times when someone has been mean to you or someone you care about. What would it look like to use these same three weapons, Jesus's love, truth, and courage, instead of being mean back? How might that change what happens?

**If They Say:** "But that's hard" or "What if it doesn't work", respond: "You're right, it is hard. What do you think would give you the courage to try it anyway?"

You're thinking like the people in this story who discovered that God's way of winning is different from the world's way, and it actually works better, even when it seems harder at first. Let's try an activity that helps us experience what this kind of victory feels like.

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#### **4. Activity: Victory 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 that true victory comes through vulnerability and cooperation rather than force by having kids physically experience how helping others and truth-telling creates a bridge over obstacles that force cannot cross. Success looks like kids discovering that the "weak" approach actually gets everyone across safely while the "strong" approach fails.

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

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We're going to build a Victory Bridge. I need everyone to line up on this side of the room, this represents people facing a big problem they can't solve alone. On the other side of the room is safety, but in between is a dangerous gap that you can't jump across by yourself.

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Here's the challenge: the gap is too wide for anyone to cross alone, and if you try to force your way across or push others, everyone falls. But there is a way to get everyone across safely. You'll need to figure out how to use the three weapons from our story, love (helping others), truth (honest communication), and courage (willingness to be vulnerable).

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The twist is this: the only way to build the bridge is by making yourself part of it. Someone has to be willing to become a bridge piece for others, and then others have to trust and help. We're doing this because it's exactly like how Jesus became the bridge for us, he made himself vulnerable so others could reach safety.

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You have 4 minutes to get everyone across. Remember: force fails, but vulnerability and cooperation succeed.

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

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Let them try different approaches first. Some will attempt to "force" their way across by running and jumping, which represents the world's way of solving problems through power. Let this fail naturally, they can't make the jump.

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Watch for the moment when someone suggests getting down on hands and knees to become a bridge piece, or when they start forming a human chain. This represents the vulnerable approach that actually works. Coach them toward cooperation without giving the answer away.

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Use coaching phrases: "I notice some approaches aren't working. What would it look like to help each other instead of doing it alone?" or "Remember, someone might need to make themselves vulnerable for others, like Jesus did for us." or "What happens when you communicate honestly about what you need?"

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Celebrate the breakthrough moment when they realize that making themselves part of the solution, becoming vulnerable to help others, actually gets everyone across. This is the physical representation of victory through vulnerability from the passage.

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Once they've succeeded, have them notice the difference: when they tried to force their way across individually, everyone failed. When they made themselves vulnerable to help others and worked together, everyone succeeded. The "weak" approach turned out to be the strong one.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to get down and become part of the bridge for others, this is the physical representation of victory through vulnerability, just like the Lamb's sacrifice.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you tried to force your way across versus when you helped each other? The forcing approach felt powerful but failed. The helping approach felt vulnerable but worked. That's exactly what happened in our cosmic battle, the dragon's force failed, but the Lamb's vulnerability succeeded. Real victory comes through love, truth, and courage, not through overpowering others.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God's way of solving big problems looks different from the world's way. Instead of fighting fire with fire, we fight lies with truth, hate with love, and fear with courage. Jesus won the biggest battle of all not by being meaner than his enemies, but by loving us so much he was

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willing to die for us.

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This doesn't mean we never protect ourselves or others when someone is being harmful. It means we try love, truth, and courage first, and we remember that real victory looks like everyone getting across the bridge safely, not like defeating enemies.

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The amazing result is that when we use God's weapons instead of the world's weapons, we actually solve problems instead of just creating bigger problems. We help people instead of hurting them back. We break cycles of meanness instead of continuing them.

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

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This week, when someone is mean to you or someone you care about, try using one of the three weapons: remember Jesus's love for you, tell the truth instead of spreading rumors or lies, or be brave enough to do the right thing even when it's scary. See what happens when you choose God's way instead of the world's way.

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

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*Dear God, thank you that Jesus won the biggest battle and that we're on the winning side. Help us remember when someone is mean to us that we can choose love over meanness, truth over lies, and courage over fear. Help us be bridge-builders like Jesus was for us. 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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids know that Jesus is stronger than any scary thing and that we can be brave when we remember how much Jesus loves us.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
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- **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 the dragon to the biggest, scariest monster they know from movies, then ask "What's stronger than any monster?", Jesus!

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

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about Jesus being strong or God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "My God is So Big," or "God is Bigger." Use movements: spread arms wide during "so big," point up during "God," and hug yourself during "loves me."

Great singing! Now let's sit in our special story horseshoe so I can tell you about the strongest person in the whole universe, Jesus! This is a story about how Jesus won the biggest fight ever.

### 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.

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound amazed when you talk about heaven, scared when you talk about the dragon, and excited when you talk about Jesus winning.

Today we're going to meet the strongest person who ever lived, Jesus! And we'll see how he won the biggest fight in the whole universe.

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

This story happened in heaven, which is the most beautiful place you can imagine. Everything sparkles, everything is perfect, and God lives there with Jesus.

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*[Use worried voice and facial expression]*

---

But then something scary appeared in heaven. A huge, terrible dragon! This dragon had seven heads and was red as fire. When he moved his tail, stars fell out of the sky!

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, use gentle voice]*

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The dragon wanted to hurt a special baby who was about to be born. But God had a plan to keep the baby safe.

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*[Move to center, speak with authority and strength]*

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When the baby was born, God snatched him up to heaven immediately! The dragon couldn't hurt him at all! God is always stronger than scary things.

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*[Move to side, sound like a brave superhero]*

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Then Michael the angel and all God's angels fought against the dragon. It was the biggest fight ever! And guess what? God's team won!

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**Revelation 12:11 (NIV)**

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*11 They triumphed over him by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony; they did not love their lives so much as to shrink from death.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you know how they won? Not by being scarier than the dragon. They won because of three special things that are stronger than any scary thing!

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*[Move to center, speak with love and warmth]*

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First, they won because of Jesus's love. Jesus loves us so much that he died on the cross for us. His love is stronger than any mean thing or scary thing!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Second, they won by telling the truth. They said, "Jesus loves us! God is good! God always wins!" When you tell the truth about Jesus, that's like using magic against scary things.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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Third, they won by being brave. They weren't afraid because they knew Jesus was taking care of them no matter what happened.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what? The dragon lost! He got thrown out of heaven like being thrown in the garbage! He was so angry because he couldn't win against Jesus's love!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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The big truth is this: Jesus is stronger than any scary thing. Dragons, monsters, bullies, nightmares, nothing is stronger than Jesus!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in your life, you might feel scared. Maybe someone is being mean to you, or you have bad dreams, or something makes you worried. But remember: Jesus is stronger than all of those things!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When you're scared, you can remember three things: Jesus loves you more than anything, you can tell the truth by saying "Jesus help me," and you can be brave because Jesus is taking care of you.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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Jesus already won the biggest fight, so you never have to be afraid that scary things will win. Jesus is the strongest, and he loves you the most!

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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. You have about one minute to share your ideas. There are no wrong answers, just talk about 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

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

1. What would you feel if you saw the scary dragon?
2. Why do you think Jesus's love is stronger than scary things?
3. What's something that makes you feel scared sometimes?
4. How can you remember that Jesus loves you when you're scared?
5. What would you say to someone who feels scared?
6. Why do you think God's angels won the fight?
7. What does it mean that Jesus already won?
8. When have you felt brave because someone loved you?
9. What's the difference between being scared and being safe?
10. How can telling the truth about Jesus help when you're scared?
11. What would you do if a friend was scared?
12. Why is love stronger than meanness?
13. What makes you feel safe and loved?
14. How can you be brave like the people in the story?
15. What do you want to remember about Jesus being strong?

16. When do you need to remember that Jesus loves you?

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17. What would happen if everyone knew Jesus was stronger than scary things?

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18. How can you tell someone else about Jesus's love?

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19. What's your favorite thing about this story?

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20. How does it feel to know Jesus has already won?

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

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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 being brave or Jesus being strong. Suggestions: "Be Strong and Courageous," "Jesus is Stronger," or "God is So Good." Include movements: flex arms during "strong," march in place during brave songs, point up during "Jesus."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time. Criss-cross applesauce in your rows, 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 that Jesus is stronger than any scary thing...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us remember when we feel scared that Jesus loves us more than anything and is always taking care of us. Help us be brave by remembering your love...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that we never have to be afraid that scary things will win because Jesus already won the biggest fight of all...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for your love that is stronger than everything. Help us tell others about how strong and loving you are. 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 feeling safe with Jesus. Examples: "Thank you that Jesus is stronger than monsters" or "Help me remember Jesus loves me when I'm scared."

Remember this week that Jesus is stronger than anything that scares you. When you feel worried, you can say "Jesus loves me and is taking care of me." Have a wonderful week, and keep being brave because Jesus has already won!

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# Standing Strong

*When Righteousness Inconveniences Others, Should we tone down our faith to avoid making waves?*

**Wisdom 2:10-24**

## 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

**Wisdom 2:10-24 (NRSV)**

*10 Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow or regard the gray hairs of the aged. 11 But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.*

*12 "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. 13 He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. 14 He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; 15 the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange.*

*16 We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father. 17 Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; 18 for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.*

*19 Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. 20 Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected."*

*21 Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, 22 and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls.*

*23 For God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, 24 but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.*

## Context

This passage from the Wisdom of Solomon, written in the first century BCE, presents the internal reasoning of the wicked as they justify persecuting the righteous. The book was written during a time when faithful Jews faced cultural pressure and sometimes outright persecution for maintaining their distinct way of life. The author gives voice to the oppressors' perspective, revealing their motivations and self-deception.

The passage is structured as a dramatic monologue, we're hearing the thoughts and plans of those who oppose righteousness. This literary technique exposes how the wicked rationalize their actions and reveals the deep-seated reasons behind persecution of the faithful. Early Christians recognized this passage as prophetic of Christ's passion, but its application extends to all who choose to live righteously in a world that often finds such living inconvenient.

## The Big Idea

**Righteousness naturally reproaches wickedness, making the righteous inconvenient to those who choose lawlessness, and this opposition is expected, not accidental.**

This isn't about being self-righteous or judgmental toward others. The passage reveals that simply living according to God's ways creates an uncomfortable contrast that exposes compromise and sin in others.

The righteous person doesn't need to preach or condemn, their very existence and manner of life serves as a living reproach to those who know better but choose otherwise.

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## Theological Core

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- **Righteousness as Reproach.** Holy living naturally exposes and challenges unholy living, even without words or intentional confrontation.
  - **Inconvenient Righteousness.** Those living righteously will find themselves creating friction simply by maintaining their standards and faith practices.
  - **Opposition Reveals Hearts.** The wicked's persecution of the righteous exposes their own spiritual condition and self-awareness of their wrong choices.
  - **God's Ultimate Vindication.** Though the wicked test and oppose the righteous, God sees and will ultimately protect and vindicate those who remain faithful.
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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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- Understand that authentic Christian living will sometimes create friction and opposition from others
  - Recognize the difference between being persecuted for righteousness versus being disliked for being judgmental
  - Learn to discern when to stand firm in faith and when accommodation might be appropriate
  - Develop courage to maintain convictions even when it costs socially or personally
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- Understand that making good choices sometimes makes other people uncomfortable or angry
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- Learn that being different for good reasons is worth the cost
- Recognize that people sometimes pressure others to join them in wrong choices
- Know that feeling scared or sad about opposition is normal, but we can still choose what's right

### Grades 1, 3

- God is happy when we choose what's right, even when others aren't
- God gives us courage to be good even when it's hard
- Sometimes people don't like it when we follow God, but God protects us

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Self-righteousness confusion.** This passage isn't about being judgmental or superior toward others, it's about understanding why living faithfully creates natural friction. Emphasize humility and love while maintaining convictions.
- **Persecution complex.** Not all opposition or discomfort is persecution for righteousness. Help students distinguish between facing consequences for being difficult versus facing opposition for living faithfully according to God's ways.
- **Withdrawal mentality.** The lesson isn't to avoid the world or become isolationist, but to understand and expect the cost of discipleship while remaining engaged and loving toward those who oppose us.
- **Prophetic overreach.** While this passage is understood to be prophetic of Christ's suffering, be careful not to overstate the parallels or suggest that every Christian's suffering directly mirrors Christ's passion without acknowledging the unique nature of his sacrifice.

## Handling Hard Questions

"Shouldn't we try to get along with everyone and avoid causing problems?"

Yes, we should be peacemakers and kind to everyone, but there's a difference between being needlessly difficult and standing firm in our convictions. Jesus himself said he came to bring peace, but also acknowledged that following him would sometimes divide even families. The goal isn't to cause trouble, but to be faithful even when faithfulness creates discomfort. We can love people while maintaining our standards, and sometimes loving them well means not compromising what we believe is true and right.

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**"What if I'm wrong about what God wants? What if I'm being stubborn about something that doesn't really matter?"**

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This is a wise question that shows spiritual maturity. Not every preference or tradition is worth fighting for, we need wisdom to discern what's truly essential versus what's cultural or personal. Seek counsel from mature believers, study Scripture carefully, and pray for discernment. Focus on core convictions about how God calls us to live, rather than secondary issues. When in doubt, err on the side of love and humility while holding fast to what Scripture clearly teaches.

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**"Why does God allow righteous people to suffer if he's supposed to protect them?"**

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God's protection doesn't always mean preventing all difficulty or suffering, sometimes it means sustaining us through it and using it for good purposes. This passage ends with confidence in God's ultimate vindication, not necessarily immediate rescue. Throughout Scripture, we see that following God sometimes leads through valleys of suffering, but God is present in those valleys and works through them. The promise is that nothing can ultimately separate us from God's love, and that he will ultimately make all things right.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Living righteously will sometimes inconvenience others and create opposition, this is normal, expected, and not a sign that we're doing something wrong.**

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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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Help students understand why faithfulness sometimes creates friction and guide them to develop wisdom about when to stand firm versus when to show flexibility. The goal is courage with humility, not self-righteousness with stubbornness.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Should we tone down aspects of our faith or moral standards when they make others uncomfortable, or is there value in the discomfort our convictions create?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of feeling pressure to compromise or fit in, this is real and difficult
  - Help them distinguish between being persecuted for righteousness versus being disliked for being judgmental or difficult
  - Let them wrestle with specific scenarios rather than giving easy answers to complex situations
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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You're hanging out with friends after school, and someone suggests doing something you know isn't right, maybe cheating on tomorrow's test, or spreading gossip about someone, or going somewhere you're not supposed to be. You say you'd rather not, and suddenly the whole mood shifts. "Come on, don't be so uptight." "You think you're better than us?" "Why do you have to make everything complicated?"

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In that moment, part of you wants to give in just to make the tension go away. It would be so much easier to go along with it. After all, it's not like you're hurting anyone by making a big deal about it, right? Maybe you're being too rigid, too judgmental. Maybe you should just relax your standards a little bit so everyone can get along.

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But then there's this other part of you that knows something important is happening here. Your presence, your different choice, has suddenly revealed something about the situation that everyone was trying to ignore. Without saying a word, you've made everyone uncomfortable about what they were planning to do. And now they're angry at you for it.

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This is exactly what happened in ancient times when people who followed God's ways lived alongside those who didn't. Their faithfulness created an uncomfortable mirror that reflected back the moral choices everyone was making. Today we're going to read about this dynamic, not from the perspective of the faithful person, but from the perspective of those who found righteousness inconvenient.

As we read, pay attention to why the wicked are so bothered by the righteous person. What is it about righteous living that makes others uncomfortable? And notice what they decide to do about that discomfort.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** This is heavy content, give them time to process the disturbing nature of the wicked's reasoning. Some may be shocked by the violence described. Remind them this is showing us what evil looks like from the inside, not endorsing it.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific things about the righteous person bother the wicked?
- Why do the wicked feel threatened by someone who's just trying to live right?
- What does this reveal about the wicked people's own self-awareness?
- How do you think the righteous person feels about all this opposition?

### Wisdom 2:10-24 (NRSV)

*10 Let us oppress the righteous poor man; let us not spare the widow or regard the gray hairs of the aged. 11 But let our might be our law of right, for what is weak proves itself to be useless.*

*12 "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law, and accuses us of sins against our training. 13 He professes to have knowledge of God, and calls himself a child of the Lord. 14 He became to us a reproof of our thoughts; 15 the very sight of him is a burden to us, because his manner of life is unlike that of others, and his ways are strange.*

*16 We are considered by him as something base, and he avoids our ways as unclean; he calls the last end of the righteous happy, and boasts that God is his father. 17 Let us see if his words are true, and let us test what will happen at the end of his life; 18 for if the righteous man is God's child, he will help him, and will deliver him from the hand of his adversaries.*

*19 Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance. 20 Let us condemn him to a shameful death, for, according to what he says, he will be protected."*

*21 Thus they reasoned, but they were led astray, for their wickedness blinded them, 22 and they did not know the secret purposes of God, nor hoped for the wages of holiness, nor discerned the prize for blameless souls.*

*23 For God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity, 24 but through the devil's envy death entered the world, and those who belong to his company experience it.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Choose confident readers for this dramatic content. The tone should convey the sinister reasoning of the wicked, then shift to the author's condemnation of their reasoning.

**Reader 1:** Verses 10-13 (The wicked's motivation) **Reader 2:** Verses 14-20 (Their plan and reasoning)

**Reader 3:** Verses 21-24 (The author's response and truth)

Listen for how the wicked try to justify their opposition to righteousness. Notice the shift in tone when the author responds to their reasoning.

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

**Setup:** Groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to come up with their most pressing questions about this passage. Walk between groups, help stuck groups by asking "What surprised you most about the wicked people's reasoning?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what we just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Don't just ask factual questions like "Who wrote this?" Instead, ask about things that surprised you, bothered you, or made you think. For example: "Why are the wicked so threatened by someone who's just minding their own business?" You have exactly 3 minutes. Go.

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

**Remember:** Let their questions drive the conversation. Write questions on the board and look for themes. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Help them see the patterns in the wicked's reasoning.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions. I'll write them on the board and we'll explore them together. What were you genuinely curious about?

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

- "What evidence do we have that the wicked know they're doing wrong?"
- "Why does the righteous person's very existence bother them so much?"
- "What's the difference between being 'inconvenient' and being self-righteous?"
- "When have you seen someone's good choices make others uncomfortable?"
- "How do you think Jesus might have been 'inconvenient' to religious leaders?"
- "What would change if the righteous person just toned down their standards a little?"
- "Why don't the wicked just ignore the righteous person instead of plotting against them?"
- "What does this teach us about the cost of following God?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

Do you notice what's happening here? The wicked aren't angry because the righteous person is preaching at them or judging them. Look at verse 12, they're angry because righteous living itself 'reproaches' them and 'accuses' them. Just by existing and making different choices, the righteous person is holding up a mirror that shows the wicked their own moral compromises. The righteous person doesn't have to say a word, their life speaks.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same pattern playing out? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, friend groups, where have you experienced pushback not for being mean or judgmental, but just for having different standards or making different choices?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Choosing not to participate in gossip or cyberbullying and having others accuse you of being "too good" for them
  - Maintaining standards about relationships, parties, or entertainment that make others defensive about their choices
  - Being the family member who takes faith seriously while others are nominal believers
  - Posting content or making comments on social media that reflect your values and receiving pushback
  - Standing up for someone being mistreated and being told you're "making drama" or "being too sensitive"
  - Making decisions about your future based on calling and values rather than just money or status
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to give advice. Some situations are genuinely complex and require wisdom. Help them think through when to stand firm versus when to show grace and flexibility.

#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone's integrity make others uncomfortable in a good way?"
  - "What helps you discern between being faithful and being unnecessarily difficult?"
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- "How do you handle the loneliness that sometimes comes with standing apart?"
  - "What's the difference between conviction and self-righteousness?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: when your faithfulness creates discomfort in others, that's not necessarily a sign you're doing something wrong, it might be a sign you're doing something right. Righteousness naturally reproaches compromise, and that can make people angry. But the goal isn't to be difficult for the sake of being difficult. The goal is to be faithful, loving, and humble while holding fast to what God calls true and right.

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This week, pay attention to moments when your values create friction. Ask yourself: Is this happening because I'm being judgmental and self-righteous, or because my choices are highlighting a moral tension that was already there? Sometimes the most loving thing you can do is maintain your standards rather than compromise them to make others comfortable.

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I'm proud of the wrestling you did today with these hard questions. Keep thinking, keep praying, and don't be afraid to be the person God is calling you to be, even when it's inconvenient for others. Your integrity matters more than their comfort, and ultimately, your faithfulness might be exactly what they need to see.

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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 making good choices sometimes makes other people uncomfortable or mad, and that's okay. They need courage to do what's right even when others pressure them to join in wrong choices.

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### If Kids Ask "Why do people get mad when we do good things?"

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Say: "Sometimes when we make good choices, it reminds other people that they're not making good choices. That makes them feel uncomfortable, so they get mad at us instead of changing what they're doing."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been the only person in a group who didn't want to do something you knew was wrong. Maybe everyone else wanted to cheat on a test, or be mean to someone, or break a rule, but you said no. Keep your hands up if that made the other people mad at you or try to pressure you to change your mind.

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Now here's a harder question: Have you ever noticed that when you make a good choice, sometimes it makes other people feel bad about their bad choices? Like when you choose to be kind to someone everyone else is being mean to, suddenly everyone feels awkward. Or when you tell the truth and everyone else was planning to lie, they get mad at you for "ruining it" for them.

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It's confusing, isn't it? Part of you thinks, "I should just go along with everyone else so we can all get along." But another part of you knows that what they want to do is wrong, and you don't want to do wrong things just to make other people happy. And sometimes you feel bad because your good choice made everyone else feel uncomfortable about their bad choices.

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This is like what happens in the movie Moana when she's the only one who wants to leave the island to save their people. Everyone else is scared and wants to stay comfortable, and they get mad at her for bringing up the problem they all know exists. Her courage to do what's right makes them uncomfortable about staying comfortable.

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The tricky part is figuring out what to do when your good choices make other people mad. Do you change what you're doing to make them feel better? Or do you keep doing what's right even when it makes things awkward?

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Today we're going to hear about a person who faced this exact problem in Bible times. Some people were planning to do bad things, but there was one person who lived differently. His good choices made them so uncomfortable that they started planning to hurt him. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate strongly to peer pressure scenarios. Some may share times they felt excluded for making good choices. Acknowledge their experiences briefly but keep moving toward the story to maintain

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there was a community where some people had started making really bad choices. They were being mean to poor people, hurting those who couldn't fight back, and basically deciding that being strong meant they could do whatever they wanted to weaker people.

But in this same community lived a man who made completely different choices. He followed God's ways. He was kind to poor people. He helped those who were being hurt. He obeyed God's laws even when it was hard. He prayed and trusted God to take care of him.

At first, the bad people just ignored him. But as time went on, they started getting more and more bothered by him. Every time they saw him being kind, it reminded them that they were being mean. Every time they saw him helping someone, it made them think about all the people they had hurt.

Imagine what it would be like if you were planning to cheat on a test, and there was someone in your class who always studied hard and never cheated. Every time you looked at that person, you'd remember that cheating was wrong. You might start feeling uncomfortable around them, even though they never said anything to you about cheating.

That's exactly what started happening. The bad people began having secret meetings to complain about the good man. And here's what they said:

### Wisdom 2:12 (NRSV)

*12 "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions; he reproaches us for sins against the law."*

Do you hear what they said? They called him "inconvenient." That means he was making their lives complicated just by being good. They weren't mad because he was being mean to them or preaching at them. They were mad because his good choices made them feel bad about their bad choices.

But they didn't stop there. The more they thought about it, the madder they got. They said, "Every time we see him, it reminds us that we're doing wrong things. The way he lives shows us how different our

lives are. We don't like feeling bad about ourselves!"

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They started making plans. "Let's test him," they said. "Let's see if his God really protects him like he says. Let's be mean to him and see what happens. If God really cares about him, then God will rescue him. But if nothing happens, then we'll know he's just pretending to be so special."

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**Wisdom 2:19 (NRSV)**

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*19 "Let us test him with insult and torture, so that we may find out how gentle he is, and make trial of his forbearance."*

This is really scary, isn't it? These people were so bothered by someone else's goodness that they wanted to hurt him. They couldn't stand having someone around who reminded them of right and wrong.

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But here's what they didn't understand. The Bible tells us that their thinking was all mixed up. They were so focused on doing bad things that they couldn't see clearly anymore. They thought being mean and strong was the most important thing, but they forgot about what God thinks is important.

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God sees everything. God knew about their evil plans, and God knew about the good man's faithful heart. Even when bad people make plans to hurt good people, God is still in control. God doesn't always stop bad things from happening right away, but God never forgets about people who choose to do right.

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**Wisdom 2:23 (NRSV)**

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*23 "For God created us for incorruption, and made us in the image of his own eternity."*

This means God made us to be good, like God is good. When we choose to do right things, we're showing what God is like. When we're kind, we're being like God. When we help people who are hurting, we're acting the way God acts.

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And here's the amazing part: even when other people get mad at us for doing good things, God is proud of us. God sees our good choices. God knows when we're brave enough to do what's right even when others want us to do wrong things.

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Sometimes in our lives, we'll be like that good man. Our good choices will make other people feel uncomfortable about their bad choices. And sometimes those people might try to pressure us to change, or they might be mean to us, or they might try to get us in trouble.

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When that happens, we can remember this story. We can remember that God sees our hearts. We can remember that making good choices is always right, even when it makes other people mad. And we can remember that God gives us courage to keep doing what's right.

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The most important thing isn't whether other people like our choices. The most important thing is whether we're choosing to follow God's ways, even when it's 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 Uncomfortable Feeling

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Imagine you're in a group where everyone is planning to copy homework from someone else, but you always do your own work. Just by being there and not joining in, you're reminding everyone that copying is wrong. How do you think the other kids would feel about you being different? How would you feel in that situation?

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**Listen For:** "They'd be mad at me," "They'd feel bad," "I'd feel left out", affirm: "Yes, your good choice would make them uncomfortable about their choice to cheat."

#### Question 2: The Pressure

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In our story, the bad people got so bothered by the good man that they wanted to hurt him. In real life, when people get uncomfortable about your good choices, what kinds of things might they say to try to get you to change your mind? What would that pressure feel like?

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**If They Say:** If they mention feeling afraid or wanting to give in, respond: "Those feelings make sense. It's hard to stand alone, but God gives us courage."

#### Question 3: The Right Response

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The good man in our story kept following God's ways even when it made other people mad. Why do you think he didn't just change his behavior to make the bad people more comfortable? What was more important to him than making others happy?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what makes someone brave, caring more about doing right than about making everyone else comfortable."

#### Question 4: God's View

Even though the bad people made evil plans, God saw everything and cared about the good man. How do you think God feels when we make good choices that other people don't like? What difference does it make to know that God sees what we're going through?

**If They Say:** If they express worry about whether God will protect them, respond: "God doesn't always stop hard things from happening, but God is always with us and proud of our good choices."

You're already thinking like wise people! You understand that sometimes doing the right thing creates problems with other people, but it's still the right thing to do. That takes real courage, and God gives us that courage when we ask for it.

#### 4. Activity: Standing Strong (8 minutes)

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

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces the lesson that sometimes standing for what's right means standing alone, and that God gives us strength to remain steady even when others pressure us. Success looks like kids discovering that they can choose to stay strong even when multiple people try to move them.

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

We're going to play "Standing Strong." I need volunteers to be "Good Choice Makers", you'll stand in the middle of the room. Everyone else will be "Pressure People", you'll surround the Good Choice Makers and try to gently push them to move from their spots.

Good Choice Makers, your job is to stay exactly where you are, no matter how many people try to move you. You can help each other by linking arms or holding hands. Pressure People, use only gentle pushes with your hands, no grabbing, pulling, or shoving. Your job is to try to get the Good Choice Makers to step away from where they're standing.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what happened in our story. The good man had to stay strong in his good choices even when lots of people were pressuring him to change. Sometimes standing for what's right means standing firm even when you feel surrounded.

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

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Round 1: Start with just one Good Choice Maker in the center, surrounded by all the Pressure People. Let them try for 30 seconds to move the person from their spot. Notice how hard it is to stand alone!

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Round 2: Now add 2-3 more Good Choice Makers who can link arms with the first person. Watch how much easier it becomes to stay strong when you have others making good choices with you!

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Coach the Good Choice Makers: "Remember, you get to choose whether to move or stay strong. The pressure is real, but you still have the power to decide." Encourage them to help each other: "Notice how much stronger you are when you stand together!"

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Round 3: Switch roles so everyone gets to experience both being pressured and being the pressure. Notice how different it feels to be on each side.

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Final Round: Have the Good Choice Makers close their eyes and imagine God standing right behind them, giving them strength. See how that changes their ability to remain steady.

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**Watch For:** The moment when isolated Good Choice Makers realize they can choose to stay strong despite pressure, this physically represents the lesson that we can choose to do right even when others pressure us.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you were surrounded by people trying to move you versus when you had others standing with you? The pressure was real, but you still got to choose whether to stay strong or give in. That's exactly like real life, other people can pressure us, but we still get to choose what we do. And when we remember that God is with us, we can find strength to make good choices even when it's hard.

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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what we learned today: Sometimes when we make good choices, it makes other people uncomfortable about their bad choices. When that happens, they might pressure us to change what we're doing so they feel better about what they're doing. But our job isn't to make other people comfortable with their wrong choices, our job is to keep making right choices.

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This doesn't mean we should be mean to people or act like we're better than them. It just means we don't have to change our good behavior to make them feel better about their bad behavior. God sees our choices, and God is proud when we choose what's right even when it's hard.

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The amazing result is that sometimes our good choices help other people see that they could make good choices too. Our courage to stand strong might be exactly what someone else needs to see to give them courage to do what's right.

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

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This week, when you're in a situation where others want you to make a bad choice, remember that it's okay if your good choice makes them uncomfortable. Look for one situation where you can make a good choice even if others pressure you to do something different. Remember that God gives you strength to do what's right!

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

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*Dear God, thank you for showing us what's right and wrong. Help us be brave enough to make good choices even when other people don't like it. When we feel pressure to do wrong things, remind us that you are with us and you give us strength. Help us be kind to others while still choosing what's right. 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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God is happy when we choose what's right, even when other people don't like our good choices.

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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 good man to a kid at school who always shares toys when everyone else is being selfish, then ask "How would that make other kids feel?"

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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 courage or doing what's right. Suggestions: "Be Strong and Courageous," "I Will Be Brave," or "God Gives Me Courage." Use movements: march in place during verses about being strong, point up to God during words about God's help, cross arms over chest during words about courage.

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Great singing! Now let's sit down in our story horseshoe to hear about someone who needed to be very brave. Get ready for an amazing story about choosing what's right!

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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 worried when talking about the bad people's plans, sound strong and confident when talking

about God's protection.

Today we're going to meet a man who always chose to do good things!

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

This good man lived in a place where some other people were being mean and making bad choices. They were hurting people who couldn't fight back. They were being selfish and unkind.

*[Use a sad, concerned expression]*

But the good man was different! He helped people who needed help. He shared with people who didn't have enough. He prayed to God every day. He always chose to do what was right.

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

At first, the mean people didn't pay attention to him. But then something strange started happening. Every time they saw the good man being kind, it made them feel bad about being mean!

*[Move to center, speak in a complaining voice]*

The mean people started saying, "We don't like that good man! When we see him helping people, it makes us remember that we should help people too. When we see him sharing, it makes us feel bad about being selfish!"

*[Move to side, look angry]*

The mean people got madder and madder. "That good man is making our lives hard!" they said. "Every time we look at him, we remember that God wants us to be good. We don't want to be reminded of that!"

**Wisdom 2:12 (NRSV)**

*12 "Let us lie in wait for the righteous man, because he is inconvenient to us and opposes our actions."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Can you believe that? The mean people were mad at the good man just for being good! Does that seem fair to you? No!

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*[Move to center, speak with concern]*

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But then the mean people made a terrible plan. They decided to be very mean to the good man to see if God would really protect him like the good man said God would.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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But here's what the mean people didn't know. God saw everything! God knew about their mean plans, and God knew about the good man's heart. God was watching and caring the whole time.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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Even when mean people make plans to hurt good people, God is still taking care of the good people. God doesn't always stop bad things from happening right away, but God never, ever forgets about people who choose to do good things.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what? God was so proud of that good man for keeping on doing right things even when the mean people didn't like it! God loves it when we choose what's right, even when it's hard.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God made us to be good, just like God is good! When we choose to be kind, we're showing what God is like. When we help people, we're acting like God acts.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in your life, you might be like that good man. Maybe you'll choose to share when others are being selfish. Maybe you'll choose to be kind when others are being mean. And sometimes that might make other people feel uncomfortable.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When that happens, remember this story! Remember that God sees your good choices. Remember that God is proud of you when you do what's right, even when other people don't like it.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God gives you courage to make good choices! God is always with you, and God will help you be brave when it's hard to do what's right.

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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 you can talk! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just say 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 good man felt when the mean people got mad at him?
  2. Have you ever made a good choice that other kids didn't like?
  3. Why were the mean people mad at someone for being good?
  4. What would you do if friends wanted you to be mean to someone?
  5. How did God feel about the good man's choices?
  6. What makes it hard sometimes to do the right thing?
  7. Why didn't the good man change to make the mean people happy?
  8. When have you seen someone be brave and do what's right?
  9. How does God help us when we're scared to do what's right?
  10. What good choice is sometimes hard for kids your age?
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11. What would happen if everyone just did whatever others wanted?

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12. How can you be brave like the good man?

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13. What do you think God says when we make good choices?

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14. How would you help a friend who was scared to do what's right?

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15. What's the difference between being good and being mean about being good?

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16. When do you need to remember that God is with you?

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17. What good choice do you want to make this week?

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18. How can we pray for courage to do what's right?

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19. What would change if the good man had given up being good?

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

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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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Select a song about God's strength or protection. Suggestions: "God is So Good," "Jesus Loves Me," or "God Will Take Care of You." Use movements: flex muscles during words about strength, hug yourself during words about God's love, march in place during words about being brave.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Cross your legs and fold your hands quietly.

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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 the good man who was brave.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us be brave like him when we need to make good choices. When other people want us to do wrong things, help us remember that you are with us.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for giving us courage to do what's right. Help us remember that you are happy when we make good choices, even when others don't like it.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving us and protecting us and helping us be good. 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 brave or making good choices. Examples: "Help me be kind when others are mean" or "Thank you for giving me courage."

Remember, God is proud of you when you choose what's right! Have a wonderful week making good choices and being brave!

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# The Wisdom Path

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*Five Steps to Immortality, Is progression automatic or aspirational?*

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**Wisdom 6:12-20**

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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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**Wisdom 6:12-20 (NIV)**

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*12* Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. *13* She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. *14* One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gates. *15* To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant for her sake will soon be free from care, *16* because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.

*17* The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, *18* and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, *19* and immortality brings one near to God; *20* so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.

## Context

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The Book of Wisdom addresses Jewish communities facing pressure to abandon their faith traditions in a Hellenistic world. Written to strengthen resolve and deepen understanding, this passage appears in a section where personified Wisdom is presented as actively seeking relationship with humans. The

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author argues that Wisdom is not distant or hidden but eager to be found by sincere seekers.

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These verses serve as the climax of a description of Wisdom's accessibility and eagerness to connect. Having established that Wisdom seeks humans as much as they seek her, the author now maps out the specific pathway by which this divine relationship develops into its ultimate goal: immortality and nearness to God.

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## The Big Idea

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**Wisdom offers a clear progression from initial desire for learning to ultimate immortality, with each stage building necessarily on the previous one.**

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This isn't magic or wishful thinking, it's a developmental pathway where growth at each stage enables the next. The chain structure suggests that while progression is possible, it requires intentional movement through each stage rather than skipping steps or expecting automatic advancement.

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## Theological Core

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- **Progressive Development.** Spiritual maturity follows recognizable stages, each building on the foundation of the previous one, requiring both divine accessibility and human response.
  - **Sincere Desire as Foundation.** The entire journey begins with authentic hunger for instruction, not casual interest or external pressure, establishing the heart posture necessary for genuine growth.
  - **Love Expressing Through Law-Keeping.** True affection for Wisdom naturally manifests in following her guidance, showing that obedience flows from relationship rather than mere compliance.
  - **Immortality as Nearness to God.** The ultimate goal isn't abstract eternal existence but intimate proximity to the Divine, making the entire progression fundamentally relational rather than purely intellectual.
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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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- Spiritual growth follows a recognizable progression that requires moving through each stage deliberately
  - The pathway from desire to immortality involves both divine accessibility and human intentionality
  - Love of wisdom expresses itself naturally through following divine guidance, not external compliance
  - Self-assessment reveals where we currently are in the progression and what the next step requires
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## Grades 4, 6

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- Learning and growing happens in steps, you can't skip from the beginning to the end
  - Wanting to learn is the most important first step in becoming wise
  - When you really care about something, you naturally want to follow its rules
  - Feelings like frustration with slow progress are normal, but each step prepares you for the next one
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants to teach us and help us learn
  - God is happy when we want to learn and grow
  - We can ask God to help us be good learners
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Treating Progression as Automatic.** The chain structure describes potential, not inevitability, each stage requires intentional engagement and doesn't guarantee the next will automatically follow without effort and response.
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- **Skipping the Foundation.** Trying to manufacture love of wisdom without genuine desire for instruction leads to shallow compliance rather than authentic spiritual development rooted in sincere hunger.
- **Separating Love from Law-Keeping.** Presenting obedience as separate from or opposed to relationship misses how genuine affection naturally expresses itself through following beloved guidance.
- **Making Immortality Abstract.** The goal isn't mere eternal existence but intimate proximity to God, keep the progression fundamentally relational rather than purely intellectual or transactional.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What if someone gets stuck at one stage and can't move forward?"**

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This is exactly why the progression is described as stages rather than automatic steps. Sometimes we need to spend more time deepening our foundation before the next stage becomes possible. The key is that Wisdom actively seeks us and meets us where we are, she's not waiting impatiently for us to hurry up, but helping us grow at the pace that builds genuine spiritual strength.

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### **"Does this mean people who don't keep laws perfectly can't have immortality?"**

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The passage describes law-keeping as flowing from love of wisdom, not as perfect performance earning rewards. It's about the orientation of a heart that loves divine guidance, not flawless execution. The progression shows that love naturally expresses itself through following what wisdom teaches, but this is relationship-driven obedience, not legalistic perfection.

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### **"How do we know if our desire for instruction is 'sincere' enough?"**

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Sincerity isn't about intensity of feeling but authenticity of motivation. The passage suggests that Wisdom herself helps discern this, she seeks those worthy of her and makes herself known to genuine seekers. Focus on cultivating honest hunger for truth and growth rather than measuring the adequacy of your desire. Wisdom responds to authentic seeking, even when it feels small.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**Spiritual growth is both a clear pathway and a patient process, each stage builds on sincere desire and leads naturally to the next when we engage authentically with divine wisdom.**

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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 whether spiritual growth happens automatically or requires intentional effort, helping them identify where they currently are in the five-stage progression and what their next step might be.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Is this progression describing what will happen or what could happen? Does moving through each stage guarantee the next, or is each transition a choice point requiring renewed commitment?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of starting things enthusiastically and then losing momentum
  - Honor the complexity of spiritual development, it's neither automatic nor impossible
  - Let students explore their own spiritual development rather than prescribing where they should be
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Think about something you really wanted to learn, maybe guitar, skateboarding, coding, or a sport. You started with this excitement, this genuine desire to get good at it. You could picture yourself being awesome at it. The motivation was real.

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But then what happened? Maybe you hit the first frustrating plateau where progress felt slow. Or you realized how much practice was actually required. Or you discovered that loving the idea of being good at something is different from loving the daily grind of getting good at it.

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Here's what's interesting: some people push through those transition points and develop genuine skill, while others get stuck or give up. The initial desire was equally real for both groups. So what makes the difference between wanting something and actually developing through the stages to get there?

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Today we're looking at a passage that maps out five specific stages in the development of wisdom, from initial desire all the way to what it calls immortality. But it raises this exact question: Is this progression describing what will automatically happen, or what could happen if you navigate each transition point intentionally?

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Open your Bibles to Wisdom chapter 6. We're going to read verses 12-20, and I want you to pay attention to how each stage connects to the next. Notice what the author seems to be promising and what might require your active participation.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room, help with pronunciation of unfamiliar words like "vigilant" or "immortality," watch for students who finish early and let them reread the key verses, allow them to feel the weight of this ambitious spiritual roadmap.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What are the five stages described in verses 17-18?
  - How does each stage supposedly lead to the next?
  - What surprises you about this progression?
  - Where would you honestly place yourself in this sequence right now?
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### Wisdom 6:12-20 (NIV)

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*12* Wisdom is radiant and unfading, and she is easily discerned by those who love her, and is found by those who seek her. *13* She hastens to make herself known to those who desire her. *14* One who rises early to seek her will have no difficulty, for she will be found sitting at the gates. *15* To fix one's thought on her is perfect understanding, and one who is vigilant for her sake will soon be free from care, *16* because she goes about seeking those worthy of her, and she

*graciously appears to them in their paths, and meets them in every thought.*

*17 The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her, 18 and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality, 19 and immortality brings one near to God; 20 so the desire for wisdom leads to a kingdom.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers, allow students to pass if they're uncomfortable, choose confident readers for the progression in verses 17-20 since it builds dramatically.

**Reader 1:** Verses 12-14 (Wisdom's accessibility) **Reader 2:** Verses 15-16 (Wisdom's active pursuit)

**Reader 3:** Verses 17-20 (The five-stage progression)

Listen for the dramatic build from Wisdom being available to this ambitious roadmap that ends with immortality and nearness to God. This isn't casual advice, it's a bold claim about human potential.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4, give exactly 3 minutes, walk between groups to listen for authentic questions, help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this progression?" or "What seems too good to be true here?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, questions you're actually curious about, not questions you think you should ask. For example: "Why does desire automatically become love?" or "How do you know if your desire is sincere enough?" or "What if someone gets stuck between stages?" You have exactly 3 minutes. Ask about what genuinely puzzles or intrigues you about this roadmap from desire to immortality.

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

**Remember:** Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper, guide discovery rather than lecture, help them wrestle with the tension between possibility and reality.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board, look for themes around the progression being automatic vs. intentional, start with questions most students will relate to about getting stuck or losing motivation.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What exactly changes when 'desire for instruction' becomes 'concern for instruction'?"
- "How is 'love of wisdom' different from just liking the idea of being wise?"
- "Why would law-keeping be the natural expression of loving wisdom?"
- "Does this progression seem automatic or does each stage require a choice?"
- "What would cause someone to get stuck between desire and concern, or between love and law-keeping?"
- "How is this similar to or different from learning anything else really well?"
- "If someone skipped straight to trying to keep laws without the earlier stages, what would happen?"
- "Why is immortality described as 'nearness to God' rather than just living forever?"

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? This isn't describing what will automatically happen to everyone who wants wisdom. It's mapping out what becomes possible when someone moves intentionally through each stage. The progression is both a pathway and a choice, each stage creates the foundation for the next, but you still have to choose to build on that foundation. Wisdom is available, but spiritual development requires your active participation at every transition point.

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

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same pattern, starting with desire but then facing the challenge of moving to the next level of commitment? Think about school, relationships, personal

goals, even your spiritual life.

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### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Wanting to do well in school but struggling to move from caring about grades to actually loving learning
  - Desiring close friendships but finding it hard to move from wanting connection to actually following through on the "laws" of good friendship
  - Being interested in faith but hitting the plateau where you have to decide if you love the path enough to let it shape your choices
  - Starting fitness or creative goals with enthusiasm but getting stuck when the initial motivation fades
  - Wanting to make a difference in social justice issues but struggling to move from caring to sustained action
  - Dealing with family expectations about who you should become while trying to discover your own sincere desires
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to fix them, acknowledge that some stages take longer than others, help them think about next steps rather than giving blanket advice about pushing harder.

### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone successfully navigate from initial desire to genuine skill or character?"
  - "What helps you move from caring about something to actually loving the process?"
  - "How do you discern between sincere desire and just liking the idea of being good at something?"
  - "What's the difference between wisdom and just being smart or knowledgeable?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: spiritual growth is both possible and intentional. This passage offers a roadmap, not a magic formula. Each stage builds on the previous one, but each transition requires you to choose to move forward rather than just coast on previous motivation.

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This week, pay attention to where you are in this progression with something that matters to you. Maybe it's faith, maybe it's a skill, maybe it's a relationship. Notice the difference between desiring something and being genuinely concerned about it. Notice what it feels like when concern becomes love, and when love wants to express itself through action.

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The good news is that wisdom actively seeks you as much as you seek it. You're not alone in this progression. But you do get to choose, at each stage, whether to build on what you've received and move toward the next level of engagement with what could transform your life.

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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 learning and growing happens in steps, and that wanting to learn is the important first step in becoming wise.

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### If Kids Ask "Why can't I just skip to the end?"

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Say: "That's like wanting to be good at piano without learning the basics first. Each step gets you ready for the next one, just like wisdom grows step by step."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever really, really wanted to learn something new, like riding a bike, playing an instrument, or getting good at a video game. Keep your hands up if it felt exciting to imagine yourself being awesome at it!

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Now here's a trickier question: raise your hand if you discovered that learning that thing was harder than you expected. Maybe you had to practice the same boring thing over and over. Maybe you got frustrated

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when you weren't getting better fast enough. Maybe you started to wonder if you actually wanted to do the hard work, or if you just wanted to magically be good at it.

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That's totally normal! Sometimes our brains trick us into thinking we can skip from wanting something to being amazing at it. But the truth is, learning anything really well happens in steps. Each step prepares you for the next one. You can't skip from Step 1 to Step 5 because you wouldn't be ready.

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This is like when Anna in Frozen wants to learn about love and relationships. At the beginning, she thinks love means finding someone who finishes your sandwiches. But by the end of the movie, she's learned that real love means being willing to sacrifice for someone else. She couldn't have understood that deeper kind of love without going through the steps first.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to stick with something through all the steps, even when it gets hard or boring. How do you keep going when the excitement of wanting it isn't enough anymore?

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Today we're going to hear about someone who discovered that there are five steps to becoming wise, and that each step gets you ready for the next one. But here's the cool part: it starts with something you might already have. Let's find out what happened when someone mapped out the path to wisdom.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to starting things enthusiastically, acknowledge brief frustration when they mention getting stuck, keep momentum moving toward hope and curiosity about the solution.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago, there was a wise teacher who noticed something interesting about people. They would come to him saying things like, "I want to be wise! I want to make good decisions! I want to understand how life works!"

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But then what would happen? Some people would get excited for a while, but when learning got hard, they would give up. Others would keep going and actually become wise and good at making decisions. This teacher wanted to figure out: what was the difference?

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So he watched and listened, and he discovered something amazing. Becoming wise isn't magic. It's not random. It actually happens in five clear steps, and each step prepares you for the next one. It's like climbing stairs, you can't skip steps, but if you take them one at a time, you can get all the way to the top.

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Imagine you're watching someone climb these stairs. You want to see what each step is like and why it matters.

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Step 1 is wanting to learn. Not just wanting to be smart or impress people, but actually wanting someone to teach you. The teacher called this "sincere desire for instruction." That means you really, truly want to learn, not just get the answers quickly.

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But then Step 1 has to grow into Step 2. Step 2 is caring about learning. It's when wanting to learn becomes something you think about and make time for. You don't just want it when it's easy or fun, you care about it even when it's challenging.

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This is where some people get stuck. They want to learn, but they don't want to care about learning if it means work. But this teacher noticed that people who made it to Step 2 discovered something wonderful.

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#### **Wisdom 6:17 (NIV)**

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*17 The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction, and concern for instruction is love of her...*

When you care enough about learning to stick with it through the hard parts, something amazing happens. You start to actually love learning! That's Step 3. It's not just that you want it or care about it, you start to enjoy the whole process of growing and understanding new things.

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Think about kids who learn to love reading. First they want to read (Step 1). Then they care enough to practice even when it's hard (Step 2). But eventually, they just love books and stories and discovering new things through reading (Step 3).

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But Step 3 grows into Step 4. When you really love learning and growing, you naturally want to follow good advice. You want to do what wisdom teaches because you've learned to trust that it leads to good things.

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The teacher called this "keeping her laws." But it's not like following rules because someone forces you. It's like following the advice of someone you love and trust because you know they want good things for you.

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#### **Wisdom 6:18 (NIV)**

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*18 and love of her is the keeping of her laws, and giving heed to her laws is assurance of immortality...*

And here's the most amazing part. Step 4 leads to Step 5. When you learn to love following good wisdom, it connects you to something bigger than yourself. The teacher called it immortality, which means being connected to God forever.

It's like when you learn to be a really good friend. First you want friends. Then you care about friendship. Then you love your friends. Then you naturally do the things that good friends do. And finally, you become the kind of person who can have deep, lasting friendships that make your whole life better.

The teacher realized that anyone could start this journey. You don't have to be super smart or special. You just need that first step: sincerely wanting to learn. And then each step gets you ready for the next one.

But here's what's really cool: you don't have to do this alone. Wisdom wants to teach you. Wisdom is looking for people who want to learn, and when Wisdom finds them, she helps them grow step by step.

Sometimes in our lives, we want to skip steps. We want to be wise without doing the learning. We want to be good at things without practicing. We want people to trust us without showing we're trustworthy.

But what we learn from this story is that each step is important. Each step gets you ready for the next one. And when you want to learn, really, truly want to learn, that's the beginning of something amazing that can grow all the way to being connected to God forever.

The most important thing is that first step: sincerely wanting to learn. Do you have that? Great! That's where wisdom begins, and it can grow into something more wonderful than you can imagine.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

#### Question 1: The Wanting

Think about something you really wanted to learn this year. Maybe it's getting better at a sport, understanding math, being a better friend, or learning about God. What made you want to learn it? Was it because it looked fun, because someone else was good at it, or because you really wanted to understand how to do it yourself?

**Listen For:** "Because it looked cool," "My friend was good at it", affirm: "Those are totally normal reasons to want something! And wanting is the first step."

### Question 2: When It Got Hard

Now think about what happened when learning that thing got harder than you expected. Did you want to quit? Did you get frustrated? Did you start to care more about it, or did your excitement fade? What helped you decide whether to keep going or give up?

**If They Say:** "I wanted to quit", respond "That's so honest! What made the difference between wanting to quit and actually quitting?"

### Question 3: The Love Part

Have you ever gotten to the point where you actually loved learning something, not just wanted to be good at it? What did that feel like? How could you tell the difference between wanting to be good at something and actually loving the process of getting better?

**Connect:** "That feeling of loving the process, that's exactly what Step 3 is about in our story!"

### Question 4: Following the Rules

When you really love something, like a sport, a friend, or a pet, it becomes easier to do what's best for that thing, even if it takes work. Can you think of a time when you wanted to follow good advice because you loved something, not just because you had to?

**If They Say:** "I take care of my dog even when I don't feel like it", affirm "That's exactly what love does, it makes us want to do good things even when it's work!"

You guys are noticing something really important. Learning happens in steps, and each step gets easier when you've really done the step before it. The best part is that God wants to help you learn and grow, starting right where you are.

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#### **4. Activity: The Learning Ladder (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 five-step progression by having kids physically experience moving from one level of commitment to the next. Success looks like kids discovering that each "rung" of the ladder requires building on the previous one and that trying to skip steps makes you unstable.

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

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We're going to build a human Learning Ladder! I'll divide you into five groups, and each group represents one step from our story. Group 1 is Wanting, Group 2 is Caring, Group 3 is Loving, Group 4 is Following, and Group 5 is Being Connected to God.

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Here's your challenge: arrange yourselves like ladder rungs across the room, with Wanting closest to me and Being Connected farthest away. But here's the tricky part, you can only "climb" the ladder by convincing each group that you're ready for their level.

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Each group has to decide what someone needs to show them before they can join their level. For example, the Loving group might need to see that you've been through Wanting and Caring first. You can't skip levels, if Level 2 doesn't think you're ready, you can't get to Level 3.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what the wise teacher discovered, each step in becoming wise builds on the step before it, and you have to really complete one level before you're ready for the next.

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

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Let kids arrange themselves into ladder formation first. Watch as some try to jump straight to higher levels. Let them discover that the groups naturally want to see evidence of previous steps before accepting new "climbers."

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As they encounter the challenge of proving they're ready for each level, notice how this creates the "aha" moment. Groups start asking questions like "How do I know you really care?" or "Show me what loving looks like."

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Coach with phrases like: "I notice Level 3 isn't convinced yet... I wonder what they need to see that you've really done Level 2?" Help them realize they need to demonstrate each level authentically, not just claim they've done it.

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Celebrate when someone successfully "climbs" by genuinely showing growth from one level to the next. Point out how much more solid their position is when they've built on each previous level.

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Once several kids have successfully moved through multiple levels, have them notice how different it feels to be "on a rung" you've earned versus one you've jumped to without preparation.

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**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize they need to convince others they're genuinely ready for the next level, this is the physical representation of authentic progression requiring real growth, not just good intentions.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you tried to skip a level versus when you built up step by step? The groups naturally wanted proof that you were really ready, didn't they? That's exactly what the wise teacher discovered, each level of wisdom requires you to genuinely complete the level before it. You can't fake Step 3 if you haven't really done Step 2.

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

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Here's what we learned today: becoming wise happens in steps, and each step gets you ready for the next one. It starts with something you might already have, really wanting to learn. From there, it can grow into caring, then loving, then following good advice, and finally being connected to God forever.

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This doesn't mean you have to be perfect at every step. It just means you can't skip steps. If you try to love something you've never cared about, or follow advice about something you don't love, it won't work very well and it won't last.

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But the amazing result is that when you take these steps for real, you become the kind of person who can have a close relationship with God that helps you make wise choices and have a great life.

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## This Week's Challenge

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Pay attention to one thing you want to learn or get better at. Notice which step you're really on, are you at wanting, caring, loving, or following good advice about it? Ask God to help you take the next step, whatever that is. Don't try to skip ahead, just focus on doing your current step really well.

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## Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*God, thank you for wanting to teach us and help us grow. Help us have sincere hearts that really want to learn. When learning gets hard, help us care enough to keep going. Help us love the process of growing and following your good wisdom. 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

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## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids know that God wants to teach them and help them learn, and that God is happy when they want to learn and grow.

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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 learning to grow flowers: first you plant seeds (wanting to learn), then you water them (caring), then they bloom (loving). Ask "What happens if you skip watering?"

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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 learning and growing. Suggestions: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: reach up high when singing about growing, point to your head when singing about learning, hug yourself when singing about God's love.

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Great singing, everyone! Now find a spot on the floor in front of me where you can see and hear. We're going to learn about how God loves to teach us and help us grow step by step!

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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 excitement and wonder, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound excited when talking about learning, use a warm voice when talking about God's love, use hand gestures to show steps going up.

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Today we're going to meet someone very smart who learned something wonderful about how we grow!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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This wise person watched boys and girls, moms and dads, and noticed something special. Some people got really good at learning new things, and some people gave up. Why?

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*[Use excited voice and big gestures]*

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So this wise teacher watched and watched, and discovered something amazing! Learning happens like climbing stairs. You go step by step by step, and each step helps you get ready for the next step!

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, count on fingers]*

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There are five steps! Step one: wanting to learn. Step two: caring about learning. Step three: loving to learn. Step four: doing what you learn. Step five: being close to God forever!

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*[Move to center, speak with wonder]*

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And here's the most wonderful part: God wants to teach you! God loves it when little children want to learn and grow!

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*[Lean forward like sharing a secret]*

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The very first step is wanting to learn. Do you want to learn things? Do you want to grow up wise and good? That makes God so happy!

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**Wisdom 6:17 (NIV)**

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*The beginning of wisdom is the most sincere desire for instruction.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you know what "sincere" means? It means really, really wanting something from your heart. Not pretending. Really wanting to learn! Do you have that? Yes, you do!

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*[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]*

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When you really want to learn, something amazing happens. You start to care about learning even when it's hard. Then you start to love learning new things!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, use gentle voice]*

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And when you love learning, you want to do the good things you learn. Like when you learn about being kind, you want to be kind. When you learn about sharing, you want to share.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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And when you do the good things you learn, God is so proud of you! It makes you closer and closer to God, who loves you so much.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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The wise teacher learned that anyone can start these steps! You don't have to be big or super smart. You just need to want to learn, and God will help you grow step by step!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God made you to be a learner! God loves teaching you new things every day. God wants to help you become wise and good and happy.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school or home, you might feel like learning is hard. Sometimes you might not understand something right away. That's okay! Learning takes time, and God is patient with you.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When something is hard to learn, you can ask God to help you. When you want to learn something new, you can tell God about it. God loves helping you learn and grow!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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Remember, it all starts with wanting to learn. And you already have that! God is so happy about your curious heart that wants to grow and learn new things.

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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 share 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. What's something new you learned this week?
  2. What do you want to learn how to do?
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3. Who teaches you things at home?

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4. What would you do if learning got hard?

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5. How do you think God helps people learn?

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6. What happens when you practice something?

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7. Who is the best teacher you know?

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8. What makes you excited to learn something?

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9. When do you feel proud of learning?

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10. What's hard about learning new things?

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11. Why do you think God wants us to learn?

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12. What good things have you learned to do?

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13. How do you know when you love something?

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14. What makes you want to keep trying?

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15. When do you ask for help learning?

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16. What do you want to teach someone else?

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17. How does it feel when you get better at something?

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18. What can you learn about God?

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19. What would happen if everyone stopped learning?

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20. How can you be a good learner this week?

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

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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 growing and learning. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or "The Wise Man Built His House Upon the Rock." Include movements: point up to God when singing about God's love, make growing motions with arms, step in place to show building step by step.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit in rows for our prayer time. Remember how God loves to help you learn and grow!

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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 loving to teach us...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us want to learn good things every day. Help us when learning feels hard or confusing. We want to grow wise and good like you want us to...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for being patient with us when we're learning. Help us remember that you love our curious hearts that want to learn and grow...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for helping us learn step by step. We love you and want to be close to you forever. 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 learning. Examples: "Thank you God for helping me learn to read" or "Help me want to learn about you."

Remember, God loves your heart that wants to learn! Keep asking questions, keep trying new things, and remember that God is always happy to help you grow. Have a wonderful week!

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