

# Character and Integrity

*Volume 23*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Character and Integrity

*Volume 23*

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## **About This Series**

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

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

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

## **A Note on Scripture Sources**

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

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

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

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

## **How to Use This Book**

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

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

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

### **For Individual Study**

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

### **For Families**

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

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

*The 1611 Press Team*

# Wise Priorities

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*When Power Meets Wisdom, What matters most when you can ask for anything?*

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**1 Kings 3:1-15**

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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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**1 Kings 3:1-15 (NIV)**

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*1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem. 2 The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord. 3 Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places.*

*4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices, for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. 5 At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream. God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." 6 Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. 7 Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 8 Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great*

*people of yours?"*

*10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11 So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. 12 I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. 13 Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for, both wealth and honor, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. 14 And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." 15 Then Solomon awoke, and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.*

## **Context**

Solomon has just become king after David's death, inheriting a complex political landscape with real enemies and threats to his reign. As a new monarch, he faces the tremendous challenge of governing God's people while navigating ancient Near Eastern politics where kings routinely eliminated rivals and enemies to secure their power. This was not only accepted but expected leadership practice.

In this pivotal moment, God appears to Solomon in a dream at Gibeon and offers him anything he wants, a blank check from the Almighty. This is Solomon's defining moment as king, where his choices will reveal his heart and set the trajectory for his entire reign. What he asks for will show what he values most deeply as a leader.

## **The Big Idea**

God commends Solomon not just for asking for wisdom, but specifically for not requesting his enemies' death, even though that would have been completely legitimate for a king facing genuine political threats.

This isn't naive about political reality; Solomon would indeed have enemies throughout his reign. The point is priority ordering: wisdom for justice comes first, while enemy management becomes a secondary consideration rather than the driving force of leadership.

## Theological Core

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- **Divine Commendation of Priorities.** God explicitly praises Solomon for what he didn't ask for, showing that our non-requests reveal as much about our character as our requests do.
  - **Wisdom Over Vengeance.** Even when destruction of opponents would be understandable and strategically sound, prioritizing wisdom for just leadership represents the higher path that earns divine approval.
  - **Leadership Character.** True leadership strength is measured not by the ability to eliminate opposition, but by the wisdom to govern justly even in the presence of adversaries.
  - **Justice-Centered Authority.** When given unlimited power, Solomon's first thought was how to use it fairly for others rather than how to secure it for himself through eliminating threats.
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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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- Leadership priorities matter more than leadership power, what we choose not to pursue reveals our character
  - Destroying enemies may be strategically sound but wisdom for justice is the higher calling that earns divine commendation
  - True strength in leadership comes from governing justly even with opposition rather than eliminating all opposition
  - Discernment means knowing when enemy destruction is appropriate versus when wisdom and justice should take priority
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- What we choose to ask for shows what's really important to us, and God notices our choices
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- When people are mean to us or work against us, our first thought shouldn't be how to get them back
- Being a good leader means thinking about what's fair for everyone, not just what helps us win
- It's okay to feel angry when people oppose us, but doing what's right matters more than getting revenge

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### Grades 1, 3

- God loves it when we ask for help to do good things instead of asking for bad things to happen to people
- God helps us know what's right and wrong when we ask Him
- We can pray for wisdom to make good choices even when people are mean to us

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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying Enemy Dynamics.** Don't imply that Solomon had no real threats or that political enemies weren't genuinely dangerous. The text assumes legitimate threats exist, making Solomon's choice all the more significant because he had real reasons to prioritize enemy destruction.
- **Condemning All Enemy Opposition.** Avoid suggesting that any action against opponents is wrong. The lesson isn't about pacifism but about priority ordering, wisdom for justice first, with enemy management as a secondary consideration when necessary.
- **Making This About Personal Grudges Only.** While the principle applies to personal conflicts, the primary context is leadership and governance. Don't reduce it to "be nice to people who hurt your feelings" without addressing the complexity of leadership responsibilities.
- **Ignoring the Divine Commendation Aspect.** The key insight is that God specifically praises what Solomon didn't ask for. This reveals that our non-requests matter to God and that choosing not to pursue legitimate options can demonstrate spiritual maturity.

## Handling Hard Questions

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**"But didn't Solomon later have to deal with enemies anyway? Wasn't this naive?"**

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You're absolutely right that Solomon faced real political opposition throughout his reign. The passage isn't teaching naive optimism about conflict disappearing. Instead, it's about priority ordering in leadership. Solomon would indeed need to address threats, but by prioritizing wisdom for justice first, he approached enemy management from a position of moral authority rather than from fear or vengeance. The text suggests this was the wiser long-term strategy.

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**"When is it actually right to ask for enemy destruction? Doesn't God sometimes command that in the Bible?"**

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There are certainly biblical examples where God directs specific actions against enemies, particularly in contexts of divine judgment or protecting the innocent. The key principle here isn't that opposing enemies is always wrong, but that wisdom for just leadership should be our primary pursuit. When we operate from that foundation, we're better equipped to discern when strong action is necessary versus when other approaches serve justice better.

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**"How do we know the difference between wisdom and being weak when dealing with opposition?"**

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This is the heart of the challenge question. True wisdom isn't weakness, it's strength directed by justice rather than by fear or anger. Wisdom includes knowing when firm action is needed, but it evaluates that need based on what serves justice and the common good, not what eliminates personal threats or satisfies emotional reactions. Solomon's choice showed strength precisely because he could have legitimately asked for enemy destruction but chose the harder path of governing justly despite opposition.

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### The One Thing to Remember

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**What we choose not to pursue when we have the power to pursue it reveals our character to God and earns His commendation when we prioritize justice over vengeance.**

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

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### Your Main Job Today

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Guide students to wrestle with the complexity of leadership priorities when you have real opponents. Help them discover that what we choose not to pursue with our power reveals as much about our character as what we do pursue.

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### The Tension to Frame

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When you have legitimate authority and face genuine opposition, how do you decide between wisdom for justice and destroying enemies, especially when both options might be justifiable?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate that political and social opposition creates real stress and legitimate security concerns
  - Honor the complexity that sometimes strong action against opponents is necessary while wisdom should still be the primary pursuit
  - Let students wrestle with priority ordering rather than providing simple "be nice" answers
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Imagine you just got elected student body president, and you discover that three popular kids have been spreading rumors about you, trying to undermine your credibility with other students. They're not just annoying, they're actively working to make you look bad and turn people against your ideas. You have some real power now: access to information, influence with teachers, ability to affect their social standing.

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Your first instinct might be to figure out how to expose them or get them back somehow. That makes perfect sense. They're working against you, they're damaging your reputation, and you have the power to do something about it. Any reasonable person would think about neutralizing that threat.

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But what if someone offered you a different kind of power, the wisdom to actually lead well, to make decisions that are genuinely good for the whole school, to figure out what's actually fair in complicated situations? The catch is, you have to choose your primary focus. You can't pursue both destroying your opponents and developing wisdom with equal intensity.

Today we're looking at someone who faced that exact choice, except the stakes were much higher, he was running an entire nation, and his enemies weren't just spreading rumors. They could literally threaten his life and his people's safety. Watch what he chose to prioritize and what God thought about that choice.

Open your Bibles to 1 Kings 3, and let's read silently through verse 15.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "discernment" and "administering." Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread verses 10-13. Let them feel the weight of God's specific response to Solomon's choice.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly does Solomon ask for, and what does he not ask for?
- Why might a new king be tempted to ask for his enemies' death?
- What surprises you about God's response to Solomon's request?
- How would you have felt in Solomon's position with unlimited power to ask for anything?

### 1 Kings 3:1-15 (NIV)

*1 Solomon made an alliance with Pharaoh king of Egypt and married his daughter. He brought her to the City of David until he finished building his palace and the temple of the Lord, and the wall around Jerusalem. 2 The people, however, were still sacrificing at the high places, because a temple had not yet been built for the Name of the Lord. 3 Solomon showed his love for the Lord by walking according to the instructions given him by his father David, except that he offered sacrifices and burned incense on the high places. 4 The king went to Gibeon to offer sacrifices,*

for that was the most important high place, and Solomon offered a thousand burnt offerings on that altar. **5** At Gibeon the Lord appeared to Solomon during the night in a dream. God said, "Ask for whatever you want me to give you." **6** Solomon answered, "You have shown great kindness to your servant, my father David, because he was faithful to you and righteous and upright in heart. You have continued this great kindness to him and have given him a son to sit on his throne this very day. **7** Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. **8** Your servant is here among the people you have chosen, a great people, too numerous to count or number. **9** So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong. For who is able to govern this great people of yours?" **10** The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. **11** So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked. **12** I will give you a wise and discerning heart, so that there will never have been anyone like you, nor will there ever be. **13** Moreover, I will give you what you have not asked for, both wealth and honor, so that in your lifetime you will have no equal among kings. **14** And if you walk in obedience to me and keep my decrees and commands as David your father did, I will give you a long life." **15** Then Solomon awoke, and he realized it had been a dream. He returned to Jerusalem, stood before the ark of the covenant of the Lord and sacrificed burnt offerings and fellowship offerings. Then he gave a feast for all his court.

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic dialogue sections between God and Solomon.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-5 (Setting up Solomon's situation and God's offer) **Reader 2:** Verses 6-9 (Solomon's response and request) **Reader 3:** Verses 10-15 (God's commendation and response)

Listen for the tension in this story, this isn't just a nice conversation. This is a new king with real political pressures making a choice that will define his entire reign.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them 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 with "What surprised you most about God's response?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 questions about what you just read, but make them real questions, things you're actually curious about. Not "What did Solomon ask for?" but more like "Why was God so specific about mentioning enemies' death?" or "What made this choice so significant?" You have three minutes to generate questions that you genuinely want to explore.

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### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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

**Collecting Questions:** Share your questions and I'll write them on the board. Let's start with questions that most of you are curious about.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that Solomon actually had real enemies to worry about?"
  - "Why do you think God specifically mentioned the enemies' death thing? What does that tell us?"
  - "Is there ever a time when a leader should prioritize defeating enemies over pursuing wisdom?"
  - "What's the difference between being wise about enemies and being naive about threats?"
  - "How do you think Solomon's choice affected his ability to handle opposition later?"
  - "Where do you see this same tension between justice-focused leadership and enemy-focused leadership today?"
  - "What if Solomon had asked for his enemies' death first and wisdom second, would that have been wrong?"
  - "Why does what we choose not to ask for matter as much as what we do ask for?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? God doesn't just commend Solomon for asking for wisdom, He specifically praises him for not asking for his enemies' death. That wasn't even on Solomon's radar as a primary concern. When given unlimited power, his first thought was about governing justly, not securing his position by eliminating threats. That priority ordering revealed something about his character that earned divine commendation.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. You may not be running nations, but you do have leadership opportunities and you do face opposition. Where do you see this same tension playing out between focusing on wisdom for justice versus focusing on defeating people who work against you?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Student government or group leadership when certain people consistently oppose your ideas or try to undermine your authority
  - Family situations where siblings or relatives create conflict and you have some power to affect their consequences or reputation
  - Friendship dynamics where you have social influence and could use it to isolate or embarrass people who have hurt you
  - Online spaces where you have followers or platform influence and could use it to call out or "cancel" people who disagree with you
  - Social justice efforts where the temptation is to focus more on defeating opponents than on building just solutions
  - Academic or athletic contexts where you could use your status to undermine rivals rather than focusing on excellence
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Acknowledge that some situations genuinely call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about always being nice.

## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone choose wisdom and justice over defeating opponents, and what was the result?"
  - "What would help you make Solomon's choice when you have the power to get back at people who oppose you?"
  - "How do you discern when strong action against opposition is wisdom versus when it's just revenge?"
  - "What's the difference between being wise about conflict and being weak or naive?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: God notices not just what we pursue with our power, but what we choose not to pursue. When Solomon had unlimited authority and legitimate reasons to focus on enemy destruction, he chose to prioritize wisdom for justice instead. That choice revealed his character and earned divine commendation. The complexity is real, sometimes strong action against opponents is necessary, but wisdom should be our foundation.

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This week, pay attention to moments when you have some kind of power or influence and face opposition. Notice whether your first instinct is to figure out how to defeat the opposition or how to pursue what's actually just and wise. Try experimenting with Solomon's approach: let wisdom for justice be your primary pursuit, and see how that changes your perspective on the opponents.

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I'm genuinely impressed by the depth of thinking you did today. These are not easy questions, and the fact that you're wrestling with them shows the kind of character that God notices and commends. Keep asking the hard questions about leadership and justice.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

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## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that what we choose to ask for reveals what matters most to us, especially when we could use our power to get back at people who oppose us but choose to focus on doing what's right instead.

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### **If Kids Ask "But what if the enemies were really dangerous?"**

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Say: "You're right that Solomon faced real threats. God wasn't saying never deal with enemies, but that asking for wisdom to be fair should come first. Sometimes wisdom includes protecting yourself."

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

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Raise your hand if you've ever been the leader of something, maybe group leader in class, team captain, or even just the oldest cousin who has to help make decisions for the younger kids. Keep your hands up. Now, raise your other hand if, when you were the leader, some people didn't like your decisions and maybe even worked against you or tried to get you in trouble.

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Now here's a harder question. Imagine you found out that some kids were spreading rumors about you to try to get you kicked out of your leadership role. They're not just disagreeing with you, they're actively trying to make you look bad. Part of you thinks, "I need to expose what they're doing and get them in trouble first." But another part thinks, "Maybe I should focus on just doing a really good job and being fair to everyone, even them."

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Those feelings make total sense. When people work against you, it's natural to want to protect yourself or even get them back. Your brain is trying to solve the problem of opposition, and sometimes that means thinking about how to stop the people who are causing problems.

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This reminds me of the movie Moana, where she could have focused on defeating Te Fiti as a lava monster, but instead she looked deeper and saw that Te Fiti needed her heart restored. Or think about Elsa in Frozen, who could have used her power to freeze all the people who were afraid of her, but instead chose to learn how to use her power to help.

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The tricky part is figuring out what to do first when you have real power and face real opposition. Do you focus on stopping the people who are working against you, or do you focus on learning to use your power wisely and fairly?

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Today we're going to hear about a young king who faced exactly this choice. He had just inherited a whole kingdom, he had real enemies who could literally threaten his life, and God offered him anything

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he wanted. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may want to share their own leadership experiences. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" or "Good leadership is tricky," but keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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A long time ago, there lived a young man named Solomon who had just become the king of God's people. His father David had been a great king, but now David was dead, and Solomon was in charge of an entire nation.

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Being king back then wasn't like being a president today. Kings had total power over their people, and they also had real enemies, other kings who might attack, people within their own kingdom who might rebel, and political rivals who wanted to take over their throne.

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Solomon was probably feeling pretty overwhelmed. Imagine being put in charge of not just your classroom or your sports team, but millions of people, with the responsibility to make decisions about their safety, their laws, and their lives. And knowing that some people really didn't want him to succeed.

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Think about what that would be like. Every choice you make affects thousands of people. Every enemy you have could potentially hurt not just you, but your whole nation. The pressure would be enormous.

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One night, Solomon went to a place called Gibeon to pray and offer sacrifices to God. He brought a thousand offerings because he really wanted to honor God and ask for help. While he was there, something amazing happened.

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God appeared to Solomon in a dream! Can you imagine? The God of the universe came to this young, nervous king and said something incredible.

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### 1 Kings 3:5 (NIV)

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*5 "Ask for whatever you want me to give you."*

Think about that for a minute. God just told Solomon he could have anything. Anything! If someone told you that today, what might you be tempted to ask for? Maybe to be the smartest kid in school, or the most popular, or to have unlimited money, or to never get sick?

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Now remember, Solomon was a king with real enemies. It would have made perfect sense for him to say, "God, please destroy all the people who want to hurt me and take over my kingdom. Make my enemies disappear so I can rule in peace." That wouldn't have been selfish, that would have been protecting his people!

But Solomon surprised everyone, including God, with what he said next. He started by remembering how good God had been to his father David, and then he admitted something really honest.

### **1 Kings 3:7, 9 (NIV)**

*7 "Now, Lord my God, you have made your servant king in place of my father David. But I am only a little child and do not know how to carry out my duties. 9 So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."*

Did you hear what Solomon asked for? Not for his enemies to be destroyed. Not for wealth or a long life or power. He asked for wisdom, the ability to know what's right and wrong, and to make good decisions for his people.

Solomon was basically saying, "God, I don't need my problems to go away. I need to become the kind of person who can handle problems wisely." Instead of asking for an easier job, he asked for the ability to do a hard job well.

And God was so impressed! Look at what happened next.

### **1 Kings 3:10-11 (NIV)**

*10 The Lord was pleased that Solomon had asked for this. 11 So God said to him, "Since you have asked for this and not for long life or wealth for yourself, nor have asked for the death of your enemies but for discernment in administering justice, I will do what you have asked."*

Notice that God specifically mentioned enemies! God was basically saying, "Solomon, I'm so proud of you. You could have asked for your enemies to be destroyed, and that would have made sense, but instead you asked for wisdom to be fair to everyone, including them."

God was so pleased that He not only gave Solomon the wisdom he asked for, but also gave him things he didn't ask for, wealth, honor, and the promise of a long life if he continued to follow God.

When Solomon woke up, he knew his dream was real. He went back to Jerusalem and celebrated with his whole court, because he knew God was going to help him be a wise and just king.

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The amazing thing is that Solomon became famous throughout the ancient world for his wisdom. Kings and queens would travel from far away just to hear how wise his decisions were. Because he chose wisdom over revenge, he became the kind of leader people respected and trusted.

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This story teaches us something important about what matters most when we have power or influence over others. Sometimes in our lives, we get opportunities to be leaders, in group projects, in sports, with younger kids, or even just in our friend groups.

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What we learn from Solomon is that when we have that power, our first thought shouldn't be "How do I stop the people who don't like me?" but "How do I make wise, fair decisions that are good for everyone?" That's what God loves to see, and it's what makes us the kind of leaders people actually want to follow.

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God loves it when we ask for help to do what's right, especially instead of asking for bad things to happen to people who oppose us. That shows God we care more about being good leaders than about winning battles against our enemies.

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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 Big Choice

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Imagine you're Solomon and God says you can have anything you want. You know there are people out there who want to take over your kingdom and maybe even hurt you. What would be going through your mind? What would be tempting to ask for?

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**Listen For:** "Protection," "Get rid of enemies," "Safety", affirm: "That makes total sense! Your brain would want to solve the scary problem first."

#### Question 2: The Surprise

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What do you think surprised God about Solomon's request? Why would God specifically mention that Solomon didn't ask for his enemies' death? What does that tell us about what God values?

**If They Say:** "God likes nice people", respond "What's the difference between being nice and being wise? Solomon wasn't just being nice, he was being strategic about what kind of leader he wanted to be."

### Question 3: The Smart Strategy

Why do you think asking for wisdom turned out to be a better strategy than asking for his enemies to be destroyed? How might that wisdom have helped him deal with opposition throughout his life?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why God was so impressed, Solomon was thinking long-term about the kind of leader he wanted to become, not just short-term about solving immediate problems."

### Question 4: In Our Lives

When you have the chance to be a leader, what would it look like to make "Solomon's choice"? How could you focus on wisdom and fairness instead of just trying to stop people who oppose you?

**If They Say:** "Just ignore the mean people", respond "Solomon didn't ignore his enemies, he learned how to lead so well that even they had to respect his decisions. There's a difference between ignoring problems and addressing them wisely."

Solomon's choice shows us that the best leaders aren't the ones who eliminate all opposition, but the ones who become so wise and fair that even their opponents have to respect their decisions. That's the kind of leadership God celebrates.

## 4. Activity: Wise Council (8 minutes)

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of choosing wisdom for justice over defeating opponents by having kids physically experience how collective wisdom solves problems better than individual power.

Success looks like kids discovering that seeking input and perspective from others, even potential opponents, leads to better decisions than trying to control outcomes alone.

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

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We're going to play "Wise Council." I need three volunteers to be "rulers", they'll stand in different corners of the room. Everyone else will be "advisors" and start by gathering in the center.

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Here's the challenge: Each ruler has been given a difficult problem to solve, and they need to make the best decision for their people. The rulers can either try to solve their problem alone using only their own ideas, or they can invite advisors to help them think through the situation.

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But here's the twist: some of the advisors might not agree with the ruler at first. The rulers have to decide, do they only listen to advisors who already agree with them, or do they ask for wisdom from people who might challenge their ideas? We're doing this because it's exactly like Solomon's situation, he could have focused on eliminating disagreement, or he could focus on gathering wisdom to make the best decisions.

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

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First phase: Rulers, try to solve your problems using only your own thinking for 30 seconds. Advisors, stay in the center and watch. Notice what happens when leaders try to figure everything out alone.

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Now the struggle: Rulers, you can invite advisors to help, but some advisors have been instructed to respectfully disagree with your first ideas. Will you send away the disagreeing advisors, or will you listen to their different perspectives?

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Coaching moments: "I notice you need more information... I wonder if there are advisors with different viewpoints who could help... What if someone who disagrees actually has a piece of wisdom you need?"

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The breakthrough: Celebrate when a ruler chooses to include advisors who disagree and discovers that the disagreement actually improves their decision. Highlight this moment as it happens.

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Completion: Once rulers have gathered diverse perspectives and made decisions, have them notice how different they feel about their choices compared to when they were trying to decide alone.

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**Watch For:** The moment when a ruler chooses to include challenging perspectives rather than just seeking agreement, this is the physical representation of Solomon choosing wisdom over eliminating opposition.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when rulers tried to make decisions alone versus when they gathered wisdom from different perspectives, even people who disagreed? This is exactly what Solomon did, instead of asking God to remove all the people who might challenge him, he asked for the wisdom to make decisions that were so fair and thoughtful that even opponents would respect them.

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

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Here's what we learned today: What we choose to ask for reveals what matters most to us. Solomon could have asked for his enemies to be destroyed, and that would have made sense, but instead he asked for wisdom to make fair decisions for everyone. God loved that choice because it showed Solomon cared more about being a good leader than about winning against his opponents.

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This doesn't mean we should never stand up for ourselves or that it's wrong to protect ourselves from people who want to hurt us. It means our first focus should be on learning to handle conflict wisely rather than just trying to make all conflict go away.

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The amazing result is that when we choose wisdom and fairness over defeating our enemies, we often become the kind of people that even our opponents respect. That's real strength, and that's what God loves to see.

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

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This week, when you face conflict or opposition from someone, try asking yourself "What's the wise and fair thing to do here?" before asking "How do I win this?" Notice how that changes your approach to the situation. You might be surprised by how much better the results are when you choose Solomon's approach.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for the story of Solomon and for showing us that you love it when we ask for wisdom instead of asking for our enemies to be defeated. Help us this week to make choices like Solomon, to care more about doing what's right and fair than about winning against people who oppose us. Give us wisdom to handle conflict well. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God loves it when we ask for help to do good things instead of asking for bad things to happen to people who are mean to us.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare Solomon choosing wisdom to choosing to ask the teacher for help on a hard test instead of asking for the mean kids in class to get in trouble.

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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 making good choices or asking God for help. Suggestions: "Lord, I Want to Be a Christian," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Jesus Loves Me." Use movements: raise hands during "want to be," point to self during "little light," hug yourself during "Jesus loves me."

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Great singing! I love how you're praising God with your voices. Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape on the floor because I have an amazing story about a young king who made a very smart choice. You're going to love this!

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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 amazed when you're God, sound young and humble when you're Solomon.

---

Today we're going to meet a young man named Solomon who just became a king!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Being a king is a really big job. Solomon had to take care of millions of people! He had to make important decisions every day. And there were some people who didn't like him and wanted to cause trouble for him.

---

*[Look worried and overwhelmed]*

---

Poor Solomon was feeling pretty scared. He thought, "How can I do this big job? I'm just young! I don't know how to be a good king!"

---

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

---

So Solomon went to pray to God. He really wanted to do a good job, so he asked God for help.

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*[Move to center, speak with big, warm voice like God]*

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That night, God came to Solomon in a dream and said something amazing: "Ask for anything you want, and I will give it to you!"

---

*[Move to side, sound like young Solomon]*

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Now, Solomon could have asked for lots of things. He could have said, "God, make all the mean people go away!" or "God, give me lots of money!" or "God, make me live forever!"

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**1 Kings 3:9 (NIV)**

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*9 "So give your servant a discerning heart to govern your people and to distinguish between right and wrong."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you know what Solomon asked for? He said, "God, please help me know what's right and what's wrong. Help me make good choices for all the people I take care of." That's called asking for wisdom!

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*[Move to center, speak with big, happy voice like God]*

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God was so happy! God said, "Solomon, I love your choice! You didn't ask for the mean people to be hurt. You asked for help to do what's right!"

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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God was so pleased that He gave Solomon exactly what he asked for, the wisdom to make really good choices. And then God gave him extra gifts too!

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

Solomon became the wisest king ever! People came from far away just to hear his smart decisions. Everyone respected him because he was so fair and kind.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what? Because Solomon chose to ask for wisdom instead of asking for his enemies to be hurt, he became the best king ever! Even the people who didn't like him at first had to admit he was really good at his job.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God loved Solomon's choice because Solomon cared more about doing good things than about getting back at people who were mean to him. God wants us to make choices like that too!

*[Speak directly to the children]*

Sometimes in our lives, kids are mean to us or don't like us. Maybe someone says mean things about us or doesn't want to be our friend. We might feel like asking God to make bad things happen to them.

*[Move closer to the children]*

But Solomon shows us a better way! When people are mean to us, we can ask God to help us know what's right and to help us make good choices. We can ask God to help us be kind even when others aren't kind to us.

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

God loves it when we ask for help to do good things instead of asking for bad things to happen to people. That makes God very happy, just like Solomon made God happy!

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

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

Find a partner and stand facing each other! I'll give each pair one question to talk about. You'll have about one minute to share your ideas. There are no wrong answers, I just want to hear 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 Solomon felt when God said he could have anything he wanted?
2. What would you have been tempted to ask God for if you were Solomon?
3. Why do you think God was so happy about Solomon's choice?

4. What would you do if someone was being mean to you at school?

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5. How did asking for wisdom help Solomon more than asking for his enemies to go away?

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6. When has someone been mean to you and you wanted to be mean back?

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7. How can we ask God for help when people are unkind to us?

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8. What does it mean to ask for wisdom instead of asking for revenge?

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9. How do you think the mean people felt when Solomon was so wise and fair?

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10. What's one way you could be like Solomon this week?

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11. Why is it better to ask for help to do good things?

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12. How does God feel when we choose to be kind instead of mean?

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13. What's the difference between being wise and being weak?

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14. How can we pray like Solomon prayed?

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15. What good choice could you ask God to help you make?

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16. How did God reward Solomon for his good choice?

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17. What would happen if everyone made choices like Solomon?

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18. How can asking God for wisdom help us at home?

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19. What if someone keeps being mean even when we're nice?

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20. How can we remember to choose wisdom when we're upset?

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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 wisdom or making good choices. Suggestions: "Be Careful Little Eyes," "The Wise Man Built His House," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Include movements: cover eyes/ears/mouth for "be careful," hammer motions for "wise man," hug for "Jesus loves."

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Wonderful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Sit crisscross applesauce in rows, close your eyes, and fold your hands. Let's talk to God together.

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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 showing us how Solomon made such a good choice when he asked for wisdom...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us this week when people are mean to us to ask for wisdom to do what's right instead of asking for mean things to happen to them...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you love it when we ask for help to make good choices, just like Solomon did...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving us and helping us know what's right and wrong when we ask you. 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 asking God for wisdom. Examples: "God, help me make good choices" or "Thank you for helping us like you helped Solomon."

Remember, God loves it when you ask for help to do good things! Have a wonderful week, and practice asking God for wisdom when you have to make hard choices. I'm proud of how well you listened today!

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# Faithful Legacy

*Remembering the Past, Living the Present, Is honor the right motivation for faithfulness?*

**1 Maccabees 2:49-70**

## 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

**1 Maccabees 2:49-70 (NIV)**

*49* When Mattathias was about to die, he said to his sons: "Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. *50* Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors. *51* Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. *52* Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? *53* Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. *54* Phineas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. *55* Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. *56* Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. *57* David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. *58* Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. *59* Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. *60* Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions. *61* And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. *62* Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendor will turn into dung and worms. *63* Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. *64* My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor." *65* Then he called for his son Simon and said to him: "I know that you are a wise man; listen to him always; he shall be your father. *66* Judas

*Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army and fight the battle against the peoples. 67 You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. 68 Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law." 69 Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. 70 He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.*

## Context

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This passage records the final words of Mattathias, an elderly Jewish priest who sparked the Maccabean revolt against Seleucid oppression in 167 BCE. Antiochus IV Epiphanes had outlawed Jewish religious practices, desecrated the temple, and forced Jews to adopt Greek customs and worship. Mattathias had killed a fellow Jew who was about to offer a pagan sacrifice and a Seleucid official enforcing the decree, then fled to the hills with his sons to begin guerrilla warfare.

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Now dying after a year of resistance, Mattathias delivers his last testament to his sons who must continue the fight for religious freedom. This is a father's final counsel in a desperate time when their people's covenant identity hangs in the balance. These words would guide the Maccabean brothers through years of warfare that would ultimately restore Jewish independence and temple worship.

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## The Big Idea

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Faithful ancestors provide a blueprint and motivation for present zeal, promising that covenant loyalty produces lasting honor even through suffering and death.

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Yet this raises challenging questions about motivation, does promising "great honor and an everlasting name" transform faithful obedience into glory-seeking? Mattathias navigates this tension by grounding honor in covenant loyalty rather than personal achievement, suggesting that the "everlasting name" comes through participating in God's ongoing purposes rather than individual recognition.

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## Theological Core

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- **Ancestral Remembrance.** Past faithfulness creates patterns and possibilities for present courage, showing that covenant loyalty transcends individual generations.
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- **Zealous Commitment.** Authentic devotion to God's law requires passionate intensity that's willing to risk everything rather than casual observance.
- **Covenant Continuity.** Each generation inherits both the privilege and responsibility of maintaining the covenant relationship through their own acts of faithfulness.
- **Redemptive Legacy.** Present sacrificial obedience creates lasting impact that outlives physical death, contributing to God's eternal purposes.

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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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- That pursuing honor through faithful obedience differs fundamentally from seeking glory through personal achievement
  - That motivation in faithfulness involves tension, we serve God purely, yet He promises reward and recognition
  - That ancestral examples provide both inspiration and practical patterns for navigating present challenges
  - That true legacy comes through participating in purposes larger than ourselves, especially God's covenant community
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- That stories of brave people from our families and faith can help us be brave when we need to stand up for what's right
  - That sometimes doing the right thing costs us something, but it's still the right choice
  - That our brave choices can inspire other people and make a difference that lasts
  - That feeling scared is okay, but we can still choose to act with courage anyway
-

## Grades 1, 3

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- God helped brave people long ago who loved Him and followed His ways
  - God helps us be brave today when we need to do the right thing
  - We can remember stories of brave people to help us when we're scared
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Honor-seeking assumption.** Don't assume that promising honor automatically corrupts motivation, the text grounds honor in covenant loyalty rather than personal glory, suggesting honor as consequence rather than goal.
  - **Martyrdom romanticism.** Avoid glorifying death or suffering for its own sake, Mattathias calls for strategic resistance and survival, with death only as ultimate necessity for covenant loyalty.
  - **Triumphalistic reading.** Don't present ancestral faithfulness as guaranteeing earthly success, many biblical heroes faced continued hardship despite their obedience, pointing to eternal rather than temporal rewards.
  - **Individualistic interpretation.** Resist making this about personal legacy or recognition, the focus is on continuing covenant community identity through collective faithfulness across generations.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### "Isn't it wrong to be motivated by honor and recognition?"

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This tension appears throughout scripture, Jesus spoke of rewards, Paul of crowns, yet we're warned against pride and self-seeking. The key distinction seems to be between honor that comes through faithful service versus honor that becomes the primary goal. Mattathias grounds honor in covenant loyalty, suggesting we can gratefully receive recognition while keeping our primary focus on obedience to God. The healthiest approach acknowledges God built us to desire significance while ensuring that

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desire serves rather than supplants love for Him.

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### **"Does this passage encourage violence or justify religious warfare?"**

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Mattathias lived under severe religious persecution where practicing faith was punishable by death, making armed resistance a matter of religious survival. However, the passage emphasizes zealotry for God's law as the primary virtue, with warfare as one possible expression in extreme circumstances. For contemporary application, we should focus on the underlying principles, passionate commitment to God's ways and willingness to sacrifice for covenant loyalty, while recognizing that faithful resistance takes many forms beyond violence in different contexts.

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### **"How can we know when to risk everything for our beliefs?"**

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Mattathias faced direct commands to abandon core religious practices and worship false gods, clear violations of fundamental covenant obligations. The principle involves distinguishing between essential aspects of faith and cultural preferences, seeking wisdom about when compromise crosses into unfaithfulness. This requires careful discernment through scripture, prayer, and wise counsel, recognizing that faithfulness sometimes demands costly choices while avoiding unnecessary conflict over secondary issues.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Past faithfulness provides both inspiration and pattern for present courage, promising that covenant loyalty creates lasting legacy even when it demands great sacrifice.**

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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 pursuing honor through faithful service versus seeking glory for personal recognition, while exploring how ancestral examples can inspire present courage.

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## The Tension to Frame

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Is it wrong to be motivated by the promise of "great honor and an everlasting name" when serving God faithfully?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their discomfort with honor-seeking, this tension appears throughout scripture and deserves careful thought
  - Help them distinguish between honor as goal versus honor as consequence of faithful service
  - Let them explore examples from their own lives rather than giving quick answers to complex questions
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about someone you follow on social media who seems to always be posting about their good deeds, volunteering at shelters, donating to charities, helping friends. Part of you appreciates seeing positive content instead of drama and selfies. But another part of you wonders: are they actually generous people, or are they just performing generosity for likes and comments?

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This gets complicated because maybe they really are kind people who also happen to enjoy recognition. Maybe the recognition even motivates them to help more. Maybe it's not an either-or situation. But it still feels weird when someone seems to be doing good things partly for the applause, right?

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Today we're looking at a dying father who told his sons to be zealous for God's law and to die for their faith if necessary, because it would bring them "great honor and an everlasting name." That sounds noble and disturbing at the same time. Is it wrong to promise honor as motivation for faithfulness?

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As we read, pay attention to how he connects past heroes to future reward. Notice what kinds of examples he gives and what he means by honor. See if you can figure out whether this is about glory-seeking or something deeper.

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Open your Bibles to 1 Maccabees 2:49 and begin reading silently through verse 70. Take your time with this, it's a father's final words to his sons.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students, help with unfamiliar names (Hananiah, Azariah, Mishael), and watch for early finishers. Let them feel the weight of these final words and the desperate historical moment.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific examples does Mattathias give of faithful ancestors?
- What motivated these ancestral heroes according to his description?
- What kinds of rewards does he promise for faithfulness?
- What would you feel if your father gave you this speech on his deathbed?

### 1 Maccabees 2:49-70 (NIV)

*49* When Mattathias was about to die, he said to his sons: "Arrogance and scorn have now become strong; it is a time of ruin and furious anger. *50* Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors. *51* Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name. *52* Was not Abraham found faithful when tested, and it was reckoned to him as righteousness? *53* Joseph in the time of his distress kept the commandment, and became lord of Egypt. *54* Phineas our ancestor, because he was deeply zealous, received the covenant of everlasting priesthood. *55* Joshua, because he fulfilled the command, became a judge in Israel. *56* Caleb, because he testified in the assembly, received an inheritance in the land. *57* David, because he was merciful, inherited the throne of the kingdom forever. *58* Elijah, because of great zeal for the law, was taken up into heaven. *59* Hananiah, Azariah, and Mishael believed and were saved from the flame. *60* Daniel, because of his innocence, was delivered from the mouth of the lions. *61* And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength. *62* Do not fear the words of sinners, for their splendor will turn into dung and worms. *63* Today they will be exalted, but tomorrow they will not be found, because they will have returned to the dust, and their plans will have perished. *64* My children, be courageous and grow strong in the law, for by it you will gain honor." *65* Then he called for his son Simon and said to him: "I know that you are a wise man; listen to him always; he shall be your father. *66* Judas

*Maccabeus has been a mighty warrior from his youth; he shall command the army and fight the battle against the peoples. 67 You shall rally around you all who observe the law, and avenge the wrong done to your people. 68 Pay back the Gentiles in full, and obey the commands of the law." 69 Then he blessed them, and was gathered to his ancestors. 70 He died in the one hundred forty-sixth year and was buried in the tomb of his ancestors at Modein. And all Israel mourned for him with great lamentation.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for confident volunteers who can handle the dramatic tone. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Divide into natural sections focusing on different aspects.

**Reader 1:** Verses 49-51 (The opening charge) **Reader 2:** Verses 52-61 (The ancestral examples)

**Reader 3:** Verses 62-70 (The final instructions and death)

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Listen for the emotion and urgency, this is a desperate father giving final counsel to sons who will face life-or-death decisions about their faith.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4, give exactly 3 minutes to develop 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups and listen for authentic curiosity. Help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this speech?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read. Not quiz questions with obvious answers, but things you're actually curious about. Maybe something that surprised you, confused you, or made you uncomfortable. What do you really want to discuss? You have three minutes, go.

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

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**Remember:** Let students drive with their questions. Facilitate and probe deeper rather than lecturing. Guide discovery through questions rather than giving answers.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board, look for themes around motivation, honor, and courage. Start with questions most students can relate to.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What pattern do you notice in the examples Mattathias gives of faithful ancestors?"
- "How do the ancestors' motivations compare to the rewards Mattathias promises his sons?"
- "What's the difference between seeking honor and receiving honor as a result of faithfulness?"
- "When does motivation for recognition become problematic versus healthy?"
- "How might 'everlasting name' mean something different from personal fame or glory?"
- "What current situations might require the kind of courage Mattathias is calling for?"
- "What if Abraham or Daniel had acted differently, how would that have changed things?"
- "Why might remembering ancestral faithfulness help with present courage?"

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Mattathias isn't just promising personal recognition, he's inviting his sons to join a legacy of faithfulness that transcends individual generations. The "everlasting name" comes through participating in God's covenant purposes, not through self-promotion. The honor follows obedience rather than driving it.

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

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension playing out between doing good for recognition versus doing good because it's right? And when do family stories or examples from people you admire actually help you make tough choices?

### Real Issues This Connects To

- Posting about volunteer work or charitable giving on social media, seeking recognition or inspiring others?
- Standing up to bullying when it might make you a target, remembering brave family members or mentors
- Choosing honest responses on tests or assignments even when cheating would help your grade
- Defending unpopular friends or viewpoints online even when it costs you followers or likes
- Taking principled stands on social issues despite family or peer pressure to stay quiet
- Making sacrifices for faith practices when they conflict with social opportunities

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations require different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket rules.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone do the right thing in a way that clearly wasn't about getting credit?"
- "What family stories or examples actually help you when you're facing tough decisions?"
- "How can you tell the difference between healthy and unhealthy motivation for good actions?"
- "What would courage look like in your specific situation versus someone else's completely different context?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: pursuing honor through faithful service is fundamentally different from seeking glory through performance. When we follow God because we love Him and want to participate in His purposes, recognition becomes a grateful byproduct rather than the driving motivation. That doesn't make the motivation question simple, but it does give us a framework for thinking it through.

This week, pay attention to your own motivations when you do good things. Notice when recognition feels like a healthy encouragement versus when it starts driving your choices. Also notice how stories of

courageous people, in your family, your faith community, or history, actually affect your own willingness to take risks for what's right.

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You did good thinking today about genuinely complex questions. Keep wrestling with hard questions about faithfulness and motivation, that wrestling itself is a sign you're taking both God and integrity seriously. I'm confident you can navigate these tensions with wisdom.

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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 stories of courageous people can inspire us to do the right thing even when it's scary or costly.

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### If Kids Ask "Why would God want people to die for Him?"

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Say: "God doesn't want people to die, but sometimes very brave people choose to do the right thing even when it's dangerous because they love God and other people more than they love staying safe."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had to do something really hard or scary because it was the right thing to do. Maybe standing up to a bully even though you were afraid. Maybe telling the truth when you knew you'd get in trouble. Maybe defending a friend when other people were being mean to them.

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Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where you knew what the right thing to do was, but part of you wanted to just stay quiet or walk away because doing the right thing would cost you something. Maybe you'd lose friends. Maybe you'd get laughed at. Maybe you'd get punished.

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That feeling makes total sense. Your brain is trying to protect you. It's saying "Hey, if you do this brave thing, something bad might happen to you." And that's not wrong, sometimes being brave does cost us things. But sometimes the right thing is still the right thing even when it's hard.

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This reminds me of movies like Moana or Brave or Wonder where the main characters have to choose between staying safe and doing what they know is right. Moana could have stayed on her island. Merida could have just accepted the arranged marriage. August could have tried harder to blend in. But something in them said "This matters too much to give up."

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The tricky part is figuring out when something is important enough to be brave about and when it's smarter to wait or get help. How do you know when to take that risk?

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Today we're going to hear about a father who was dying and needed to give his sons courage for some really hard choices. He told them stories about brave people from the past to help them be brave in the future. Let's find out how those stories made a difference.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share about conflicts with siblings, standing up to teasing, or admitting mistakes. Acknowledge briefly and keep momentum toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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A long time ago, there was a brave priest named Mattathias who lived when his people weren't allowed to follow God anymore.

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The king had made a new law: "No more Jewish prayers. No more reading God's word. You have to worship our Greek gods now." If anyone got caught following God, they could be killed.

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This made Mattathias incredibly angry. These weren't just rules, this was about his family's relationship with God going back hundreds and hundreds of years. His great-great-great grandparents had followed God. His great-great grandparents had followed God. Every generation of his family had loved and obeyed God.

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Imagine if someone told your family you weren't allowed to be together anymore, or that you had to pretend you didn't love each other. That's what this felt like to Mattathias.

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So Mattathias and his sons decided they would rather fight back and risk their lives than give up their faith. They went up into the mountains and started a rebellion to protect their freedom to worship God.

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For a whole year, they lived like outlaws, hiding in caves, fighting soldiers, helping other families escape. But Mattathias was getting old and sick from all the hardship.

---

As he was dying, he knew his sons would have to keep fighting without him. They were afraid. How could they be brave enough to keep going when their father wasn't there to lead them anymore?

Mattathias called them all around his bedside. His voice was weak, but his eyes were still fierce. "Listen to me, boys. I need to tell you something important before I die."

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**1 Maccabees 2:50-51 (NIV)**

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*"Now, my children, show zeal for the law, and give your lives for the covenant of our ancestors. Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name."*

The sons looked at each other nervously. Give their lives? That sounded terrifying. But their father wasn't finished.

"Let me tell you stories about brave people in our family," he said. "Stories that will help you remember who you are and what you can do."

"Remember Abraham? When God asked him to do something that seemed impossible, Abraham trusted God even though he was scared. And God made Abraham the father of many nations."

"Remember Joseph? When he was thrown in prison for something he didn't do, he kept doing the right thing anyway. Eventually he became the second most powerful person in all of Egypt."

"Remember Daniel? When the king said he couldn't pray to God anymore, Daniel prayed anyway. God saved him from the lions."

"Remember the three friends, Shadrach, Meshach, and Abednego? When they wouldn't bow down to the king's statue, he threw them in a fire. But God walked with them in the flames and brought them out safely."

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**1 Maccabees 2:61 (NIV)**

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*"And so observe, from generation to generation, that none of those who put their trust in him will lack strength."*

As Mattathias told these stories, something changed in his sons' faces. They started sitting up straighter. Their eyes got brighter. They began to remember: they came from a long line of brave people.

---

These weren't just old stories, these were their family. These were people who had faced impossible odds and chosen to trust God anyway. And every time, God had given them the strength they needed.

---

Mattathias looked around at each of his sons. "You are part of this story now. When you choose to be brave, when you do what's right even when it's hard, you're adding your chapter to this family legacy."

---

Then he gave them specific jobs. "Simon, you're wise, be the counselor. Judas, you're strong, lead the army. All of you, stick together and remember these stories when you're afraid."

---

After Mattathias died, his sons did exactly what he said. They remembered the stories. They stuck together. And when they faced scary situations, they thought about Abraham and Daniel and all the others who had been brave before them.

---

And you know what? They won. They defeated the king's army. They got their temple back. They restored their freedom to worship God. And their story became another story that future generations could remember when they needed courage.

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Sometimes in our lives, we need to remember stories of brave people too, people in our families, people in our churches, people in the Bible. Those stories remind us that courage is possible, even when we're afraid.

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When God asks us to do something hard, or when we need to stand up for someone, or when we need to tell the truth even though it's scary, we can remember: other people have been brave before us. We're part of a long story of courage.

---

Being brave doesn't mean not being scared. It means choosing to do the right thing even when you are scared, trusting that God will give you the strength you need.

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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 Choice

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Put yourself in the sons' shoes. Your dad is dying and telling you that you might need to risk your life to fight for what's right. You're scared, but you also know that your people need someone to protect them. How do you think they felt when they heard those stories about Abraham and Daniel and the others?

**Listen For:** "Brave," "scared but hopeful," "stronger", affirm: "Yes, stories of courage can actually change how brave we feel."

### Question 2: Family Stories

Think about your own family or people you know. Has anyone ever told you a story about a time when someone in your family did something brave or stood up for what was right? Maybe a grandparent or parent or older sibling? How did hearing that story make you feel about what you could do?

**If They Say:** "My family doesn't have stories like that", respond: "Sometimes the bravest stories are small ones we don't notice, like always telling the truth or helping neighbors."

### Question 3: The Hard Part

Mattathias told his sons they might need to "give their lives" for what they believed. That sounds really scary. But sometimes we have to give up smaller things, like popularity or staying out of trouble, to do what's right. When have you had to choose between doing the easy thing and doing the right thing?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made the sons' choice so hard and so important, it cost them something to be brave."

### Question 4: The Result

The sons won their fight and got their freedom back. But what if they had lost? What if being brave hadn't worked out the way they hoped? Do you think it still would have been the right thing to do? Why or why not?

**If They Say:** "No, because they would have died for nothing", respond: "What if doing the right thing matters even when we can't control the outcome?"

Those stories Mattathias told weren't just about the past, they were about helping his sons see what was possible. When we remember how God has helped brave people before, it helps us believe He'll help us too.

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#### **4. Activity: Courage Chain (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 how remembering past courage creates strength for present challenges by having kids physically experience how individual acts of bravery link together to create collective strength. Success looks like kids discovering that they're stronger when they remember they're connected to others who have been brave.

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

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We're going to create a human Courage Chain. Everyone will start standing alone around the room, spread out. Each person represents someone facing a scary challenge by themselves.

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But here's the twist: as we go around the room, each person will share the name of someone brave they know or have heard about, family member, Bible hero, book character, anyone. After you share, you get to link arms with someone else who's already shared.

---

The challenge is to see how the chain feels different when you're all connected versus when you're standing alone. We're doing this because it's exactly like how Mattathias used stories of brave people to help his sons feel connected to something bigger than just themselves.

---

I'll start by sharing a brave person I know, then we'll go around. When it's your turn, say "I remember [name] who was brave when they [brief description]" then link up with the chain.

---

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

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Start by having everyone spread out and feel isolated. Then begin sharing and let the chain grow person by person. Watch how their posture and confidence change as they link together.

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As the chain grows, have them test its strength gently, can they move together? Can they support someone who stumbles? Notice how they feel more stable together than they did apart.

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Coach with phrases like: "Notice how different it feels to face hard things when you remember you're connected to other brave people. Feel how much stronger the chain is than any single link."

---

When everyone is linked, have them take a moment to look at the whole chain. Point out how each person's courage story contributes to everyone else's strength.

---

Finish by having them notice that they each started alone and scared, but they're ending connected and stronger, just like Mattathias's sons when they remembered their brave ancestors.

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**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize they feel braver as part of the chain than they did standing alone, this is the physical representation of how ancestral courage gives present strength.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt to stand alone at the beginning versus being part of the chain at the end? When we remember stories of brave people who came before us, it's like linking our courage to theirs. We discover we're not facing hard things by ourselves, we're part of a long line of people who chose to be brave when it mattered.

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

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Here's what we learned today: stories of brave people can help us be brave too. When we remember how God helped Daniel face the lions, or how He helped someone in our family through a hard time, it reminds us that courage is possible even when we're afraid.

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This doesn't mean you should look for dangerous situations or try to be a hero about everything. It means that when you know what the right thing to do is, you can remember you're connected to a long line of brave people who chose to trust God even when it was scary.

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The amazing result is that when we choose courage, our brave choice becomes part of the story that might help someone else be brave later. Just like Mattathias's sons became heroes whose story encourages us today.

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

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Ask someone in your family to tell you about a time when they or someone they know had to be brave. Listen to their story and think about how it might help you when you face your own hard choices. Remember: you're part of a courage chain that goes back generations.

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

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*God, thank You for all the brave people who came before us and showed us what courage looks like. When we face scary situations or need to do the right thing even when it's hard, help us remember their stories and know that You'll give us strength too. Help us be brave so our story can encourage others. 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 helped brave people long ago and helps us be brave today too.

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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 remembering brave people to remembering superheroes who help us feel strong, then ask "Who helps you feel brave?"

---

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's strength or being brave. Suggestions: "Be Strong and Courageous," "God Is So Good," or "Jesus Loves Me." Use movements: flex muscles during "strong" lyrics, point up during "God" lyrics, march in place during "brave" words.

---

Great singing! Now sit down in a horseshoe shape so everyone can see me. I have an amazing story about some very brave people who loved God and how God helped them be strong.

---

## 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 worried when talking about danger, sound strong when talking about God's help.

---

Today we're going to meet a daddy whose name was Mattathias. He loved God very much.

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

But there was a mean king who made a very bad rule. The king said "Nobody can pray to God anymore! Nobody can read God's book anymore!" That made Mattathias very sad and angry.

---

*[Make a sad face and shake your head]*

---

Mattathias had sons who loved God too. They decided they would keep praying to God even if it got them in trouble. They went to live in the mountains to hide from the mean king.

---

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

---

After a long time, Mattathias got very sick. He knew he was going to die soon. His sons were scared! How could they be brave without their daddy?

---

*[Move to center, speak with warm, strong voice]*

---

So Mattathias called his sons close to him. "I need to tell you something important," he said. "I need to tell you about brave people in our family who loved God."

---

*[Move to side, speak excitedly]*

---

"Remember Abraham! God asked him to do something scary. But Abraham trusted God, and God made him very special!"

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**1 Maccabees 2:51 (NIV)**

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*"Remember the deeds of the ancestors, which they did in their generations; and you will receive great honor and an everlasting name."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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"Remember Daniel! When bad people threw him to hungry lions, God kept him safe! Remember the three friends who wouldn't bow down to a statue! God saved them from the fire!"

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

---

As Mattathias told these stories, his sons started to feel different. They remembered: "Wait! God helped all those brave people! Maybe God will help us be brave too!"

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Mattathias smiled at his sons. "God helped them because they loved Him and trusted Him. God will help you too when you need to be brave."

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

Then Mattathias told each son what their job would be. "You be the wise one. You be the strong one. You take care of each other. And remember these stories when you're scared."

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

After their daddy died, the sons did exactly what he said! They remembered the stories about Daniel and Abraham and the others. And when they got scared, they said "God helped them, and God will help us too!"

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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And you know what happened? God DID help them! They beat the mean king! They got their temple back! They could pray to God again! Just like God helped Daniel and Abraham, God helped them too!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we get scared too. Maybe someone is mean to us. Maybe we have to do something hard. Maybe we need to tell the truth when we're in trouble.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When that happens, we can remember stories of brave people who loved God. We can remember that God helped them, and God will help us too.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves you just like He loved Daniel and Abraham and Mattathias's sons. When you need to be brave, God will help you be brave too!

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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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Stand up and find a partner! I'll 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.

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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 sons felt when they heard stories about Daniel and Abraham?
  2. Who is someone brave that you know?
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3. What made Mattathias want to tell his sons those stories?

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4. What would you do if you were one of the sons?

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5. How did the sons change after hearing the stories?

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6. Why do you think God helped Daniel in the lion's den?

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7. What happened when the sons remembered the stories?

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8. When do you need to be brave at school?

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9. When do you need to be brave at home?

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10. Who helps you feel brave?

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11. Why did God help the sons win against the mean king?

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12. How can you remember to be brave when you're scared?

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13. What does God do when we need help?

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14. How can we trust God like Daniel did?

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15. What makes someone brave?

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16. What should you remember from this story?

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17. How does God help us today?

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18. Who can you tell about being brave?

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19. What would happen if nobody was brave?

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20. How can you be like the brave people in the story?

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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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Choose songs about God's help or being brave. Include movements like marching for courage songs or reaching up during "God helps us" lyrics. Suggestions: "When I Am Afraid," "God Is My Helper," or "I Am Strong."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for prayer. Fold your hands and close your eyes.

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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 helping Daniel in the lion's den.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for helping Abraham be brave when he was scared. Thank you for helping Mattathias's sons fight the mean king.*

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*[Pause]*

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*When we need to be brave at school or home, help us remember that You helped all those people and You will help us too.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank You for loving us and making us strong. Help us remember the stories of brave people. 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. Examples: "Help me be brave like Daniel" or "Thank you for making me strong."

Remember: God helped brave people long ago, and God helps you be brave today too! Have a wonderful week, and remember that God loves you!

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# Treat as Family

*Relationship Wisdom, How Do We Honor Everyone Well?*

**1 Timothy 5:1-16**

## 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

**1 Timothy 5:1-16 (NIV)**

*1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*

*3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. 5 The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. 6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. 8 Anyone who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

*9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good work.*

*11 As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. 12 Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. 13 Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense and say things they ought not to. 14 So I counsel younger widows to marry, manage their homes and give the enemy no opportunity for slander. 15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.*

*16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.*

## Context

Paul is writing to Timothy, his young protégé who is leading the church in Ephesus. As a younger leader in a culture that deeply valued age and authority, Timothy needs wisdom about how to navigate relationships across generational and gender lines. The church is dealing with practical issues: correction of members, care for widows, and maintaining appropriate boundaries in a diverse community.

Paul has just finished discussing church leadership qualifications and is now addressing how Timothy should relate to different groups within the congregation. This isn't abstract theology, it's practical guidance for a young pastor who must correct older men, work alongside women, and manage limited church resources while maintaining his credibility and purity.

## The Big Idea

**Family relationships provide the blueprint for how we honor and interact with people across age and gender lines in the faith community.**

This approach acknowledges the complexity of human relationships while providing clear guidelines. The family metaphor prevents both harsh treatment of others and inappropriate intimacy, offering a relational framework that transcends cultural differences while respecting the specific vulnerabilities that exist in cross-gender relationships.

## Theological Core

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- **Relational Respect.** Age and position deserve honor, even when correction is necessary. The way we approach someone matters as much as what we say.
  - **Family Metaphor.** Treating church members as family creates appropriate boundaries and expectations, neither too distant nor too intimate, but warmly respectful.
  - **Gender Boundaries.** Cross-gender relationships require additional wisdom and safeguards, not because of shame but because of the unique vulnerabilities and temptations involved.
  - **Community Care.** The church has responsibility for those truly in need, but families bear primary responsibility for their own members, preventing both neglect and enabling.
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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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- Intergenerational relationships require wisdom, you can correct someone older while still showing proper respect and honor
  - Family metaphors provide clear guidelines for appropriate boundaries without being legalistic or cold
  - Gender boundaries aren't about fear or shame but about wisdom and protecting relationships
  - Healthy communities require both individual responsibility and collective care, knowing when to help and when to require accountability
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- Different relationships require different kinds of respect and interaction, you don't talk to your teacher the same way you talk to your little brother
  - Good boundaries help relationships stay healthy and safe for everyone involved
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- Sometimes you need to say hard things to people you care about, but the way you say it matters
  - It's okay to feel awkward about boundaries, learning to treat people appropriately takes practice and wisdom
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### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to treat everyone in His family with love and kindness
  - We can be respectful to older people and gentle with younger people
  - God's family is like our family, we take care of each other
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Making it about gender hierarchy.** This passage isn't about women being less important or men being in charge, it's about appropriate relationship dynamics that honor everyone involved while maintaining healthy boundaries.
  - **Assuming all families are healthy models.** The family metaphor works because it points to ideal family relationships, not dysfunctional ones. When someone's family experience has been harmful, help them understand what healthy family love looks like.
  - **Creating fear around cross-gender friendships.** The goal isn't to make opposite-gender relationships scary or impossible, but to approach them with wisdom and appropriate safeguards that protect everyone involved.
  - **Ignoring the correction context.** This passage is about how to handle church discipline and difficult conversations, it's not primarily about casual social interaction but about maintaining respect even in conflict.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"What if someone's family was abusive? How can they understand these family metaphors?"**

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This is a profound question that requires both pastoral care and theological clarity. When Paul uses family metaphors, he's pointing to what family relationships should be, characterized by love, protection, respect, and appropriate boundaries. For someone whose family experience has been harmful, the church family becomes an opportunity to experience what these relationships can look like when they're healthy. We can acknowledge the pain of broken family relationships while still using the metaphor as an aspirational picture of how God intends us to treat each other.

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**"Isn't this passage just cultural? Does it really apply today when we have different gender and age dynamics?"**

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While the specific cultural expressions may shift, the underlying principles remain relevant: the need for appropriate respect across age lines and wisdom in cross-gender relationships. Every culture has ways of showing honor to elders and maintaining healthy boundaries between men and women. The family metaphor transcends specific cultural forms because the fundamental dynamics of respect, protection, and appropriate intimacy are universal human needs, even if they're expressed differently in different contexts.

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**"What about professional relationships where you have to work closely with opposite-gender colleagues?"**

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The principle of treating others "as family" doesn't eliminate professional relationships but informs how we conduct them. Just as you might work alongside a sibling or cousin in a family business, you can maintain professional collaboration while being mindful of boundaries that protect both the relationship and your integrity. This often means being intentional about transparency, avoiding unnecessarily intimate settings, and prioritizing the health of all relationships involved, including marriages and other commitments.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Family love shows us how to honor everyone well, with appropriate respect, healthy boundaries, and genuine care that protects relationships rather than complicating them.**

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**Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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## Your Main Job Today

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Guide students to explore what appropriate boundaries and respect look like across different relationships. Help them wrestle with how to maintain honor and love while also addressing difficult issues when necessary.

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## The Tension to Frame

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How do you show respect to someone when you disagree with them or need to address a problem? How do family relationships help us navigate this challenge?

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## Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their experiences with family relationships, both positive and challenging
  - Honor the complexity of gender and age dynamics without creating fear or confusion
  - Let them explore practical applications rather than giving quick answers
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about how you handle conflict with different people in your life. When your little sibling is doing something wrong, you probably don't use the same approach you'd use with your parent or your teacher. When you disagree with a close friend, that conversation looks different than when you disagree with someone you barely know. We instinctively adjust our approach based on the relationship.

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But here's where it gets tricky. Sometimes you need to address a serious issue with someone, maybe a friend is making dangerous choices, or an adult in your life is doing something that seems wrong. How do you show respect for who they are while still being honest about the problem? How do you honor the relationship while not ignoring something important?

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This becomes even more complex when gender and age differences are involved. How do you navigate relationships across those lines, especially when there's conflict or correction needed? Do you just avoid those conversations? Do you treat everyone exactly the same regardless of who they are?

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Today we're looking at advice Paul gave to Timothy, a young leader who had to navigate exactly these kinds of situations. Timothy needed wisdom about how to correct older men, work alongside women, and manage relationships across age and gender lines while maintaining respect and appropriate boundaries.

As we read, pay attention to the family metaphors Paul uses. Notice how he addresses the complexity without avoiding it.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage has some complex cultural elements about widows that may require brief explanation. Help students focus on the relational principles rather than getting bogged down in historical details.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific relationship language does Paul use for different groups of people?
- What's challenging about Timothy's situation as a young leader?
- Why might family metaphors be helpful for navigating complex relationships?
- What seems difficult or confusing about these instructions?

### 1 Timothy 5:1-16 (NIV)

*1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*

*3 Give proper recognition to those widows who are really in need. 4 But if a widow has children or grandchildren, these should learn first of all to put their religion into practice by caring for their own family and so repaying their parents and grandparents, for this is pleasing to God. 5 The widow who is really in need and left all alone puts her hope in God and continues night and day to pray and to ask God for help. 6 But the widow who lives for pleasure is dead even while she lives. 7 Give the people these instructions, so that no one may be open to blame. 8 Anyone*

*who does not provide for their relatives, and especially for their own household, has denied the faith and is worse than an unbeliever.*

*9 No widow may be put on the list of widows unless she is over sixty, has been faithful to her husband, 10 and is well known for her good deeds, such as bringing up children, showing hospitality, washing the feet of the Lord's people, helping those in trouble and devoting herself to all kinds of good work.*

*11 As for younger widows, do not put them on such a list. For when their sensual desires overcome their dedication to Christ, they want to marry. 12 Thus they bring judgment on themselves, because they have broken their first pledge. 13 Besides, they get into the habit of being idle and going about from house to house. And not only do they become idlers, but also busybodies who talk nonsense and say things they ought not to. 14 So I counsel younger widows to marry, manage their homes and give the enemy no opportunity for slander. 15 Some have in fact already turned away to follow Satan.*

*16 If any woman who is a believer has widows in her family, she should continue to help them and not let the church be burdened with them, so that the church can help those widows who are really in need.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Choose confident readers for this passage. The middle section about widow care is complex, consider having stronger readers handle verses 3-16.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-2 (The family metaphor instructions) **Reader 2:** Verses 3-8 (Widow care and family responsibility) **Reader 3:** Verses 9-16 (Practical widow care guidelines)

Listen for the tone of this advice, Paul is being very practical and specific about complex relationship situations.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and assist. If groups are stuck, prompt them with "What surprised you?" or "What seems challenging about Timothy's situation?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Don't worry about having the "right" questions, ask what you're actually curious about. Maybe something confused you, or something seemed difficult to apply, or you wonder about Timothy's situation. You have three minutes, go.

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### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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**Remember:** Start with their questions and use your probing questions to go deeper. Let them discover the principles rather than lecturing about them.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions. I'll write them on the board and we'll explore them together.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What do you notice about how Paul categorizes different people in the church?"
  - "Why might Timothy need this advice, what was challenging about his situation?"
  - "How would treating someone 'as a father' change the way you approach a difficult conversation with them?"
  - "What's the difference between 'rebuking harshly' and 'exhorting as a father'?"
  - "Why do you think Paul adds 'with absolute purity' specifically for younger women?"
  - "What does this passage suggest about the balance between individual responsibility and community care?"
  - "How might these principles apply differently in our cultural context compared to Timothy's?"
  - "What would it look like to apply family relationship dynamics in non-family settings today?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? Paul is saying that the way you relate to your family, the respect, boundaries, and love that work there, should inform how you relate to others in the faith community. It's not about avoiding relationships or making them unnecessarily complicated, but about bringing the best of family dynamics to all your relationships while being wise about the unique challenges different relationships present.

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see these same relationship dynamics playing out? Think about school, youth group, family situations, social media interactions, part-time jobs. Where do you need to navigate respect across age or gender lines, especially when there's conflict or disagreement?

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Confronting a teacher or coach when you think they're being unfair
  - Addressing problems in mixed-gender friend groups without creating drama
  - Dealing with family conflicts where respect and honesty both matter
  - Navigating workplace relationships with older supervisors or younger coworkers
  - Handling online interactions where age and gender create additional complexity
  - Managing friend groups where different people need different kinds of support
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Acknowledge that these situations are genuinely complex and that wisdom often means taking time to think through the best approach.

## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone handle a difficult conversation really well across age or gender lines?"
  - "What would help you know whether you're being appropriately respectful or just avoiding necessary conversations?"
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- "How do you discern between healthy boundaries and unhealthy barriers in relationships?"
- "What's the difference between family-like love and being inappropriate or codependent?"

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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: family relationships show us what appropriate respect, healthy boundaries, and genuine care look like. When you need to address a difficult issue with someone, ask yourself: how would I handle this if this person were my sibling, parent, or cousin? That doesn't mean avoiding the conversation, but it means approaching it with the kind of love and respect that protects the relationship.

This week, pay attention to how you navigate different relationships. Notice when family-like respect and boundaries would improve an interaction. Experiment with bringing the best of family dynamics to your other relationships, not the dysfunction, but the protective love and appropriate honor that healthy families demonstrate.

You did excellent thinking today about complex relationship dynamics. These aren't simple issues, and the fact that you're wrestling with them thoughtfully shows maturity. Keep asking these kinds of questions and trust that wisdom develops over time through both experience and reflection.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that different relationships require different kinds of respect and interaction, and that treating people like family means showing appropriate care and honor.

### If Kids Ask "Why do we have to treat boys and girls differently?"

Say: "We don't treat them as less important, but we do show respect in ways that keep everyone safe and comfortable, just like in healthy families."

## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you have ever had to tell someone in your family that they were doing something wrong. Keep your hand up if you talked to your little brother or sister the same exact way you would talk to your parent or grandparent. Anyone still have their hand up? I didn't think so!

---

Here's a harder question: imagine your best friend is doing something that could get them in serious trouble, maybe something dangerous or hurtful to other people. Part of you thinks "I need to say something because I care about them," but another part thinks "This is going to be such an awkward conversation and they might get mad at me." Have you ever felt stuck like that?

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You're not wrong to feel that way. It's genuinely hard to know how to approach someone when you need to talk about something serious. Your friendship matters, you want to show respect for them, but you also care too much to just ignore the problem. Those feelings are completely normal and show that you're thinking carefully about relationships.

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This is like the movie "Inside Out" where Riley has to figure out how to talk to her parents about her feelings. Or like in "Encanto" when Mirabel has to address problems in her family while still showing love and respect for everyone. The way you approach someone affects whether they can hear what you're saying.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to show respect and care for people while still being honest when something important needs to be said. Different relationships call for different approaches, but how do you know what approach to use?

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Today we're going to hear about a young leader named Timothy who got some very practical advice about how to treat different people in his church community. He needed to know how to show respect while still addressing problems when necessary. Let's find out what his mentor Paul told him to do.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share examples of family conflicts or times they felt stuck about addressing problems. Acknowledge these briefly and redirect attention to the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Timothy was a young leader in the early church, and he had a big problem. People in his church community were making mistakes, some of the choices they were making weren't good for them or for

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others. As a leader, it was Timothy's job to help them see the problems and make better choices.

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But here's what made it so difficult: some of the people making these mistakes were much older than Timothy. In their culture, young people were supposed to show tremendous respect to older adults. Some of the people were men, some were women, some were his age, some were younger. How do you approach all these different people in ways that honor who they are while still addressing the problems?

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Timothy probably felt nervous about this. Can you imagine being the youngest person in the room and having to tell adults that they needed to change something about their behavior? What if they got angry? What if they stopped respecting him as a leader? What if he said the wrong thing and made the situation worse?

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Imagine you had to tell your teacher that they were being unfair, or you had to address a problem with someone of the opposite gender without making things weird, or you had to help an older relative who was making poor choices. Those conversations require a lot of wisdom, and Timothy needed that same kind of wisdom.

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Paul, Timothy's mentor, understood exactly how challenging this was. Paul had years of experience navigating relationships in diverse communities, and he had learned some important principles about how to treat different people with appropriate respect.

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Paul's advice was brilliant in its simplicity. Instead of giving Timothy complicated rules for every situation, he gave him a framework that would work in almost any circumstances. He told Timothy to think of the church community as his family.

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"When you need to correct an older man," Paul said, "don't be harsh with him. Instead, encourage him gently, the way you would approach your own father when you needed to discuss something important." Think about how that would change your whole approach, the tone, the respect, the assumption that this person cares about doing the right thing.

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"Treat younger men like brothers," Paul continued. When you have a problem with your brother, you can be more direct, but you still care about the relationship. You're not trying to win a fight, you're trying to solve a problem together because you're family.

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Paul didn't stop there. He gave Timothy guidance for relating to women in the community too. "Treat older women like mothers," he said. Again, think about how you approach your mother when something needs to be discussed, with respect, with love, with the assumption that she wants what's best.

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## 1 Timothy 5:1-2 (NIV)

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*1 Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, 2 older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*

"And treat younger women like sisters," Paul said, "with absolute purity." This meant that Timothy should approach younger women with the same protective care he would show his own sister, always being mindful of maintaining appropriate boundaries that kept everyone safe and comfortable.

Paul understood something important about families. In healthy families, people can address problems and have difficult conversations while still maintaining love and respect. A good father can correct his child without being mean. A sister can challenge her brother without destroying their relationship. A son can express concerns to his mother while still honoring her.

The family relationship provides a framework for how to approach someone, it tells you what tone to use, what boundaries to maintain, and what your goal should be. You're not trying to embarrass them or prove you're right. You're trying to help someone you care about, just like you would in your own family.

Paul went on to give Timothy very specific guidance about how to care for people in need while still expecting families to take responsibility for their own members. The church should help people who truly have no one else, but families shouldn't just dump their responsibilities on the community.

This was revolutionary advice. Instead of making relationships more complicated, Paul made them simpler by giving Timothy a clear reference point: treat everyone like the family member they most resemble. This meant Timothy could maintain appropriate respect and boundaries while still addressing problems when necessary.

When Timothy followed this advice, something beautiful happened. People felt honored rather than attacked when he needed to correct them. Relationships stayed healthy even during difficult conversations. The community became more like a true family, not perfect, but characterized by the kind of love and respect that protects everyone involved.

Sometimes in our lives, we face similar challenges. We need to address problems with friends, work with people of different ages, navigate relationships across gender lines, or have difficult conversations while maintaining respect. Timothy's story teaches us that family love provides the perfect model.

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What we learn from this is that different relationships require different approaches, but they all require respect, appropriate boundaries, and genuine care. When we treat others like the family members they resemble, we honor them while still being able to address what needs to be addressed.

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The core truth is this: God wants us to treat everyone in His family with the same kind of respectful, protective love that we see in healthy families. This doesn't make relationships more complicated, it actually makes them clearer and safer for everyone involved.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Different Approaches

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Think about how you talk to different people in your family. How would you approach your parent if you needed to tell them something important, compared to how you'd approach your little sibling? What would be different about your tone, your words, or your attitude? Why do you think those differences matter?

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**Listen For:** "I'd be more respectful to my parent," "I'd be more careful with my words", affirm: "Exactly! You instinctively know that different relationships call for different approaches."

#### Question 2: The Awkward Conversations

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Imagine you have a friend who's your age but the opposite gender, and they're doing something that could get them in trouble. You want to help them, but you also don't want to make your friendship weird. If you treated them "like a sibling," how might that change your approach? What would stay the same and what would be different?

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**If They Say:** "I'd still be worried about being awkward", respond "That's totally normal! Even with siblings, some conversations feel awkward, but you care enough to have them anyway."

#### Question 3: The Respect Challenge

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Timothy had to correct older adults even though he was young. That's like you having to tell your teacher or a parent that they made a mistake. How do you think treating them "like a father or mother" would help Timothy find the courage to have that conversation while still being respectful?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Timothy's approach so wise, he could be honest without being disrespectful."

#### Question 4: The Family Pattern

Paul told Timothy to treat the church community like a family. What do you think would happen in a school or friend group if everyone started treating each other more like family members? What would get better? What challenges might come up? Would you want to be part of a group like that?

**If They Say:** "Some families fight a lot", respond "You're right, which is why we want to follow the pattern of healthy families that show love and respect."

You've identified something really important: family relationships give us a blueprint for how to treat others with respect, appropriate boundaries, and genuine care. This makes difficult conversations possible while protecting relationships at the same time.

#### 4. Activity: Family Relationship Sorting (8 minutes)

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

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces appropriate relationship dynamics by having kids physically experience how different family relationships require different approaches to communication. Success looks like kids discovering that changing your relational stance changes how you communicate, and that all family roles deserve respect but require different approaches.

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

We're going to play Family Relationship Sorting. I'm going to call out different family relationships, and you'll arrange yourselves in the room based on how you would approach that person with a difficult

conversation. One wall represents "very careful and formal," the opposite wall represents "casual and direct."

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But here's the twist, I'm also going to give you scenarios where that family member is doing something problematic, and you need to address it. Your job is to find the spot in the room that represents how you'd approach that conversation, balancing respect with honesty.

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Then we'll see if you notice a pattern about how family relationships give us wisdom for approaching different kinds of people. We're doing this because it's exactly like Timothy's situation, he needed to know how to approach different people appropriately while still addressing problems.

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

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First scenario: Your parent is consistently forgetting to pick you up from activities, and it's becoming a problem. Find your spot on the spectrum from very careful and formal to casual and direct. [Let them move, then continue]

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Next: Your younger sibling keeps borrowing your things without asking and sometimes breaks them. Where do you position yourself for that conversation? Notice if your spot changed and why. [Observe their movement]

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Here's a challenging one: Your older teenage sibling is hanging around friends who are clearly bad influences and making risky choices. Where do you stand for that conversation? Think about your tone, your approach, your goals. [Watch for their reasoning]

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Final scenario: Your cousin, who's your age and opposite gender, is posting things online that could get them in trouble with parents or school. You care about them but don't want to overstep. Find your position. [Let them settle]

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Now everyone freeze where you are and look around the room. What do you notice about how your positions changed based on the relationship? What stayed constant even as your approach shifted?

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**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize that their care and respect stays constant, but their approach adjusts, this is the physical representation of Timothy's wisdom.

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

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What did you notice about how your approach changed but your care stayed the same? You instinctively adjusted your method based on the relationship, but you never stopped caring about the person. That's exactly what Paul was teaching Timothy, let the relationship inform your approach, but always maintain respect and genuine love. You just physically experienced the wisdom of treating different people appropriately while still addressing what needs to be addressed.

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

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Here's what we learned today: different relationships require different approaches, but all relationships deserve respect, appropriate boundaries, and genuine care. When we treat people like the family members they most resemble, we honor them while still being able to address problems when necessary.

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This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone or that all boundaries are the same. It means you approach each person with the kind of respectful love that protects both them and you, just like healthy families do.

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The amazing result is that difficult conversations become possible, relationships stay healthy even during conflict, and everyone feels honored rather than attacked when problems need to be addressed.

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

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This week, pay attention to how you approach different people in your life. When you need to have a difficult conversation or address a problem, ask yourself: "How would I approach this if this person were my [parent/sibling/cousin]?" Try using family-like respect and care in one relationship where it might make a difference.

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

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*God, thank you for giving us families to teach us how to love and respect others. Help us to treat everyone in Your family with the same kind of care we show our own families. When we have difficult conversations, give us wisdom to be both honest and loving. Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God wants us to treat everyone in His family with love and respect, just like we treat our own families.

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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 treating church friends like family members, be kind to older people like grandparents, gentle with younger kids like little siblings.

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's family or love. Suggestions: "Father I Adore You," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "We Are One in the Spirit." Use movements: arms wide during "love" lyrics, point up during "God" or "Father," hold hands during "together" words.

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Great singing! You are part of God's big family, and today we're going to learn how God wants us to treat everyone in His family. Come sit in our story horseshoe so we can meet someone who learned about family love!

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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 respectful when talking about older people, sound gentle when talking about younger people.

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Today we're going to meet a young man named Timothy who loved God very much!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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Timothy was a leader in God's family, the church. But Timothy had a big problem. Sometimes people in God's family were not being kind to each other. Sometimes they were not making good choices. Timothy wanted to help them, but he didn't know how!

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*[Look worried, scratch your head]*

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You see, some of the people were much older than Timothy. Some were younger. Some were men and some were women. Timothy thought, "How do I talk to all these different people? How do I help them without being mean?"

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

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Paul was Timothy's friend and teacher. Paul was very wise! When Paul heard about Timothy's problem, he had a wonderful idea. Paul said, "Timothy, I will teach you the secret!"

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*[Move to side, sound excited]*

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"What secret?" asked Timothy. He really wanted to know how to help people the right way!

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**1 Timothy 5:1-2 (NIV)**

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*Do not rebuke an older man harshly, but exhort him as if he were your father. Treat younger men as brothers, older women as mothers, and younger women as sisters, with absolute purity.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Timothy was so happy! "Treat everyone like family!" he said. "That's easy to remember!" Do you think Timothy was excited? Yes!

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*[Move to center, speak with authority/warmth]*

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Paul explained more. "When you talk to older men, be respectful like you are talking to your daddy. When you talk to older women, be gentle like you are talking to your mommy. When you talk to people your age, be kind like you are talking to your brother or sister."

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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This was perfect! Timothy knew how to treat his family with love and respect. Now he could treat everyone in God's family the same way!

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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So Timothy started treating everyone like family. When he talked to older people, he was very respectful, just like when he talked to his parents. When he talked to younger people, he was gentle and kind, just like a good big brother.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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Something wonderful happened! People felt loved instead of scared when Timothy talked to them. Everyone felt special and cared for. God's family became more loving and kind!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God wants us to treat everyone in His family with love and respect, just like we treat our own families! God can help us be kind to older people and gentle with younger people!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in our lives, we meet older people like teachers and grandparents. We can be respectful to them! Sometimes we meet younger kids like your little brother or the kids in the younger classes. We can be gentle and kind to them!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When you're at church, at school, or at home, you can remember Timothy's secret. Treat everyone like they are part of your family, with love, kindness, and respect!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves you and He loves everyone in His big family. God will help you show love to everyone you meet!

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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! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. You'll have about one minute to share your ideas. 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. How do you act when you talk to your mommy or daddy?
  2. How do you act when you play with your little brother or sister?
  3. What does it mean to be respectful to older people?
  4. How can you be gentle with younger kids?
  5. Who are some older people in your life that you can be respectful to?
  6. Who are some younger people you can be gentle with?
  7. What would happen if everyone at church treated each other like family?
  8. How do you feel when someone treats you with kindness?
  9. What does God want us to do with people in His family?
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10. How can you show love to someone older than you?

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11. How can you show love to someone younger than you?

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12. What would happen if you were mean to people instead of kind?

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13. Why do you think God wants us to treat people like family?

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14. How does it feel to be treated like family?

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15. What's your favorite thing about your family?

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16. How can you be a good big brother or sister to younger kids?

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17. What does it look like to respect your parents?

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18. How can you help someone feel loved and special?

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19. What would you do if someone was sad and needed kindness?

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20. How can you remember to treat people like Timothy did?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together in our horseshoe. 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 songs about love and family. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God's Love is So Wonderful," or "Love, Love, Love." Include movements: hug yourself during "love" words, point to others during "friend" words, arms wide during "everyone" words.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer and remember what God wants us to do with His family.

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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 Timothy who learned how to love people...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to be respectful to older people and gentle with younger people. Help us treat everyone in Your family with love and kindness...*

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*[Pause]*

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*When we are at church, at school, or at home, help us remember to treat people like our own family...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving us and for giving us Your big family to love. Help us show Your love to everyone we meet. 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 treating God's family with love. Examples: "Help me be kind to everyone" or "Thank you for my church family."

Remember Timothy's secret: treat everyone in God's family with love and respect! Have a wonderful week showing God's love to everyone you meet!

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# Mourning with Grace

*Grieving Your Enemies, When does honoring the dead require complete truth?*

**2 Samuel 1:11-27**

## Instructor Preparation

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

## The Passage

**2 Samuel 1:11-27 (NIV)**

*11 Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. 12 They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

*13 David said to the young man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?" "I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite," he answered. 14 David asked him, "Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" 15 Then David called one of his men and said, "Go, strike him down!" So he struck him down and he died. 16 For David had said to him, "Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, 'I killed the Lord's anointed.'"*

*17 David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan: 18 (It is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: "A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel. How the mighty have fallen! 19 Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.*

*20 Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor may you have fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul, no longer rubbed with oil. 21 From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. 22 Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.*

*23 Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. 24 How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. 25 I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.*

*26 How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!" 27*

## Context

Saul and Jonathan have just died at the Battle of Mount Gilboa, fighting the Philistines. For years, Saul had relentlessly pursued David across the wilderness, seeking to kill him out of jealousy and paranoia. David had been forced to live as a fugitive, gathering outcasts and hiding in caves. He had opportunities to kill Saul but refused, saying he would not lift his hand against God's anointed.

Now news of Saul's death reaches David at Ziklag. An Amalekite messenger arrives claiming to have killed Saul at his request (though this contradicts the earlier account in 1 Samuel 31). David's response is unexpected, not relief or celebration, but genuine grief. He executes the messenger for claiming to kill God's anointed, then composes this formal lament to be sung publicly throughout Israel.

## The Big Idea

**\*\*David publicly mourns Saul, the man who hunted him for years, without mentioning Saul's persecution of him. Instead, he praises Saul's strength and accomplishments, modeling extraordinary public grace toward one's persecutor.\*\***

This lament reveals David's complex motivations, personal grief, political wisdom, and genuine honor for God's anointed. He could have used this moment to vindicate himself publicly, listing Saul's wrongs and his own righteousness. Instead, he chooses selective truth, honoring what was genuinely good about Saul's reign while passing over personal offenses in silence.

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## Theological Core

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- **Public grace toward enemies.** David demonstrates that private forgiveness can lead to public honor, even when the world would understand vindication.
  - **Selective truth in mourning.** Honoring the dead doesn't require complete biographical accuracy but rather gracious emphasis on genuine strengths and contributions.
  - **Leadership through magnanimity.** David establishes his legitimacy as Saul's successor not by condemning his predecessor but by honoring him, showing the kind of leader he intends to be.
  - **Grief over God's purposes.** Even when someone's death removes an obstacle from our path, we can still genuinely mourn the loss of their life and calling, as David does for God's anointed.
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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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- Public grace toward enemies requires intentional choice to honor their genuine strengths rather than rehearse their offenses against us
  - Multiple motivations can coexist, David's lament serves personal, political, and spiritual purposes simultaneously without invalidating its sincerity
  - Speaking truthfully about the deceased doesn't require mentioning every fault, but can focus graciously on their contributions and positive qualities
  - Discerning when to emphasize grace versus complete truth depends on context, relationship, and the purpose our words will serve
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## Grades 4, 6

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- When someone who has hurt us dies or moves away, we get to choose how we remember and talk about them to others
  - Choosing to focus on someone's good qualities instead of their wrongs shows strength and maturity, not weakness or dishonesty
  - Our words about others affect not just their reputation but also who we become as people and how others see our character
  - Feeling hurt by someone's actions is normal and valid, but we can still choose kind responses even when our feelings are complicated
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to say kind things about people, even when they haven't been kind to us
  - When we choose to be kind with our words, it makes God happy and helps other people feel better
  - We can find good things to say about almost everyone if we look for them and choose to focus on those things
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **False choice between complete honesty and selective grace.** David's lament isn't dishonest, it's strategically gracious. Help students understand that truth-telling serves different purposes in different contexts. Private processing may require full honesty; public mourning may call for gracious selection.
  - **Dismissing David's political motivations as manipulative.** David genuinely grieves while also establishing his legitimacy as successor. Mixed motives don't invalidate authentic emotion. Human responses are rarely purely one thing.
  - **Requiring blanket forgiveness without acknowledging justice.** David executes the messenger who claims to have killed Saul, showing that grace toward the dead doesn't mean ignoring ongoing
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consequences for the living. Boundaries and grace can coexist.

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- **Making this only about death situations.** The principle applies to any context where we speak publicly about those who have wronged us, former colleagues, ex-friends, parents, leaders. The question is always what our words accomplish and what character they reflect.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Isn't David being fake by not mentioning how Saul tried to kill him?"**

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David isn't lying, he's choosing what to emphasize. Public eulogies serve different purposes than private therapy sessions. David genuinely respected Saul's role as God's anointed and his military accomplishments. By focusing on these truths rather than personal grievances, David shows the kind of leader he'll be. Sometimes maturity means choosing grace over vindication, especially when someone can no longer respond or defend themselves.

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### **"What if someone was really terrible? Do we still have to say nice things when they die?"**

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We're not required to lie or manufacture fake praise. But we can often find something genuinely positive, their love for family, their skills, their early dreams before things went wrong. Sometimes the kindest true thing we can say is simply that their life mattered to someone. The goal isn't to whitewash history but to resist the temptation to use someone's death as an opportunity to settle scores or justify ourselves.

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### **"How do we know when to speak up about someone's wrongs versus staying quiet?"**

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Consider your motives, your audience, and the timing. Are you speaking to protect others from ongoing harm, or to make yourself feel better? Are you the right person to speak in this context? David's public lament serves Israel's need for unity and his own need to model magnanimous leadership. Private conversations with close friends might call for different honesty than public statements. Wisdom discerns what each situation requires.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**Public grace toward our enemies, choosing to honor their genuine strengths without rehearsing their wrongs against us, reveals not weakness but the kind of strength that builds rather than destroys.**

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

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the complexity of public grace toward those who have wronged us. Help them discover that David's choice to honor Saul publicly while omitting personal grievances reveals mature leadership, not dishonesty or weakness.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When does honoring the dead or departed require complete truth versus gracious selection? Is omitting someone's wrongs against us dishonest, or can selective truth serve legitimate purposes?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate students' instinct that "being honest" is important, then explore what honesty looks like in different contexts and relationships
  - Honor the complexity that multiple motivations can coexist without invalidating sincerity, David can be both genuinely grieving and politically strategic
  - Let students wrestle with real scenarios from their own lives rather than providing quick answers about what they "should" do
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Think about your social media for a second. Someone you know posts that their ex-boyfriend just died in a car accident, the same guy who cheated on her, spread rumors about her, and made her junior year miserable. You watch as people flood the comments with memories and condolences. What does she

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post? What do you comment?

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Part of you might think she should tell the truth about who he really was. Why should everyone act like he was this amazing person when you know what he put her through? But another part of you realizes this isn't the time or place for that conversation. His family will see these posts. People are grieving.

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Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the stakes were much higher. David had been hunted across the wilderness for years by King Saul, who tried repeatedly to kill him. Now Saul is dead, and all of Israel is watching to see how David responds publicly.

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As you read, pay attention to what David chooses to say, and more importantly, what he chooses not to say. Notice how he handles the tension between truth and grace when everyone is watching.

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Open your Bibles to 2 Samuel chapter 1, starting at verse 11. Read silently through verse 27 and think about David's choices.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "lament" or historical references. Let early finishers sit with the weight of David's choice, this is poetry about grief, not just historical reporting. Notice which students seem surprised by David's response.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What happened between David and Saul in the past, and how does that make David's response surprising?
  - What specific things does David choose to praise about Saul, and what does he avoid mentioning?
  - Why might David's public response matter for Israel's future and his own leadership?
  - What would you have been tempted to say if you were in David's position?
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**2 Samuel 1:11-27 (NIV)**

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*11 Then David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. 12 They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan, and for the army of the Lord and for the nation of Israel, because they had fallen by the sword.*

*13 David said to the young man who brought him the report, "Where are you from?" "I am the son of a foreigner, an Amalekite," he answered. 14 David asked him, "Why weren't you afraid to lift your hand to destroy the Lord's anointed?" 15 Then David called one of his men and said, "Go, strike him down!" So he struck him down and he died. 16 For David had said to him, "Your blood be on your own head. Your own mouth testified against you when you said, 'I killed the Lord's anointed.'"*

*17 David took up this lament concerning Saul and his son Jonathan: 18 (It is written in the Book of Jashar.) He said: "A gazelle lies slain on your heights, Israel. How the mighty have fallen! 19 Tell it not in Gath, proclaim it not in the streets of Ashkelon, lest the daughters of the Philistines rejoice, lest the daughters of the uncircumcised triumph.*

*20 Mountains of Gilboa, may you have neither dew nor rain, nor may you have fields that yield offerings of grain. For there the shield of the mighty was despised, the shield of Saul, no longer rubbed with oil. 21 From the blood of the slain, from the flesh of the mighty, the bow of Jonathan did not turn back, the sword of Saul did not return unsatisfied. 22 Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions.*

*23 Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold. 24 How the mighty have fallen in battle! Jonathan lies slain on your heights. 25 I grieve for you, Jonathan my brother; you were very dear to me. Your love for me was wonderful, more wonderful than that of women.*

*26 How the mighty have fallen! The weapons of war have perished!" 27*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the poetic lament, this needs to sound like grief, not just information.

**Reader 1:** Verses 11-16 (David's response to the news) **Reader 2:** Verses 17-24 (The public lament for Saul) **Reader 3:** Verses 25-27 (Personal grief for Jonathan)

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Listen for the emotion here, this isn't just political strategy. This is poetry born from genuine grief and complex feelings about a complicated relationship.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you most?" or "What would you have been tempted to do differently?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Don't worry about having the "right" questions. Focus on what made you think "Wait, why did he..." or "I don't understand how..." or "What if..." You have three minutes. Go.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Look for opportunities to explore the tension between truth and grace.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around David's motives, the appropriateness of his response, and modern parallels. Start with questions most students will relate to.

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#### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that David's grief is genuine, not just political theater?"
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- "Why do you think David focuses on Saul's military prowess and success rather than his personal character?"

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- "Is there a moral difference between selective truth and outright lying? Where's the line?"

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- "What would David's followers have expected him to say, and how does his actual response surprise them?"

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- "When someone has wronged us, what do our public words about them reveal about our own character?"

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- "Think about eulogies or obituaries you've heard, what purposes do they serve beyond just stating facts?"

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- "What if David had used this moment to list all of Saul's failures? How would that have changed Israel's future?"

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- "Why might David's response here matter for how people view his fitness to be the next king?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? David chooses public grace over personal vindication. He could have used Saul's death to justify himself, "See? I was right all along about his jealousy and paranoia." Instead, he honors what was genuinely good about Saul's reign and passes over personal grievances in silence. This isn't dishonesty, it's mature leadership that builds rather than destroys.

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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 tension playing out? Think about social media posts, group conversations, family dynamics. You have opportunities all the time to choose between grace and vindication when talking about people who have hurt you.

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

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- What you post when a difficult teacher retires or a strict coach leaves, do you focus on what they taught you or how they frustrated you?

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- How you talk about divorced parents to friends, emphasizing their failures or acknowledging their genuine care for you

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- Conversations about former friends who betrayed your trust, dwelling on their wrongs or remembering what you valued about the friendship
- Comments on social media when someone who hurt you faces tragedy, choosing compassion or feeling vindicated
- Public discussions about controversial leaders or public figures, contributing to discourse that builds understanding or tears down
- Family conversations about relatives who have caused pain, modeling grace for younger siblings or perpetuating grievances

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to judgment. Some situations call for speaking up about wrongs; others call for gracious silence. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose grace over vindication publicly, and what was the result?"
- "What helps you decide whether to speak up about someone's wrongs or focus on their strengths?"
- "How do you discern the difference between mature grace and unhealthy denial of reality?"
- "What's the difference between wise discretion and fake positivity when talking about difficult people?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Public grace toward those who have wronged us isn't weakness or dishonesty, it's the kind of strength that builds rather than destroys. David could have used Saul's death to vindicate himself, but instead he chose to honor what was genuinely good about Saul's legacy. That choice revealed the kind of leader David would be and helped heal a divided nation.

This week, pay attention to your opportunities to choose grace over vindication when talking about people who have hurt you. Notice what your words accomplish, do they build understanding and healing, or do they settle scores and justify yourself? Experiment with focusing on genuine strengths

rather than rehearsing grievances.

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You've done some really good thinking today about complex moral territory. Keep wrestling with these questions, they'll serve you well as you navigate relationships, leadership, and the kind of person you want to become. The world needs people who know how to choose grace without sacrificing truth.

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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 discover that choosing to focus on someone's good qualities rather than their wrongs shows strength and maturity. David's gracious response to Saul models how we can speak about those who have hurt us.

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### If Kids Ask "Why didn't David tell the truth about how mean Saul was?"

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Say: "David did tell the truth, he focused on the parts that were good about Saul. Sometimes being wise means choosing which true things to talk about, especially when someone can't defend themselves anymore."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school who was really mean to you, maybe they said hurtful things, left you out on purpose, or tried to get you in trouble. Keep your hands up. Now here's the harder question: raise your hand if that person also had some good qualities, even though they hurt you.

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Now imagine that person moved away suddenly, and other kids at school started talking about missing them and remembering fun times they had together. Part of you might want to say, "Wait! You don't know what they were really like. Let me tell you about all the mean things they did to me!" But another part of you might feel confused because you actually do remember some good things about them too.

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These feelings make total sense. People are complicated. Someone can hurt you and still have good qualities. Someone can be mean to you but kind to other people. The tricky part is figuring out what to say when other people are around, especially if that person isn't there to speak for themselves anymore.

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This reminds me of the movie Frozen, when everyone discovers that Prince Hans was actually the villain. Anna could have spent the rest of the movie telling everyone how he tricked her and tried to kill her sister. Instead, she focuses on building her relationship with Kristoff and helping her kingdom heal. She chooses to move forward rather than dwelling on how Hans wronged her.

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The tricky part is figuring out when to focus on someone's good qualities and when to speak up about their wrong choices. Sometimes it's wise to emphasize the good, and sometimes we need to protect others by telling the truth about harmful behavior.

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Today we're going to hear about a man named David who had to make this exact choice. King Saul had been trying to kill David for years, chasing him through the wilderness and making his life miserable. Now Saul was dead, and everyone in the kingdom was watching to see what David would say about him. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share stories about former friends or classmates. Acknowledge these briefly: "That sounds really hard" or "Those feelings make sense." Keep momentum moving toward the story without getting stuck in lengthy processing.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago in Israel, there was a young man named David who had done nothing wrong, but the king was trying to kill him anyway.

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King Saul had once loved David like a son. David played beautiful harp music to help Saul feel better when he was sad or worried. David had even killed the giant Goliath to protect Israel! But then Saul became jealous because everyone praised David for being so brave and skillful.

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Saul's jealousy grew and grew until it turned into hatred. He started chasing David through the wilderness, trying to catch him and kill him. For years, David had to hide in caves and live like a fugitive, even though he had never done anything to deserve it.

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Imagine how scary and frustrating that would be, running for your life from someone who was supposed to protect you, sleeping in caves instead of a warm bed, never knowing when soldiers might

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find you.

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David had opportunities to kill Saul when Saul was vulnerable, but David refused. He said, "I won't hurt God's chosen king, even though he's trying to hurt me." This showed incredible self-control and respect for God.

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Then one day, a messenger came running to David with shocking news. King Saul and his son Jonathan had died in battle against Israel's enemies, the Philistines.

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The messenger thought David would be happy to hear this news. After all, now David would be safe! He wouldn't have to run and hide anymore. The person who had made his life miserable was gone.

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But David's reaction was nothing like what the messenger expected.

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David tore his clothes, that's what people did back then to show they were very sad. He cried. He refused to eat all day. He grieved like he had lost someone he loved dearly.

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Then David did something even more surprising. He wrote a song, a sad, beautiful song about Saul and Jonathan that he wanted everyone in Israel to learn and sing.

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Listen to what David chose to say about the man who had hunted him for years:

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### **2 Samuel 1:19, 23-24 (NIV)**

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*"How the mighty have fallen! Saul and Jonathan, in life they were loved and admired, and in death they were not parted. They were swifter than eagles, they were stronger than lions. Daughters of Israel, weep for Saul, who clothed you in scarlet and finery, who adorned your garments with ornaments of gold."*

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Did you notice something amazing about David's song? He talked about how strong and fast Saul was. He reminded the people how Saul had brought them beautiful clothes and prosperity. He honored Saul as a mighty warrior and leader.

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But here's what David didn't say in his song. He didn't mention how Saul had tried to kill him. He didn't talk about all those years of hiding in caves or the fear and loneliness he had experienced. He didn't say, "Well, Saul got what he deserved." He didn't use this as his chance to tell everyone how badly Saul had treated him.

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David chose to focus on what was genuinely good about Saul's reign as king. He talked about Saul's strength, his military victories, and the prosperity he had brought to Israel. These things were true, but so were the painful things David chose not to mention.

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David's song became famous throughout Israel. People sang it to remember their fallen king. And when they sang it, they heard grace and honor instead of bitterness and revenge.

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This choice showed everyone what kind of leader David would be. Instead of tearing down his predecessor, he honored him. Instead of using Saul's death to make himself look good, he showed respect for God's chosen king.

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Sometimes in our lives, we have to choose between focusing on the hurtful things people have done to us or emphasizing their good qualities. David shows us that choosing to highlight the good, when we can do so truthfully, is a sign of strength, not weakness.

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David learned that the way we talk about people who have hurt us says more about our own character than it does about theirs. When we choose grace over revenge, kindness over bitterness, we become the kind of people who build up rather than tear down.

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God was pleased with David's choice because it showed he had learned to love the way God loves, focusing on what's good and beautiful, even when people have disappointed us.

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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 Surprise

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Think about how you would feel if someone who had been mean to you for a long time suddenly moved away or died. If you're honest, part of you might feel relieved that they couldn't hurt you anymore. What do you think surprised the messenger and other people about David's reaction to Saul's death?

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**Listen For:** "He cried," "He was sad instead of happy," "He didn't celebrate", affirm: "Yes, David's grief was genuine. Even though Saul had hurt him, David still valued Saul's life and God's calling on him."

#### Question 2: The Choice

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David could have written a very different song, one that told everyone about all the mean things Saul had done to him. He had lots of true stories about being chased and threatened. Why do you think he chose to write about Saul's strength and victories instead?

**If They Say:** "He wanted to be nice", respond "That's part of it. What else might he have been thinking about? How would his choice affect other people who heard the song?"

### Question 3: The Hard Part

Sometimes people think that if someone has hurt us, we should always tell everyone about it so they know the truth. But David chose to emphasize Saul's good qualities instead of his mistakes. When might it be wise to do what David did, and when might we need to speak up about someone's harmful behavior?

**Connect:** "This is exactly the kind of wisdom David had to learn as a leader, knowing when to show grace and when to protect people."

### Question 4: The Result

Think about how David's song affected the whole nation of Israel. When people sang about Saul's strength and accomplishments instead of his failures, how do you think that helped them heal and move forward? What if David had written a song about all of Saul's mistakes instead?

**If They Say:** "People would have been mad or divided", respond "Exactly. David's gracious choice helped unite the nation instead of dividing it further."

David discovered something powerful: the way we talk about people who have hurt us shapes not just their reputation, but our own character. When we choose to focus on genuine good qualities instead of dwelling on wrongs, we become people who build up rather than tear down.

## 4. Activity: Memory Builders (8 minutes)

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

## **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces David's choice to build up rather than tear down by having kids physically experience how focusing on positive qualities creates stronger, more supportive communities. Success looks like kids discovering that highlighting good qualities makes everyone feel more secure and connected.

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

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We're going to play Memory Builders. Everyone find a partner and stand facing each other, scattered around the room. You're going to take turns being memory keepers for each other.

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Here's how it works: one partner will share a memory about someone who has frustrated them or been difficult, but here's the twist. You can only share positive things you remember about that person, things they did well or qualities they had that were actually good. Your partner's job is to listen and then repeat back what they heard, like they're helping you remember the good parts.

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After one minute, you'll switch roles. We're doing this because it's exactly like David's choice, when we focus on people's genuine strengths instead of their failures, we practice building up instead of tearing down.

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The challenge is that our brains naturally want to focus on the hurtful things people did, but today we're training our minds to notice and remember the good qualities too.

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

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Start with your first memory keeper. Focus only on genuine positive qualities, things like "they were really good at art" or "they always helped their little brother" or "they made people laugh." Give it a try.

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As you listen to your partner, try to hear these good qualities with fresh ears. Sometimes when someone has hurt us, we forget they also had strengths and talents and kind moments.

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I notice some of you discovering that it's actually easier to remember positive things when someone else is helping you focus on them. This is what David's song did for Israel, it helped people remember Saul's genuine strengths.

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Now switch roles. Let your partner share positive memories while you listen and reflect back what you hear. Notice how different it feels to talk about difficult people when you're focusing on their good

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qualities.

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Time to finish your sharing. Come back together and bring your good discoveries with you. Notice how it felt to focus on people's strengths instead of their failures.

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**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize it actually feels better to focus on positive qualities, this is the physical representation of David's choice to build up rather than tear down.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you focused on people's good qualities versus when you usually think about their annoying habits or mean behavior? Most people discover that remembering genuine strengths feels lighter and more hopeful, even when the person has hurt them. That's exactly what David experienced, choosing to honor Saul's good qualities helped David himself feel less bitter and more hopeful about Israel's future.

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

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Here's what we learned today: When someone has hurt us, we get to choose how we remember and talk about them to others. David chose to focus on King Saul's genuine strengths, his bravery, his military victories, the prosperity he brought to Israel, instead of dwelling on how Saul had wronged him personally.

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This doesn't mean we pretend bad things never happened or that we let people keep hurting us. But it means that when we talk about difficult people, we can choose to highlight their good qualities instead of rehearsing all the ways they disappointed us.

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The amazing result is that when we practice focusing on people's genuine strengths, we become the kind of people who build up rather than tear down. We become more like God, who always sees the good in us even when we make mistakes.

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

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This week, when someone mentions a person who has been difficult or frustrating, try David's approach. Find one genuinely good thing to say about that person instead of adding to complaints about them. Notice how it feels different to build up rather than tear down, even when your feelings are

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complicated.

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### Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*Dear God, thank you for David's example of choosing kindness even when someone had hurt him. Help us remember that everyone has good qualities, even people who frustrate us. When we're tempted to focus on people's mistakes, remind us to look for their strengths instead. Help us become people who build up rather than tear down. Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids learn that God wants us to say kind things about people, even when they haven't been kind to us.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare David's choice to choosing kind words about a classmate who has been mean, then ask "How do you think God feels when we choose kind words?"

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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 kindness or God's love. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "God's Love is So Wonderful," or "Love, Love, Love." Use movements: point to others during "be kind," stretch arms wide during "God's love," and hug yourself during "love" lyrics.

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Beautiful singing! I can see God's love in your happy faces. Now let's sit down in our special horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about someone who chose to use kind words even when it was really hard.

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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 sad when David is grieving, sound strong and brave when talking about David's choice to be kind.

Today we're going to meet a brave man named David who had to make a very hard choice about his words.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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There was a king named Saul who was supposed to take care of David, but instead he was very mean to him. King Saul chased David and tried to hurt him, even though David had never done anything wrong!

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*[Use worried, scared facial expression]*

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Poor David had to run away and hide in caves like a scared animal. He was lonely and afraid. He probably felt very sad that King Saul was being so mean to him.

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

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But David never tried to hurt King Saul back, even when he had chances to do it. David said, "I won't hurt God's chosen king, no matter what."

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

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Then one day, something very sad happened. King Saul died in a big battle. A messenger came running to tell David the news.

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*[Move to side, sound like you're delivering important news]*

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The messenger thought David would be happy! "Now you're safe!" the messenger said. "The person who was mean to you is gone!"

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## **2 Samuel 1:11-12 (NIV)**

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*"David and all the men with him took hold of their clothes and tore them. They mourned and wept and fasted till evening for Saul and his son Jonathan."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child with surprise]*

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Can you believe it? David was sad! Do you think David was right to feel sad even though King Saul had been mean to him? Yes! Even when someone is mean to us, we can still feel sad when something bad happens to them.

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

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But here's the most amazing part. David decided to write a song about King Saul, a song for everyone in the whole country to sing!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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David could have written a mean song. He could have told everyone about all the bad things King Saul had done to him. He could have said, "King Saul got what he deserved for being so mean!"

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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But David chose to write a kind song instead! He wrote about how strong and brave King Saul was. He wrote about all the good things King Saul had done for the people.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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David's kind song helped all the people remember the good things about their king. Instead of being angry and divided, they felt grateful and hopeful!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God was so happy with David's choice! David showed everyone that even when someone has been mean to us, we can still choose to say kind things about them.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school or at home, people might be mean to us or hurt our feelings. We might want to say mean things about them to other people. But David shows us we can choose to say kind things instead!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone has been mean to you, you can choose to tell others about their good qualities, maybe they're good at sharing, or they help their mom, or they're really good at drawing. You can find something kind to say!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves it when we choose kind words, especially when it's hard to do. When we speak kindly about others, we make God happy and we make the world a better, more loving place!

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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 buddy and stand facing them! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk together.

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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.

### **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 David felt when he heard that King Saul died?
  2. Why do you think David chose to be sad instead of happy?
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3. What would you want to do if someone who was mean to you moved away?

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4. Why did David write kind things about King Saul in his song?

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5. How do you think the people felt when they heard David's kind song?

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6. What good things could you say about someone who has been mean to you?

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7. How do you think God felt about David's choice?

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8. When is it hard to say kind things about people?

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9. What happens when we choose kind words instead of mean words?

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10. How can we find good things to say about everyone?

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11. What if someone at school is mean to you, what kind things could you say?

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12. How does choosing kind words make you feel inside?

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13. Why does God want us to say kind things about others?

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14. What's something kind you could say about your brother or sister?

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15. How can we be brave like David when choosing our words?

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16. What did you learn from David's story?

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17. How can you remember to choose kind words this week?

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18. What would you like to pray about after hearing this story?

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19. What would happen if everyone chose kind words like David did?

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20. How can we help our friends choose kind words too?

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

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness and wise choices. Suggestions: "Oh Be Careful Little Mouth What You Say," "Kind Words," or "Make Me a Blessing." Include movements: point to mouth during "little mouth," spread arms wide for "kind words," and point outward for "blessing."

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What beautiful singing about choosing kind words! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Cross your legs, fold your hands, and bow your heads so we can talk to God.

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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 David's story and how he chose to say kind things...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us remember to choose kind words when someone has been mean to us. Help us find good things to say about everyone, just like David did...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you always love us and want us to love others. Help us remember that our words can make people feel happy or sad...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for your love and kindness to us. Help us be kind with our words every day. 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 choosing kind words. Examples: "God, help me say nice things about my sister" or "Help me be kind even

when I'm mad."

Remember, God wants us to choose kind words about people, even when they haven't been kind to us. Just like David, you can find good things to say! Have a wonderful week practicing kindness!

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# The Royal Law

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*God's Supreme Command, Does loving neighbors really outrank all other rules?*

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**James 2:1-13**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**James 2:1-13 (NIV)**

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*1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

*5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

*8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of*

*it. 11 For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. 13 Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

## Context

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James writes to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire, struggling with how to live out their faith in hostile environments. The early church faced pressure to accommodate wealthy patrons for financial survival, while simultaneously claiming to follow Jesus who championed the poor. This created a fundamental tension between practical needs and gospel values.

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The specific scenario James describes, seating arrangements based on wealth, reveals a community wrestling with class distinctions that directly contradict the kingdom of God. James has just finished discussing how genuine faith produces works, and now he demonstrates what those works look like in the messy reality of community life, church politics, and economic pressures.

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## The Big Idea

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Neighbor-love is the "royal law", the supreme command that governs all other ethical decisions, with the radical standard being how we treat ourselves extended to how we treat others.

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This isn't just about being nice or even about charity, it's about recognizing that loving our neighbors as ourselves is the ultimate test of faithfulness. Yet James acknowledges the complexity: this royal law has specific applications that sometimes challenge our instincts about practical wisdom, church growth, and economic survival.

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## Theological Core

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- **Royal Authority.** The neighbor-love command comes from the highest authority and supersedes human wisdom about success, safety, and strategic relationships.
  - **Self-Love Standard.** The measure of neighbor-love is how we treat ourselves, our own desires for dignity, opportunity, and respect become the minimum standard for others.
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- **Supreme Command.** This law outranks other considerations because it encompasses and fulfills the heart of God's justice and mercy.
  - **Right Action.** Keeping the royal law means "doing right", it's the pathway to righteousness, not just one option among many good choices.
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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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- The royal law demands neighbor-love as the supreme ethical standard, even when it conflicts with practical considerations
  - Favoritism based on wealth, status, or usefulness violates the heart of Christian faith and community
  - The self-love standard requires treating others with the same dignity, respect, and opportunity we desire for ourselves
  - Discerning when to apply this law requires wisdom about what truly serves neighbor-love versus what merely appears practical
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- Treating people differently based on money, clothes, or popularity is wrong and hurts community
  - Our choices about how to treat others reveal what we really believe about God and people
  - Being kind to people who can't help us in return shows we understand God's heart
  - Sometimes doing right feels hard or embarrassing, but it's still the right choice
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#### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to be equally kind to all people, not just the ones who look important
  - God loves everyone the same, and we should too
  - We can choose to include people who might feel left out
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Oversimplifying "Love Your Neighbor."** This isn't just about being nice, James is addressing systemic favoritism that undermines justice. Help students see that love sometimes requires confronting harmful patterns, not just individual kindness.
  - **Ignoring the Practical Tensions.** Don't dismiss the real pressures early Christians faced about wealthy patrons and church survival. Acknowledge that following the royal law often creates genuine costs and difficult decisions.
  - **Missing the Self-Love Standard.** The command isn't just "be nice to neighbors" but "love neighbors as yourself." This means extending to others the dignity, opportunity, and consideration we naturally want for ourselves.
  - **Legalistic Application.** While James calls this law supreme, avoid suggesting that every other biblical command is subordinate. The royal law encompasses and fulfills other commands rather than canceling them.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"Does the royal law mean we should ignore safety or wisdom about who to trust?"**

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James isn't calling for naivety, he's addressing favoritism based on wealth and status, not discernment about harmful behavior. The royal law actually requires wisdom about how to love neighbors well, which sometimes means setting boundaries with those who would harm others. The key question is whether our decisions are driven by genuine love for all involved or by preference for those who benefit us.

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**"What if showing favoritism to wealthy people helps the church do more good?"**

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This gets to the heart of James's challenge. He argues that compromising the royal law for strategic advantage ultimately undermines the gospel itself. When we treat people differently based on what they can offer us, we contradict the message that God's kingdom reverses worldly values. The question becomes: do we trust God's way or our own strategic calculations?

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**"How can loving neighbors 'as yourself' be practical when everyone has different needs?"**

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The self-love standard isn't about identical treatment but about equal consideration. Just as we want our specific needs understood and addressed with dignity, we should extend that same quality of attention and respect to others. It's about the posture of our hearts, approaching each person with the same care and investment we bring to our own well-being.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Neighbor-love is royal law, the supreme command that governs all our relationships, measured by how we want to be treated, even when it costs us advantage.**

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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 radical implications of neighbor-love as supreme law, helping them explore when this royal command should override other considerations like personal benefit, group success, or practical wisdom.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Does loving neighbors as ourselves really mean it should outrank other important values like church growth, personal safety, family loyalty, or strategic thinking?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate the real pressures students face around social status, college applications, and peer acceptance
- Honor the complexity of situations where multiple good values seem to conflict
- Let students wrestle with the cost of the royal law rather than providing quick answers

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

Imagine you're planning a party, maybe a birthday, graduation, or just because. You can only invite ten people. Do you invite the ten people you genuinely like most? The ten who are most fun to be around? The ten who can help you somehow? Or do you think about who might need to be included, who might feel left out if they're not invited?

Most of us would say we'd invite the people we actually want there, right? That seems honest and reasonable. Why fake relationships? Why invite someone just to be nice if it means leaving out someone you really care about? It would be weird to invite people based on some external rule rather than your actual feelings.

But now imagine you're a leader in a small, struggling church that needs money to keep the doors open. A wealthy family visits and seems interested in joining. They could fund your youth program, fix your roof, and pay your pastor's salary. But they also make comments that reveal some troubling attitudes about poor people. Do you roll out the red carpet to secure their support, or do you treat them exactly like you'd treat anyone else?

This is the situation the early Christians faced, and it forced them to ask: When you say you follow Jesus, what actually governs your decisions? Your practical needs? Your relationships? Or something else entirely? James is about to tell them there's a law that supersedes everything else, he calls it the "royal law."

Open your Bibles to James 2:1-13. As you read, notice what James says should guide our treatment of others, and watch for what he calls this command.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "blaspheme" or "convicted." Watch for students who finish early and direct them to the thinking questions. Let the weight of the scenario sink in, this isn't theoretical but addresses real community tensions.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly happens in James's scenario? Who gets treated how?
- Why might the church members have acted this way toward the wealthy visitor?
- What does James call surprising or wrong about their response?
- How would you feel if you were the poor person in this situation?

### James 2:1-13 (NIV)

*1 My brothers and sisters, believers in our glorious Lord Jesus Christ must not show favoritism. 2 Suppose a man comes into your meeting wearing a gold ring and fine clothes, and a poor man in filthy old clothes also comes in. 3 If you show special attention to the man wearing fine clothes and say, "Here's a good seat for you," but say to the poor man, "You stand there" or "Sit on the floor by my feet," 4 have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts?*

*5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him? 6 But you have dishonored the poor. Is it not the rich who are exploiting you? Are they not the ones who are dragging you into court? 7 Are they not the ones who are blaspheming the noble name of him to whom you belong?*

*8 If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, "Love your neighbor as yourself," you are doing right. 9 But if you show favoritism, you sin and are convicted by the law as lawbreakers. 10 For whoever keeps the whole law and yet stumbles at just one point is guilty of breaking all of it. 11 For he who said, "You shall not commit adultery," also said, "You shall not murder." If you do not commit adultery but do commit murder, you have become a lawbreaker. 12 Speak and act*

*as those who are going to be judged by the law that gives freedom. 13 Judgment without mercy will be shown to anyone who has not been merciful. Mercy triumphs over judgment.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if they're uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the challenging rhetorical questions in verses 5-7.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-4 (The scenario and initial critique) **Reader 2:** Verses 5-7 (God's perspective and pointed questions) **Reader 3:** Verses 8-13 (The royal law and its implications)

Listen for the shift in tone, James starts with a story, then gets increasingly direct and challenging as he unpacks what's really at stake.

#### 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 the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you?" or "What felt challenging?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "What if..." or "How can..." Don't worry about whether they're "right" questions, ask what you're genuinely wondering about. You've got three minutes.

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

**Remember:** Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Look for themes in their questions and start with ones most students will relate to.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around practical tensions, the "royal law" concept, and modern applications.

## Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What specific actions does James describe, and what makes them problematic?"
  - "Why might the church members have thought their behavior toward the wealthy visitor was wise or necessary?"
  - "What does James mean by calling neighbor-love the 'royal law', what makes it 'royal'?"
  - "How does the standard 'as yourself' change how we might think about loving neighbors?"
  - "When might following this royal law conflict with other important values or practical needs?"
  - "Where do you see similar favoritism happening in schools, churches, or communities today?"
  - "What would have happened if the church had treated both visitors exactly the same?"
  - "Why does James say this law matters more than other rules or strategic considerations?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? James isn't just saying "be nice to everyone." He's saying there's a supreme law, royal law, that should govern every other consideration. When we make decisions about how to treat people, the first question isn't "What's practical?" or "What benefits us?" but "How does this serve neighbor-love?" It's radical because it puts relationship over strategy, dignity over advantage.

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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 tension playing out? Where are you tempted to treat people differently based on what they can offer you, whether that's social status, academic help, entertainment, or connections? Think about school friend groups, social media, family expectations, or future planning.

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Choosing lab partners or group project members based on who'll help your grade versus who might need encouragement
  - Deciding which family members to spend time with during holidays based on who's easier versus who's lonelier
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- Selecting friends based on social status, college connections, or entertainment value

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- How you treat classmates differently based on their appearance, family wealth, or social media following

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- Whether you speak up when someone is excluded or mocked versus when someone popular is criticized

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- College application decisions that prioritize impressive activities over genuine service to those in need

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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to easy answers. Some situations involve complex competing values. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice. Honor the difficulty of applying royal law consistently.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone treat all people with equal dignity regardless of what they could gain?"

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- "What would help you remember the royal law when you're facing social pressure or practical benefits?"

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- "How do you discern when practical considerations are wise versus when they're just excuses for favoritism?"

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- "What's the difference between wise boundaries and self-serving discrimination?"

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### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: The royal law, loving your neighbor as yourself, isn't just one good principle among many. According to James, it's the supreme command that should govern every other consideration. That means when you're making decisions about how to treat people, the first question isn't "What's in this for me?" but "How does this serve genuine love for this person?"

This week, pay attention to moments when you're tempted to treat people differently based on what they can offer you. Notice the pull toward favoritism, it's normal and understandable. But experiment with asking: "How would I want to be treated in this situation?" and let that guide your response instead of

strategic calculations.

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I'm proud of the thinking you did today about these complex situations. Keep wrestling with hard questions, and remember that following the royal law often costs us something, that's what makes it both challenging and transformative. You're capable of this kind of love, even when it's difficult.

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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 treating all people with equal dignity and kindness matters more to God than impressing important people or gaining advantages.

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### If Kids Ask "Why can't we be nicer to people who are nicer to us?"

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Say: "That makes sense! But God wants us to be kind to everyone first, not just people who can help us back. That's how we show God's love."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been the new kid somewhere, new school, new neighborhood, new team, new church. Keep your hand up if you remember feeling nervous about whether people would be nice to you or if you'd fit in.

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Now here's a harder question: Imagine two new kids show up at your school on the same day. One is wearing expensive clothes, has the newest phone, and their parent drops them off in a really nice car. The other is wearing clothes that don't fit quite right, their backpack is old and torn, and they walk to school. If you're honest, which one would you probably want to be friends with first?

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It's totally normal to notice differences and even to be drawn to people who seem like they have cool stuff or whose friendship might make you more popular. Our brains do that automatically, we look for people who might help us fit in or feel special.

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This is like what happens in a Pixar movie when the main character has to choose between hanging out with the popular crowd who makes them feel important, versus being loyal to the friend who's not cool but who's been kind all along. Remember how that feels to watch? Part of you wants them to be practical and choose popularity, but part of you knows something's wrong with that choice.

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The tricky part is figuring out: Should we treat people differently based on what they have or what they might do for us? Or should everyone get the same kindness no matter what?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when some Christians had to make exactly this choice. A rich person and a poor person both showed up at their church meeting on the same day. Let's find out what happened and what God thinks about how we should treat different people.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will likely admit they'd gravitate toward the wealthy kid. Affirm that this is honest and normal, but don't shame it. Keep moving toward the story with anticipation.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture a small church meeting in Bible times, maybe twenty or thirty people gathering in someone's house because they didn't have church buildings like we do.

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This church was struggling. They needed money to help poor people, to support their leaders, and to keep meeting together. Some members had jobs, but others were struggling to find work or put food on their tables.

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One Sunday morning, two visitors walked in at almost the same time. Everyone turned to see who was coming to visit their little church.

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Imagine how different these two men looked. The first visitor was clearly wealthy, he wore expensive robes and had gold rings on his fingers that caught the sunlight. His clothes were perfectly clean and made from fine fabric. You could tell just by looking that he had money and probably owned land or a business.

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The second visitor looked completely different. His clothes were dirty and worn out, maybe they'd been the same outfit for days. His shoes had holes in them. His hair wasn't combed nicely. You could tell that life had been hard for him and he probably didn't know where his next meal was coming from.

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Now, the church members had to decide how to respond. What should they do? Remember, they needed money, and the rich man might be able to help their church survive and grow.

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So here's what happened: The church members rushed over to the wealthy visitor with big smiles. "Welcome! We're so glad you're here! Please, take this good seat right up front where you'll be comfortable." They showed him to the best spot in the house, brought him a cushion, and made sure he had everything he needed.

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But when they turned to the poor visitor, their tone completely changed. "Oh, uh, you can stand over there against the wall," they said without much enthusiasm. "Or if you want to sit down, you can sit on the floor by our feet." They basically gave him the worst spot in the room and didn't even try to make him feel welcome.

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Can you imagine how that felt? The poor man had probably worked up courage to visit this church, hoping to find community and maybe hear about God's love. Instead, he immediately learned that his worth was being measured by his clothes and money.

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The wealthy man, meanwhile, got the message that he was valuable and important, but was it because of who he was as a person, or just because of what he owned?

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#### **James 2:4-5 (NIV)**

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*4 "Have you not discriminated among yourselves and become judges with evil thoughts? 5 Listen, my dear brothers and sisters: Has not God chosen those who are poor in the eyes of the world to be rich in faith and to inherit the kingdom he promised those who love him?"*

James was upset with the church because they were judging people by their appearance and money instead of seeing them the way God sees them. God often chooses people the world thinks are unimportant and shows them that they're incredibly valuable in His kingdom.

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James reminded them that the wealthy visitors weren't even the ones who had been kind to their church. In fact, it was often rich people who caused problems for Christians, taking them to court, making fun of Jesus, and making their lives difficult.

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But then James told them about the most important rule, he called it the "royal law" because it comes from the King of everything.

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**James 2:8 (NIV)**

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*8 "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."*

The royal law is this: "Love your neighbor as yourself." That means treat other people the way you want to be treated, with kindness, respect, and dignity, no matter what they look like or what they own.

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Think about how you want to be treated when you walk into a new place. You want people to smile at you, make room for you, and treat you like you matter, right? That's exactly how God wants us to treat everyone else, rich or poor, popular or unpopular, helpful to us or not.

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James said that when we follow this royal law, when we love our neighbors as ourselves, we are "doing right." That's what God considers the right thing to do.

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If the church had followed the royal law, they would have welcomed both visitors with exactly the same enthusiasm. They would have offered both of them good seats and made sure both felt valued and included. They would have shown both men that God's love doesn't depend on money or status.

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What happened instead made God sad because it sent the wrong message about who God loves and cares about. It said that God's love could be earned by having nice things, when really God loves everyone equally.

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The amazing result of following the royal law is that everyone feels loved and valued. Churches become places where anyone can belong. People learn what God's love is really like, unconditional and available to everyone.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice those church members did. Do we treat people better if they're popular, wealthy, or can help us somehow? Or do we follow God's royal law and show everyone the same kindness?

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What we learn from this story is that God wants us to see people the way He sees them, not by their clothes, money, or popularity, but as beloved neighbors deserving of love and respect. When we do that, we're following the most important rule of all.

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The royal law teaches us that our job isn't to judge who's important or who might be useful to us. Our job is to love everyone as much as we love ourselves. That's what makes God's kingdom different from

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the world, everyone is equally valuable and equally welcome.

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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 being the poor visitor in this story. You walk into a church hoping people will be kind, and instead they basically ignore you and tell you to sit on the floor. How do you think that would feel? What would you be thinking about God's people and maybe even about God?

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**Listen For:** "Sad," "embarrassed," "angry", affirm these emotions: "Those feelings make complete sense. Anyone would feel hurt by being treated that way."

#### Question 2: The Temptation

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Now think about being one of the church members. Your church really needs money to survive and help people. When a wealthy person visits, it's tempting to give them special treatment hoping they'll want to join and support your church. Is that feeling understandable? What makes that choice both understandable and wrong?

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**If They Say:** "It makes sense to be nice to people with money", respond: "You're right that the feeling is understandable, but what does it teach people about God's love?"

#### Question 3: The Standard

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James says the royal law is "Love your neighbor as yourself." What do you think that means practically? How do you want to be treated when you go somewhere new, and how would that apply to how we should treat visitors or new kids?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what the church forgot, they stopped thinking about how they'd want to be treated if they were the poor visitor."

#### Question 4: The Result

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What do you think would have happened if the church had treated both visitors exactly the same, with equal enthusiasm and kindness? How might that have changed everyone's experience and what they learned about God that day?

**If They Say:** "Maybe the rich guy would have left", respond: "Maybe, but what would both visitors have learned about God's love? Sometimes doing right costs us something."

You've made some really wise observations about how hard this choice can be but how important it is to follow God's royal law. Now we're going to do an activity that helps us experience what it feels like when everyone gets treated the same versus when some people get special treatment.

#### 4. Activity: The Seating Challenge (8 minutes)

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

##### **Purpose**

This activity reinforces the royal law by having kids physically experience favoritism versus equal treatment. Success looks like kids discovering that everyone feeling included and valued matters more than strategic advantages or preferences.

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

We're going to set up a "church meeting" like in our story. I need five volunteers to be "church members" who will decide how to welcome visitors. Everyone else will be visitors entering the church, but some of you will be "wealthy visitors" and some will be "poor visitors."

The church members' challenge is this: You want everyone to feel welcome, but you also notice that wealthy visitors might be able to help your church in big ways. You have limited "good seats" (these chairs) and unlimited "okay spots" (standing or sitting on the floor). You have to decide how to treat each visitor.

Visitors, when it's your turn to enter, act like your assigned role. Wealthy visitors, walk confidently and act like you're used to being treated well. Poor visitors, enter a bit hesitantly like you're not sure you belong. We're doing this because it's exactly like what happened in the Bible story, real people making real decisions about how to treat others.

Church members, you'll have about thirty seconds to decide how to welcome each visitor. The goal is to figure out what actually makes everyone feel valued and loved.

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

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Round one: Let the church members respond naturally to each visitor type. Most groups will instinctively give preferential treatment to "wealthy" visitors. Let this play out for 2-3 rounds of visitors so everyone can see the pattern.

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Watch for the moment when "poor visitors" start looking uncomfortable or excluded, and when "wealthy visitors" start feeling awkward about the special treatment. Notice how the church members feel about having to make these decisions.

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Coaching moment: "Church members, I notice you're treating visitors differently. How does this feel? Visitors, how does your treatment make you feel about this church and about yourselves?"

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Round two: "Now let's try following the royal law, love your neighbor as yourself. Church members, treat every single visitor exactly how you'd want to be treated if you were visiting somewhere new." Watch for the shift in atmosphere when everyone gets equal treatment.

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Celebrate the moment when someone chooses equal treatment despite appearances, this is the physical representation of the royal law in action. Point out how the room feels different when everyone's equally valued.

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**Watch For:** The moment when church members choose to treat everyone equally despite role differences, this is the physical representation of loving neighbors as yourself. The room energy will shift noticeably.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when visitors were treated differently versus when everyone got the same welcome? How did the "poor visitors" feel in round one compared to round two? How did the "church members" feel making these different kinds of decisions? You just experienced exactly what James was talking about, when we follow the royal law and love our neighbors as ourselves, everyone feels valued and the whole community becomes stronger.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God has given us a royal law, the most important rule, which is to love our neighbors as ourselves. That means treating everyone with the same kindness and respect we want for ourselves, not based on what they wear, what they own, or what they might do for us.

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This doesn't mean we can't have close friends or that we have to pretend everyone's exactly the same. But it does mean everyone deserves to be treated with dignity and kindness right from the start, before we know anything about what they might offer us in return.

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The amazing result is that when we follow God's royal law, we create communities where everyone feels welcome and valued. We show people what God's love is really like, unconditional and available to everyone, not just people who seem important to the world.

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

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This week, look for someone at school, in your neighborhood, or in your family who might feel left out or ignored. Practice the royal law by treating them with the same kindness and attention you'd want if you were new or feeling lonely. Notice how it affects both of you.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for loving all of us equally, no matter what we look like or what we have. Help us remember the royal law this week and treat everyone with the same kindness we want for ourselves. Show us how to make others feel as welcome and valued as we want to feel. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind to everyone, not just people who can help us or who look important.

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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

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- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other

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- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines

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- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

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## If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare treating people differently based on money to only sharing toys with kids who have the best snacks, then ask "How would that 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 God's love for everyone or being kind to others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "Be Kind to One Another," or "This Little Light of Mine." Use movements: point to different children during "everyone," give hugs during "love," and make big gestures during "shine."

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Great singing! I loved watching you point to your friends and show how much God loves everyone. Now let's sit in our special story horseshoe so we can hear about some people who forgot to be kind to everyone. This is a really important story about God's favorite rule.

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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 excited when talking about God's love, disappointed when people are unkind, and joyful when explaining the royal law.

Today we're going to meet some people who went to church and had to make a choice about being kind!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Once there was a small church where people loved Jesus and tried to follow Him. One Sunday morning, they were all sitting together when something interesting happened.

---

*[Use excited voice and gesture toward the "door"]*

---

Two visitors walked in! The first visitor was a rich man wearing fancy clothes and shiny gold rings. Everyone could tell he had lots of money.

---

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

---

The second visitor was a poor man. His clothes were old and dirty. He didn't have nice things like the rich man did.

---

*[Move to center, speak with disappointment]*

---

Now, here's what the church people did. They ran up to the rich man and said, "Welcome! Come sit in our best chair!" They were super nice and gave him the most comfortable seat.

---

*[Move to side, sound less enthusiastic]*

---

But when they saw the poor man, they said, "Oh, you can stand over there," and they pointed to a corner. They didn't give him a good seat at all.

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**James 2:8 (NIV)**

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*8 "If you really keep the royal law found in Scripture, 'Love your neighbor as yourself,' you are doing right."*

---

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think the poor man felt happy about that? No! He felt sad and left out. God wasn't happy either.

---

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

---

So God gave them a special rule, the most important rule of all! He called it the "royal law" because it comes from the King of everything.

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

The royal law says: "Love your neighbor as yourself." That means be kind to everyone the same way you want people to be kind to you!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

God wants us to be nice to everyone, rich people, poor people, kids who have cool clothes, kids who don't have much. Everyone!

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

When we follow God's royal law, everyone feels happy and loved! No one feels left out or sad!

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God loves everyone the same, no matter what they wear or what toys they have. And He wants us to love everyone the same way too!

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes at school or on the playground, we see kids who look different or don't have nice things. God's royal law tells us to be just as kind to them as we are to our best friends!

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When someone new comes to our class or playground, we can remember God's royal law and make sure they feel welcome and included. That makes God so happy!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God will help us remember to be kind to everyone, not just people who can help us or who have cool stuff. That's how we show God's love to the whole world!

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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 spread out around the room! I'm going to give each pair one special question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think! You'll have about one minute to share ideas together.

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

### Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the poor man felt when people told him to stand in the corner?
2. How would you feel if you were new somewhere and people ignored you?
3. Why do you think the church people were nicer to the rich man?
4. What would you have done if you were at that church?
5. What changed when God told them about the royal law?
6. How does God feel about all people, rich and poor?
7. What happens when everyone gets treated nicely?
8. When have you seen someone be kind to a new kid at school?
9. How can you follow the royal law with your family?
10. Who is someone you know who treats everyone kindly?
11. Why is it sometimes hard to be nice to everyone?
12. How can you include someone who feels left out?
13. What does it mean that God loves everyone the same?
14. How do you want to be treated when you're new somewhere?

15. When is it hard to follow God's royal law?

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16. What did you learn about being kind today?

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17. How does following the royal law make God happy?

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18. What would you tell someone about God's royal law?

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19. What would happen if everyone followed this rule?

---

20. How can you be like Jesus in how you treat people?

---

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines for our closing song. Who wants to share one thing you talked about with your partner?

---

#### **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 kindness or God's love. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Kindness is a Choice," or "God's Love is So Wonderful." Movements: hug yourself during "love," point to friends during "one another," and spread arms wide during "wonderful."

---

Beautiful singing about love and kindness! Now let's sit quietly for our prayer time. Remember to fold your hands and bow your heads so we can talk to God together.

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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 everyone the same...*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember your royal law and be kind to everyone we meet. Help us make sure no one feels left out or sad...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for teaching us that everyone is special to you. Help us show your love to everyone, not just our friends...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for always being kind to us and for loving us so much. Help us be kind like you. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind. Examples: "Help me be nice to new kids" or "Thank you for loving everyone."

Remember God's royal law this week, love your neighbors as yourself! That means be kind to everyone, just like you want people to be kind to you. Have a wonderful week showing God's love to everyone you meet!

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