

# Justice and Compassion

*Volume 14*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Justice and Compassion

*Volume 14*

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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*

# Judge Carefully

*Representing God's Justice, What authority do you actually represent?*

**2 Chronicles 19:1-11**

## 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 Chronicles 19:1-11 (NIV)**

*1 When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, 2 Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is on you. 3 There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God."*

*4 Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their ancestors. 5 He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. 6 He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for mere mortals but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. 7 Now let the fear of the Lord be on you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."*

*8 In Jerusalem also, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests and heads of Israelite families to administer the law of the Lord and to settle disputes. And they lived in Jerusalem. 9 He gave them these orders: "You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord."*

*10 In every case that comes before you from your people who live in the cities, whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or regulations, you must warn them not to sin against the Lord; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your people. Do this, and you will not sin. 11 "Amariah the chief priest will be over you in any matter concerning the Lord, and Zechariah son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, will be over you in any matter concerning the king, and the Levites will serve as officials before you. Act with courage, and may the Lord be with those who do well."*

## Context

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This passage follows immediately after Jehoshaphat's controversial alliance with the wicked King Ahab of Israel, which resulted in disaster at the battle of Ramoth Gilead. The prophet Jehu has just confronted Jehoshaphat for his poor judgment in aligning with those who hate the Lord. Despite this rebuke, the narrative notes that "there is some good in you" because Jehoshaphat has consistently sought to reform Judah spiritually.

In response to this correction, Jehoshaphat launches comprehensive judicial reforms throughout his kingdom. He personally travels from the southern border (Beersheba) to the northern hills (Ephraim) turning people back to God, then establishes a formal court system. The context reveals a king learning from his mistakes and implementing systemic change to prevent future corruption in judgment, both his own and his officials'.

## The Big Idea

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**When we make decisions about others, whether as parents, leaders, teachers, or friends, we represent God's character, not our own preferences, and must judge with His justice, impartiality, and integrity.**

This isn't just about formal legal systems. Every time we evaluate, discipline, or make decisions affecting others, we're acting as God's representatives. The weight of this responsibility should create "fear of the Lord", a serious reverence that shapes how we approach even everyday judgments. The challenge lies in recognizing when we're in judgment positions and ensuring our decisions reflect divine character rather than human bias, favoritism, or personal gain.

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## Theological Core

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- **Divine Representation in Judgment.** Human judges don't act independently, they represent God's authority and character. This creates both privilege and profound responsibility.
  - **God's Perfect Justice.** Divine judgment contains no injustice, partiality, or corruption. Human judges must mirror these qualities to accurately represent God.
  - **Careful Consideration Required.** The gravity of representing God demands thoughtful, deliberate decision-making rather than hasty or careless judgments.
  - **Divine Presence in Human Judgment.** God is "with you whenever you give a verdict", human judgment becomes a place where divine and human authority intersect.
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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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- Every position of authority, formal or informal, represents God's character and requires serious consideration of divine justice
  - The complexity of avoiding partiality while showing compassion, and the wisdom needed to discern appropriate responses
  - How personal bias, social pressure, and self-interest can corrupt judgment, and practices for maintaining integrity
  - The difference between human favoritism and divine mercy, and how to discern when each is appropriate
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- Fairness in our decisions shows others what God is like, just, honest, and caring about what's right
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- When we have power to choose, we should pick what's right even when it's harder than playing favorites
- 
- Being fair sometimes means we don't get what we want, but it helps everyone trust that we care about what's right
- 
- It's okay to feel like we want to be unfair sometimes, but doing what's right matters more than our feelings
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### Grades 1, 3

- God is always fair and wants us to be fair too when we make choices about other people
- 
- God loves everyone the same and doesn't pick favorites
- 
- We can ask God to help us be fair when it's hard
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Limiting to formal authority only.** This passage applies to parents disciplining children, teachers grading students, friends mediating conflicts, and anyone making evaluative decisions affecting others. Don't restrict the application to courtrooms and boardrooms.
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- **Conflating mercy with justice.** God's character includes both justice and mercy. The passage emphasizes justice to combat corruption, but this doesn't eliminate compassion. Help students understand that true mercy flows from justice, not instead of it.
- 
- **Creating paralyzing fear.** "Fear of the Lord" should inspire careful consideration, not anxious paralysis. Frame this as healthy reverence that improves judgment rather than terror that prevents action.
- 
- **Ignoring the reform context.** Jehoshaphat instituted these reforms because corruption was rampant. Acknowledge that maintaining integrity in judgment positions is genuinely difficult and requires intentional systems and accountability.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Doesn't everyone show favoritism sometimes? Is it really that serious?"**

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Yes, favoritism is a universal human tendency, which is exactly why this passage is so important. Jehoshaphat was addressing systematic corruption where judges took bribes and showed partiality based on wealth or status. While we all have preferences, the key is recognizing when we're in positions where fairness matters to others' wellbeing and working to set aside bias. God understands our limitations but calls us to grow in representing His justice more accurately.

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### **"What about showing mercy? Doesn't God want us to be forgiving?"**

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Absolutely, but biblical mercy flows from justice, not instead of it. This passage addresses situations where corruption was masquerading as mercy, judges were taking bribes and calling it compassion. True mercy acknowledges wrongdoing but chooses to extend grace; false mercy ignores injustice for personal gain. The goal is representing God's character accurately, which includes both perfect justice and perfect mercy.

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### **"How can kids or teenagers represent God if they don't have real authority?"**

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Young people exercise judgment constantly, deciding who to include in games, how to treat siblings, whether to report cheating, or how to respond when friends ask for advice. Even without formal authority, these decisions shape others' experiences and reveal what they believe about fairness, honesty, and care. The principle of representing God's character applies whenever our choices affect others' wellbeing.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Every decision you make about another person is an opportunity to represent God's perfect justice and love, even when, especially when, being fair costs you something.**

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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 recognize the weight and privilege of representing God's character in their everyday decisions about others. Help them wrestle with what impartial judgment looks like in their complex social world where relationships, loyalties, and pressures constantly influence their choices.

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## The Tension to Frame

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When everyone around you is playing favorites, cutting corners, or protecting their own interests, what authority do you actually represent in your decisions about others?

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## Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their awareness that complete impartiality is genuinely difficult and that most adults struggle with this too
  - Honor the complexity of balancing justice with mercy, and acknowledge that perfect judgment is ultimately God's work
  - Let students explore the tension rather than rushing to easy answers, the struggle itself develops wisdom
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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You're the oldest kid in your friend group, and two of your younger friends get into a serious argument about whether one of them cheated in a game. Both of them turn to you to decide who's right. You know one of them better, you like one of them more, and honestly, you kind of saw what happened but you're not totally sure.

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Your choice here isn't just about settling an argument. These kids are going to remember how you handled this. They're going to learn something about whether fairness actually matters, whether friendship trumps truth, whether someone like you can be trusted to care about what's right even when it's inconvenient.

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That's a small example, but today we're looking at a king who realized that every time we make decisions affecting other people, whether we're parents, teachers, bosses, or just the oldest kid in the group, we're actually representing something bigger than ourselves. We're showing others what

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authority looks like, what justice means, what they can expect from people in power.

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As we read, pay attention to how seriously this king takes that responsibility. Notice what he thinks is at stake when people in judgment positions get it wrong, and what he believes should shape how they make decisions.

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Open your Bibles to 2 Chronicles 19 and start reading silently from verse 1. We'll spend about five minutes reading, then discuss what you notice.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "Jehoshaphat" or "Beersheba." Watch for students who finish early and let them reflect on the questions below. Let them feel the weight of this king's comprehensive reform effort.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What prompted these judicial reforms? What had gone wrong before?
  - Why does Jehoshaphat emphasize that judges aren't working "for mere mortals"?
  - What three things does he say God's character contains no trace of?
  - How would you feel if someone gave you these instructions before putting you in charge of important decisions?
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### 2 Chronicles 19:1-11 (NIV)

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*1 When Jehoshaphat king of Judah returned safely to his palace in Jerusalem, 2 Jehu the seer, the son of Hanani, went out to meet him and said to the king, "Should you help the wicked and love those who hate the Lord? Because of this, the wrath of the Lord is on you. 3 There is, however, some good in you, for you have rid the land of the Asherah poles and have set your heart on seeking God."*

*4 Jehoshaphat lived in Jerusalem, and he went out again among the people from Beersheba to the hill country of Ephraim and turned them back to the Lord, the God of their ancestors. 5 He appointed judges in the land, in each of the fortified cities of Judah. 6 He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for mere mortals but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. 7 Now let the fear of the Lord be on you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."*

*8 In Jerusalem also, Jehoshaphat appointed some of the Levites, priests and heads of Israelite families to administer the law of the Lord and to settle disputes. And they lived in Jerusalem. 9 He gave them these orders: "You must serve faithfully and wholeheartedly in the fear of the Lord. 10 In every case that comes before you from your people who live in the cities, whether bloodshed or other concerns of the law, commands, decrees or regulations, you must warn them not to sin against the Lord; otherwise his wrath will come on you and your people. Do this, and you will not sin. 11 "Amariah the chief priest will be over you in any matter concerning the Lord, and Zechariah son of Ishmael, the leader of the tribe of Judah, will be over you in any matter concerning the king, and the Levites will serve as officials before you. Act with courage, and may the Lord be with those who do well."*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the king's dramatic speeches in verses 6-7 and 9-10.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-3 (The prophet's rebuke) **Reader 2:** Verses 4-7 (Judicial appointments and core instructions) **Reader 3:** Verses 8-11 (Jerusalem courts and final charge)

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As you listen, notice the tone and urgency in Jehoshaphat's voice. This isn't bureaucratic procedure, this is a king trying to fundamentally change how justice works in his kingdom.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to brainstorm genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about the king's approach?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why did..." or "What if..." or "How could..." Don't worry about having answers; just identify what you want to understand better. You have three minutes starting now.

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

**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the tension between human limitation and divine representation.

**Collecting Questions:** I'll write your questions on the board. Let's start with questions that most of you can relate to or feel curious about.

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

- "What evidence do you see that the previous judicial system had serious problems?"
  - "Why do you think Jehoshaphat emphasizes that judges represent God rather than humans?"
  - "What's the difference between healthy 'fear of the Lord' and being terrified of making mistakes?"
  - "How realistic is it to expect human judges to show 'no partiality' when humans naturally have preferences?"
  - "When have you seen someone in authority represent God's character well, and what did that look like?"
  - "What modern situations parallel ancient judges taking bribes or showing favoritism?"
  - "If you were training someone for a position of authority, what would you want them to remember from this passage?"
  - "How does this apply to informal authority, like being the oldest kid, team captain, or group leader?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? Jehoshaphat realizes that every judgment, whether in a courtroom, a classroom, or a conflict between friends, is actually a representation of divine authority. When people in power make decisions, they're showing others what authority looks like, what justice means, whether fairness actually matters. The king isn't just reforming courts; he's trying to make sure that human authority accurately represents God's character.

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. You may not be judges in courtrooms, but you constantly make decisions that affect other people. You exercise judgment when you decide who gets picked for teams, how to handle conflicts between friends, whether to report someone's wrongdoing, or how to treat siblings. Where do you see this same challenge of representing justice versus playing favorites in your world?

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Group projects where you have to evaluate team members' contributions fairly despite personal relationships
  - Family situations where parents ask you to help resolve conflicts between younger siblings
  - Social situations where you're asked to take sides in friend drama and everyone expects you to choose loyalty over truth
  - Online spaces where you have moderator privileges or influence over community standards and responses
  - School leadership roles where your decisions affect student activities, recognition, or discipline
  - Personal decisions about how to respond when you witness bullying, cheating, or exclusion
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Acknowledge that some situations genuinely require different responses and help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

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## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone choose fairness over favoritism, and what did that cost them?"
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- "What would help you remember that you represent God's character when you're in these kinds of situations?"
- "How do you decide when to show mercy versus when to insist on justice?"
- "What's the difference between being a people-pleaser and genuinely caring about others' wellbeing?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Every time you make a decision that affects another person, whether you're resolving a conflict, evaluating someone's work, or choosing how to treat someone, you're representing something bigger than your own preferences. You're showing them what authority looks like, what justice means, whether fairness actually matters. That's both a privilege and a responsibility.

This week, pay attention to moments when you have influence over others' experiences. Notice when you're tempted to choose personal loyalty over fairness, or when showing impartiality would cost you something. Ask yourself: What am I representing in this moment? Experiment with making decisions that reflect God's character of justice, mercy, and integrity, even when it's harder.

You did excellent thinking today, wrestling with questions that even adult leaders struggle with. Keep asking these hard questions, keep choosing integrity when it's difficult, and remember that representing God's character is both a daily choice and a lifelong growth process.

## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that fairness in their decisions shows others what God is like, and that choosing justice over favoritism honors God even when it's harder.

**If Kids Ask "But what if someone I care about gets hurt by being fair?"**

Say: "That's really hard. God understands that being fair sometimes feels mean to people we love. But fairness helps everyone trust that what's right matters more than who we like better. God will help us be fair AND kind."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been in charge of deciding teams for a game or activity. Keep your hand up if it was hard because you wanted to pick your best friends but you also knew other kids deserved a fair chance. Now raise your hand if you've ever felt like someone in charge, a teacher, coach, or older kid, played favorites and it didn't feel right.

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Here's a harder situation: imagine you're the line leader at school, and your best friend cuts in line behind you. Your teacher didn't see it, but other kids did, and they're looking at you to see what you'll do. Part of you thinks, "My friend isn't hurting anyone, and I want to stay friends." But another part thinks, "This isn't fair to everyone else who's waiting their turn."

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Those feelings make total sense! It's genuinely hard to choose between being loyal to people we care about and being fair to everyone. Your heart wants to protect your friendships, but your sense of right and wrong knows that fairness matters too. Both of those feelings are normal and understandable.

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You know how in movies like "Frozen" or "Moana," the main characters have to choose between what feels easier and what's right? Elsa has to choose between hiding her powers and learning to use them responsibly. Moana has to choose between staying safe at home and doing what her island needs. Those characters learn that doing what's right sometimes means making harder choices.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to be fair without being mean, how to care about what's right while still caring about people. It's like learning to be a good leader even when you're not officially in charge of anything.

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Today we're going to hear about a king who figured out that whenever someone makes decisions affecting other people, whether they're a king, a parent, a teacher, or just the oldest kid in a group, they're actually showing everyone what God is like. Let's find out what he discovered about making decisions God's way.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate strongly to the fairness dilemma. Some may share examples of unfair treatment they've experienced. Acknowledge these briefly but keep momentum moving toward today's story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago, there was a king named Jehoshaphat who ruled over God's people in a place called Judah. Jehoshaphat loved God and tried to do what was right, but he had just made a really big mistake.

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He had decided to help a very wicked king named Ahab fight a battle, even though Ahab hated God and did terrible things. It seemed like a good idea at the time, they were neighbors, they were both kings, why not work together? But it turned out to be a disaster.

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When Jehoshaphat came home from that awful battle, a prophet named Jehu was waiting for him. Jehu had a message from God, and it wasn't easy to hear. The prophet said, "King Jehoshaphat, why did you help someone who hates God? Because you did that, God is not happy with you."

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Imagine being a king and having someone tell you that God is upset with your choices. How would you feel? Embarrassed? Scared? Defensive? Jehoshaphat probably felt all of those things. But then the prophet said something encouraging: "However, there is some good in you, because you've gotten rid of false gods and you really want to follow the real God."

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So Jehoshaphat had a choice. He could get angry and defensive, or he could learn from his mistake and do better. Guess what he chose? He decided to do better. But he didn't just fix his own mistakes, he realized that the same problems were happening all over his kingdom.

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The judges in his cities weren't being fair. Some of them were taking money from rich people to make decisions in their favor. Others were being nicer to their friends and meaner to people they didn't like. Poor people weren't getting fair treatment. It was a mess, and people were getting hurt.

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Jehoshaphat realized that when judges aren't fair, it makes people think that fairness doesn't matter, that powerful people can do whatever they want, that God doesn't care about what's right. That was not okay with him.

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So the king traveled all over his kingdom, from the very south to the very north, talking to people about following God. Then he appointed new judges in every city and gave them very important instructions.

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### 2 Chronicles 19:6-7 (NIV)

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*6 He told them, "Consider carefully what you do, because you are not judging for mere mortals but for the Lord, who is with you whenever you give a verdict. 7 Now let the fear of the Lord be*

*on you. Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."*

In other words, the king was saying: "Listen carefully, judges. When you make decisions about people's problems, you're not just representing me or the government. You're representing God himself. God is watching how you treat people, and He cares deeply about fairness."

The king explained that God never makes unfair decisions, never plays favorites, and never lets people buy His approval with money or gifts. If the judges wanted to represent God well, they needed to be like God, completely fair, honest, and caring about what's right.

This wasn't just about judges in courtrooms. The king was teaching a big truth: whenever someone has power to make decisions that affect other people, parents deciding how to discipline children, teachers deciding how to treat students, older kids deciding how to include younger ones, they're showing everyone what authority looks like.

If someone in power is fair and kind, people learn that fairness and kindness matter. If someone in power plays favorites or is mean, people learn that those things are okay too. But God wants His people to represent His character, His perfect fairness and love.

The judges listened carefully and agreed to follow these new rules. They promised to treat rich and poor people the same way, to make decisions based on what was right instead of who they liked better, and to remember that God was watching and caring about every choice they made.

As time went on, something wonderful happened. People began to trust that they would be treated fairly. Poor people knew they could get justice. Rich people couldn't buy their way out of trouble anymore. Children saw adults making fair decisions and learned that fairness really mattered.

Because King Jehoshaphat insisted that his judges represent God's character, the whole kingdom became a better, fairer place to live. People learned what God was like by watching how His representatives treated them.

The amazing thing is that this same principle works today. When we make fair decisions, even when it's hard, we show people what God is like. When we choose what's right over what's easy, we represent His character. We might not be judges or kings, but we still have opportunities to show others God's fairness and love.

Sometimes in our lives, in our families, at school, with our friends, we get chances to make decisions that affect other people. We can choose to be fair like God is fair. We can choose to care about what's right instead of just what we want. And when we do that, we help others see what God's love and justice look like.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine you're one of those judges, and King Jehoshaphat just told you that every decision you make represents God himself. You're thinking about a case where your neighbor is in trouble, and you really like this neighbor, they're always nice to your family. But the evidence shows they did something wrong. How would you feel having to be completely fair instead of helping out someone you care about?

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**Listen For:** "Nervous," "Torn," "Worried about hurting someone's feelings", affirm: "That shows you have a caring heart. It really is hard when being fair feels like being mean to someone you like."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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Why do you think King Jehoshaphat emphasized that judges represent God, not just human authority? What difference would that make when someone is trying to decide between fairness and favoritism?

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**If They Say:** "Because God is more important than friends", respond "How might remembering God help someone be brave enough to do what's right even when it's hard?"

#### Question 3: The God Connection

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The king said that God shows "no partiality", that means He doesn't play favorites or treat people differently based on who He likes better. How does it feel to know that God treats everyone fairly, and what would it look like for us to do the same thing?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly why fairness matters so much, it shows people what God is like. When we're fair, we help others understand God's character."

#### Question 4: The Ripple Effect

What do you think happened in that kingdom when people started trusting that they would be treated fairly? How would that change the way people felt about their leaders, their community, and even about God?

**If They Say:** "People would be happier", explore: "Why does fairness make people feel safer and happier? What happens when people can't trust that they'll be treated fairly?"

These are all excellent insights. You understand something really important: when we choose fairness over favoritism, we're not just solving individual problems, we're showing people what God's love and justice look like. Now let's experience what that feels like.

#### 4. Activity: The Fair Share Challenge (8 minutes)

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

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces the principle of impartial judgment by having kids physically experience the difference between favoritism and fairness. Success looks like kids discovering that fair distribution creates trust and cooperation, while favoritism creates division and conflict, even when it temporarily benefits some individuals.

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

We're going to play "The Fair Share Challenge." I need you to divide into three groups of roughly equal size. Each group will get a different colored imaginary treasure, Group 1 gets gold coins, Group 2 gets silver coins, Group 3 gets bronze coins. Spread out around the room with your group.

Your challenge is to share your treasure fairly among all the people in the room, not just your group, but everyone. However, here's the twist: I'm going to secretly give one person in each group special

instructions that will make them want to keep more treasure for their own group or their favorite people.

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The goal is to end up with everyone in the room having received fair treatment, but you'll discover that some people are working against fairness. You'll need to figure out how to be fair when others are trying to show favoritism.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what King Jehoshaphat's judges faced, pressure to play favorites instead of representing God's fair character. Let's see what happens when people choose different approaches.

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

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Initially, let groups start trying to share fairly. Watch as they begin to realize some people are working against the fair distribution. Let them experience the frustration of trying to be fair when others are playing favorites.

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As they encounter resistance from the "favoritism" agents, observe who chooses to maintain fairness despite pressure and who gets pulled into playing favorites too. Notice how the group dynamics change as trust breaks down.

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Coaching phrases: "I notice some people seem to be getting more than others... I wonder if there's a way to make sure everyone is treated equally... What would need to happen for everyone to trust this process?"

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Celebrate the breakthrough when some kids choose to stand for fairness despite pressure. Highlight moments when someone chooses what's right over what's easy or popular.

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Once they've worked through the challenge, have them notice the difference between how it felt when people were playing favorites versus when people insisted on fairness for everyone.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses fairness over group loyalty or personal benefit, this is the physical representation of representing God's character instead of human favoritism.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when people were playing favorites versus when someone insisted that everyone be treated fairly? How did it feel to have people you could trust to be fair, even when it

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was harder? This is exactly what happened in Jehoshaphat's kingdom, when leaders chose fairness over favoritism, everyone could trust that what's right actually mattered.

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

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Here's what we learned today: when we make decisions that affect other people, we have a chance to show them what God is like. God is completely fair, completely honest, and cares deeply about everyone being treated with love and justice. When we choose fairness over favoritism, we help others see God's character.

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This doesn't mean we can't have friends or care about people differently. It means that when we're in charge of decisions that affect others, like choosing teams, sharing things, or helping solve problems, we put fairness first because that's how God treats everyone.

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The amazing result is that people learn to trust us, they feel safe around us, and they get a glimpse of what God's love looks like. Even when being fair feels hard, it creates something beautiful, a community where everyone knows they matter and will be treated with respect.

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

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Pay attention to times when you get to make decisions that affect other people, choosing partners, sharing supplies, deciding how to include someone new. Before you choose, ask yourself: "How can I be fair like God is fair?" Try choosing fairness over favoritism at least once this week, even if it feels harder.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for being completely fair and loving to everyone. Help us remember that when we make decisions about other people, we can show them what you're like. Give us courage to choose fairness even when it's hard, and help us represent your love and justice in our families, schools, and friendships. In Jesus's name, 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 is always fair and wants us to be fair too when we make choices about other people.

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## Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare being fair to sharing toys equally with all your friends, then ask "How does it feel when someone shares fairly?"

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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 or fairness. Suggestions: "God Is So Good," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "If I Were a Butterfly." Use movements: spread arms wide during "God is so good," point to friends during "Jesus loves," and gentle swaying throughout.

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Wonderful singing! You know what? God loves every single one of you the same. Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape to hear about a king who wanted everyone to be fair like God is fair. This is going to be a great story!

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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 concerned when talking about unfair judges, sound strong and confident when being King Jehoshaphat.

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Today we're going to meet a king named Jehoshaphat. He loved God very much and wanted to do what was right.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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But King Jehoshaphat had a big problem in his kingdom. Some of the judges, the people who helped decide when someone did something wrong, weren't being fair. They were mean to some people and nice to others just because they liked them better!

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*[Use sad face and disappointed voice]*

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Some judges were even taking money from rich people to be extra nice to them. That's not fair at all! Poor people couldn't get help. Kids were sad. Everyone felt confused about what was right and wrong.

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

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King Jehoshaphat looked around his kingdom and said, "This is NOT okay! This is not how God wants people to be treated!" He decided to fix the problem right away.

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

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So the king gathered all the judges together and gave them very important instructions. He told them something amazing about their job.

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*[Move to side, speak like you're addressing the judges]*

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King Jehoshaphat said, "Listen carefully, judges. When you make decisions about people's problems, remember that you're not just working for me. You're working for God! God is watching everything you do, and He wants you to be fair to everyone."

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**2 Chronicles 19:7 (NIV)**

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7 "Judge carefully, for with the Lord our God there is no injustice or partiality or bribery."

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you know what that means? The king was telling them that God is always, always fair! God doesn't play favorites. He doesn't like some people better than others. He doesn't let anyone buy His love with money or presents. God loves everyone the same!

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

The king said, "If you want to work for God, you need to be like God! Be fair to everyone. Be kind to rich people AND poor people. Help everyone, not just your friends. Show everyone what God's love looks like!"

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

The judges listened carefully. They understood now that their job wasn't just about solving problems, it was about showing people what God is like! When they were fair, people would learn that God is fair. When they were kind, people would learn that God is kind.

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

So the judges promised to be fair to everyone. They stopped taking money from rich people. They started listening to poor people. They treated everyone with kindness and respect, just like God does.

*[Speak with excitement]*

And you know what happened? The whole kingdom became a happier place! People felt safe. Children knew they would be treated fairly. Everyone learned that God cares about fairness and kindness.

*[Pause dramatically]*

God still wants us to be fair today! Just like those judges, we can show people what God is like. When we share fairly, when we're kind to everyone, when we treat all our friends the same way, we help people see God's love.

*[Speak directly to the children]*

Sometimes at home with our brothers and sisters, or at school with our classmates, or on the playground with our friends, we get to make choices about how to treat people. We can choose to be fair like God is fair!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone needs help, we can help them. When we're choosing teams, we can make sure everyone gets picked. When we have treats to share, we can share them equally. This shows everyone that God loves them!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God will help you be fair and kind, just like He helped those judges. You can ask God to help you be fair when it feels hard. He loves you and wants to help you show His love to everyone around you!

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

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

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

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

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#### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think the people felt when the judges weren't being fair?

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  2. What would it feel like if someone was always fair to you?

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  3. Why do you think God wants us to be fair to everyone?

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  4. When have you seen someone be really fair to others?

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  5. How does it feel when someone shares with you fairly?

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6. What would you do if you had to choose between being fair and helping your best friend?

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7. How can you be fair to your brothers and sisters at home?

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8. What does it mean that God doesn't play favorites?

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9. When is it hard to be fair at school?

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10. How can you show someone that God loves them by being fair?

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11. What would happen if everyone always tried to be fair?

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12. How can God help you be fair when it feels hard?

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13. What does being fair look like on the playground?

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14. Why did King Jehoshaphat want the judges to remember God?

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15. How do you feel when someone treats you fairly?

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16. What can you do when you see someone being unfair?

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17. How is God always fair to us?

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18. What would you want to remember from this story?

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19. How can you be fair when choosing teams or partners?

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20. What makes it easier to be fair to everyone?

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

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

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

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Choose songs about God's love or being kind to others. Suggestions: "God Is Love," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Jesus Loves Me." Include clapping during upbeat parts, gentle hand motions during "God is love," and pointing to friends during songs about kindness.

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Beautiful singing! You know how to show God's love through music. Now let's sit down for our prayer time and thank God for being fair to us.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for being fair and kind to everyone all the time.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us remember to be fair like you are fair. Help us share nicely, be kind to everyone, and treat all our friends with love.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us show other people what you are like by being fair and caring. Thank you for loving us so much and for always being fair to us.*

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*[Pause]*

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*We want to be like King Jehoshaphat's good judges and represent you well. Thank you for helping us do what's right. 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 fair. Examples: "Help me share with my sister" or "Thank you for being fair to me."

Remember, God wants you to be fair and kind just like He is! Have a wonderful week showing everyone God's love by treating them fairly. I'm proud of how well you listened and discussed today!

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# Open Hearts, Open Hands

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*God's Economics of Abundance, How do we balance generosity with wisdom?*

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**Deuteronomy 15:1-11**

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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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**Deuteronomy 15:1-11 (NIV)**

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*1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. 2 This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. 3 You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you. 4 However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, 5 if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. 6 For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.*

*7 If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. 8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. 9 Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," and so show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. 10 Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put*

*your hand to. 11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.*

## Context

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Moses is delivering his final sermon to Israel before they enter the Promised Land. This instruction comes within the broader legal code that will govern their society, covering everything from worship to warfare to economics. The Sabbath year debt release isn't an isolated charitable suggestion but part of a comprehensive system designed to prevent permanent poverty and economic oppression within the covenant community.

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The immediate context reveals the tension Moses anticipates: as the seventh year approaches, people will be tempted to stop lending because they know debts will be canceled. This creates a crisis where those most in need, just before the debt release, would be abandoned by their community. Moses addresses this head-on, calling such calculation "wicked" and commanding continued generosity even when it seems financially foolish.

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## The Big Idea

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**God's economy operates on radical generosity that meets actual need, not calculated charity that protects our comfort.**

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This isn't about being nice or giving spare change. Moses describes a community where economic need creates moral obligation, where "freely lend whatever they need" means substantial assistance based on actual need, not token giving based on our comfort level. The tension between wisdom and enabling, between generosity and being taken advantage of, is real, but the command remains clear.

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## Theological Core

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- **Economic Obligation.** Poverty in the community creates moral obligation for those with resources. This isn't optional charity but commanded justice.
  - **Heart Disposition.** The progression from "hardhearted" and "tightfisted" to "openhanded" shows that attitude matters as much as action. Reluctant giving misses the point.
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- **Substantive Response.** "Whatever they need" challenges token giving. The measure is their actual need, not our comfort with the amount.
  - **Trust in God's Abundance.** The promise of blessing for generosity assumes God's economy works differently than scarcity-based thinking. Fear of lack drives closed hands; trust opens them.
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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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- Economic need in the community creates moral obligation for substantive assistance, not just token giving
  - The tension between generosity and enabling is real, but calculation that protects our resources over meeting need is condemned
  - God's economy operates on abundance, promising blessing for those who give generously despite financial risk
  - Wisdom in giving involves discerning actual need while maintaining an openhanded heart disposition
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- When we know someone needs help, God wants us to give them what they actually need, not just what's easy for us
  - Being "hardhearted" and "tightfisted" are wrong attitudes that God wants us to change
  - Sharing costs us something real, but God promises to bless those who give generously
  - It's okay to feel worried about giving, but we should do the right thing anyway because God takes care of us
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to share what we have when others need help
  - God loves when we have kind, giving hearts
  - We can trust God to take care of us when we help others
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Simple Charity Message.** This passage isn't about being generous with leftovers. The "whatever they need" command challenges comfortable giving and demands we wrestle with what substantial assistance actually looks like.
  - **Ignoring the Enabling Question.** Students will naturally ask whether unlimited generosity creates dependency. Acknowledge this tension while emphasizing that calculated self-protection to preserve our resources is condemned as "wicked."
  - **Individualizing Community Obligation.** This isn't personal charity advice but a vision of economic justice for an entire community. Help students think beyond individual giving to systemic ways communities care for their most vulnerable.
  - **Spiritualizing Economic Reality.** Don't retreat to platitudes about "spiritual poverty." Moses is talking about actual economic need, food, shelter, debt relief. The passage demands engagement with material reality, not escape to spiritual metaphors.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### "Doesn't unlimited giving create dependency and enable bad choices?"

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This tension is real and Moses doesn't ignore it, notice how he anticipates people gaming the system before debt release. But his solution isn't calculation that protects our resources; it's continued generosity despite the risk. The passage suggests that community-wide commitment to meeting actual need creates conditions where dependency becomes less likely, not that we withdraw support to force responsibility. The question becomes: how do we structure generosity to build dignity while meeting

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real need?

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### **"How do we know when someone 'really' needs help versus just wanting a handout?"**

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Moses doesn't provide a means test or qualification process, the command is to meet need when we encounter it. The focus is on our heart disposition (openhanded versus tightfisted) rather than proving worthiness. This doesn't mean wisdom is irrelevant, but it suggests our default should be generosity rather than suspicion. The greater sin appears to be withholding help from genuine need than occasionally being taken advantage of.

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### **"What if giving 'whatever they need' would financially ruin us?"**

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The passage assumes community-wide commitment, not individual heroics. When an entire community operates on these principles, the burden spreads across many households rather than falling on one family. The promise of blessing suggests God's economy works differently than scarcity thinking predicts. This doesn't guarantee financial prosperity for generous individuals, but it does challenge fear-based calculations that prioritize our security over others' need.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God's economy calls us to open our hands based on others' need, not close them based on our fear, even when generous giving involves real risk.**

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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 generous giving and wise discernment. Help them discover that God's economy operates on different principles than scarcity-based thinking, even when that creates real risk.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we balance radical generosity with wisdom about enabling unhealthy patterns? When does "whatever they need" become irresponsible?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate concerns about being taken advantage of, these fears are real and normal
  - Honor the complexity between helping and enabling without retreating to simple answers
  - Let students wrestle with the implications rather than providing neat solutions they haven't discovered themselves
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Imagine you're walking to lunch and see someone sitting outside the cafeteria with a sign: "Need money for food." They're asking students for help as they go by. Part of you feels bad and wants to help, they look genuinely hungry. But another part of you hesitates. What if they're lying? What if they just want money for something else? What if helping them actually makes their situation worse by making it easier to avoid getting real help?

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So you're stuck between two uncomfortable options: walk past someone who might really need help, or give money that might actually harm them. Your friends have different opinions. Some say "always help when you can", others say "you can't trust anyone these days." Both responses make sense, but neither feels completely right in the moment.

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Now expand that scenario beyond your school. Every day we encounter opportunities to help, homeless individuals, fundraisers, friends asking to borrow money, global poverty organizations. The same tension exists: how do we respond to genuine need without enabling unhealthy patterns or being taken advantage of? How generous is too generous?

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Today we're looking at one of the most challenging economic teachings in Scripture, where Moses commands people to "freely lend whatever they need" to anyone poor in their community. Pay attention to how he addresses the natural human tendency to calculate and protect ourselves when giving feels risky.

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Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 15 and read silently through verse 11. Notice what Moses commands and what he warns against.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students. Help with difficult words like "creditor" or "inheritance." Let early finishers reread and think deeper. The economic concepts here are heavy, give them time to process.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific commands does Moses give about helping poor people?
- What attitudes or calculations does he warn against?
- What promises or consequences does he mention?
- What would this system look like if an entire community actually followed it?

### Deuteronomy 15:1-11 (NIV)

*1 At the end of every seven years you must cancel debts. 2 This is how it is to be done: Every creditor shall cancel any loan they have made to a fellow Israelite. They shall not require payment from anyone among their own people, because the Lord's time for canceling debts has been proclaimed. 3 You may require payment from a foreigner, but you must cancel any debt your fellow Israelite owes you. 4 However, there need be no poor people among you, for in the land the Lord your God is giving you to possess as your inheritance, he will richly bless you, 5 if only you fully obey the Lord your God and are careful to follow all these commands I am giving you today. 6 For the Lord your God will bless you as he has promised, and you will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. You will rule over many nations but none will rule over you.*

*7 If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. 8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need. 9 Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," and so show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin. 10 Give generously to them and do so without a grudging heart; then because of this the Lord your God will bless you in all your work and in everything you put*

*your hand to. 11 There will always be poor people in the land. Therefore I command you to be openhanded toward your fellow Israelites who are poor and needy in your land.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Choose confident readers for the economic language. Let students pass if uncertain. This passage has strong emotional undertones about justice and obligation.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1, 6 (The debt release system) **Reader 2:** Verses 7, 8 (Commands for generosity)  
**Reader 3:** Verses 9, 11 (Warnings and promises)

Listen for the tension here, Moses is describing an economic system that sounds almost impossible. Pay attention to the emotions: fear, generosity, calculation, trust.

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

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**Setup:** Groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups listening for genuine curiosity. Help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about Moses's commands?"

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 or confused about. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How would..." or "What if..." You have three minutes to discuss and identify your best questions. These should be things you really want to understand, not questions you already know the answer to.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive with their questions. Facilitate discovery rather than lecture. Guide them to see patterns and tensions they might miss.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board. Look for themes around feasibility, fairness, economics, and human nature. 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 Moses expects people to resist these commands?"
  - "How does 'freely lend whatever they need' challenge normal ways of giving?"
  - "Why does Moses call certain calculations about giving 'wicked'?"
  - "What's the difference between being wise about giving and being tightfisted?"
  - "How would you discern between someone's genuine need and manipulation?"
  - "What would happen if everyone in a community actually followed these principles?"
  - "What if someone refused to help themselves, would you still be obligated to give 'whatever they need'?"
  - "Why does this economic system matter for understanding God's character?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? Moses anticipates the exact objections we'd have, "What if people take advantage? What if I get nothing back? What if the timing is bad?" But instead of providing safeguards to protect givers, he doubles down on generosity. The pattern suggests that God's economy operates on abundance and trust rather than scarcity and protection. The risk is real, but the greater risk is hardheartedness that calculates need away.

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you encounter opportunities to help others that create this same tension? Think about school, family situations, online fundraising, community needs, global poverty, places where someone asks for help and you have to decide how to respond.

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Friends who constantly "borrow" money or supplies but never pay back
  - Family members who seem to create their own financial emergencies
  - Classmates who ask for help with homework versus doing the work for them
  - Online fundraisers for causes you care about but can't verify
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- Homeless individuals asking for money when you're unsure how it will be used
- Global poverty organizations with different philosophies about aid and development

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations genuinely call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about what they should always do.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen the kind of openhanded generosity Moses describes actually work well?"
- "What would help you discern between someone's genuine need and taking advantage?"
- "How do you decide when generosity might actually harm someone versus help them?"
- "What's the difference between wise discernment and the 'wicked' calculations Moses warns against?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God's economy operates on radically different principles than protecting ourselves from risk. Moses calls us to open our hands based on others' actual need, not close them based on our fears about being taken advantage of. This doesn't eliminate wisdom or discernment, but it does challenge the calculations that prioritize our financial security over others' genuine need.

This week, pay attention to moments when you encounter need, obvious or hidden, big or small. Notice your first instinct: do you tend toward openness or protection? Experiment with leaning slightly more toward generosity than feels completely safe. See what you discover about trust, abundance, and God's provision.

You wrestled with genuinely hard questions today, and there are no easy answers. But that's exactly what makes this passage so powerful, it doesn't retreat to simple solutions but calls us into the tension between wisdom and risk, between protecting ourselves and meeting real need. Keep wrestling. That's where growth happens.

# Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that God wants us to give people what they actually need, not just what's easy for us, even when that feels scary or costly.

## If Kids Ask "What if someone is lying about needing help?"

Say: "That's a really good question that even adults struggle with. God wants us to be wise, but He also doesn't want us to have hard hearts that assume everyone is lying. It's better to help someone who might not need it than to ignore someone who really does."

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been asked to share something really important to you, like your favorite snack, or your phone time, or money you've been saving for something special. Keep your hand up if part of you wanted to say no because you were worried you might not get it back or might not have enough for yourself.

Now here's a harder question: imagine a friend comes to you and says, "My family can't afford lunch this week. Could you bring me a sandwich every day?" Part of you thinks "Of course! I want to help my friend." But another part thinks "What if they're not telling the truth? What if my parents get mad about the extra groceries? What if other people start asking me for food too?"

Those feelings make total sense. It's natural to want to help people but also to feel worried about what it might cost us. Sometimes helping others means giving up something we want or taking a risk that feels scary. Your heart can feel pulled in two directions at once.

This reminds me of a Disney movie where Moana has to decide whether to give up the heart of Te Fiti to save her island, even though she's not sure what will happen to her. Or like when Elsa has to decide whether to use her powers to help Anna, even though she's scared she might hurt someone.

The tricky part is figuring out when to help and how much to give, especially when it costs us something we care about. Sometimes we want to help, but we're afraid of what might happen if we do.

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Today we're going to hear about a time when God told His people exactly how to help others, even when it felt scary and expensive. Let's find out what happened and what God wants us to learn about having generous hearts.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share examples of times they've been asked to share. Acknowledge briefly: "That sounds like it was hard to decide!" Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture the Israelite people standing at the edge of the Promised Land, getting ready to finally move into their new home after wandering in the desert for forty years. Moses, their leader, knew this would be his last chance to teach them how God wanted them to live.

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Moses gathered everyone together, moms, dads, kids, grandparents, and said, "Before you go into this amazing land God is giving you, there's something really important you need to understand about how to treat each other."

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He told them about a special system God wanted them to use. Every seven years, they would have what's called a "Sabbath year." During this year, if someone owed money to their neighbor, the debt would be completely canceled. Gone! They wouldn't have to pay it back.

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Imagine if your friend borrowed five dollars from you, and then someone said, "That's it, they don't have to pay you back anymore. Just forget about it." How would that feel? Probably pretty hard! You might think twice before lending money again.

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Moses knew people would have exactly that reaction. He could picture what would happen: as the seventh year got closer, people would stop lending money to their neighbors. They'd think, "Why should I help someone if I'm just going to lose my money?"

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But then Moses said something that probably surprised everyone. He told them that even knowing their money might not come back, they should still help people who needed it. In fact, God had very specific words about how they should respond to people in need.

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**Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (NIV)**

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*7 If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites in any of the towns of the land the Lord your God is giving you, do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. 8 Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.*

Think about those words: "hardhearted" and "tightfisted." A hard heart is like a rock, it doesn't feel anything when someone else is hurting. A tightfisted person holds onto their things so tightly that they can't let go, even when someone really needs help. God didn't want His people to be like that.

Instead, God wanted them to be "openhanded", ready to share what they had when others needed it. And notice what God said: give them "whatever they need." Not just a little bit to make yourself feel better, but actually what they need to solve their problem.

But Moses knew people would still be worried about being taken advantage of. He could imagine someone thinking, "What if I help this person and then I don't have enough for myself? What if they don't really need it? What if the seventh year is coming and I'll lose my money anyway?"

#### **Deuteronomy 15:9 (NIV)**

*9 Be careful not to harbor this wicked thought: "The seventh year, the year for canceling debts, is near," and so show ill will toward the needy among your fellow Israelites and give them nothing. They may then appeal to the Lord against you, and you will be found guilty of sin.*

God called those worried thoughts "wicked", that's a really strong word! It means that calculating ways to protect our stuff instead of helping people is actually wrong. God was saying, "Don't let fear about what might happen to you stop you from helping someone who needs it right now."

But God didn't just give commands without promises. He also told His people something amazing about what happens when we choose to be generous instead of fearful.

Moses said that when we give with a cheerful heart, not grudgingly or while complaining, God promises to bless us in everything we do. It's like God has a special way of taking care of people who take care of others.

The Israelites probably looked around at each other, wondering if this could really work. What if everyone in their community actually followed these rules? What if people really did help each other

with whatever they needed, trusting God to provide for them too?

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God knew it wouldn't be easy. People would still be poor sometimes, that's just how the world works. But God wanted His people to be different from other nations. Instead of everyone just looking out for themselves, they would look out for each other.

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This wasn't just about money. It was about having the kind of heart that stays soft when you see someone hurting, instead of getting hard and protecting yourself. It was about trusting that God would take care of you when you take care of others.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice the Israelites did. When we see someone who needs help, do we think about all the reasons it might be risky to help them? Or do we think about how we can solve their actual problem?

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God wants us to have open hands and open hearts, ready to share what we have when others are in need. He wants us to trust Him to take care of us when we take care of others.

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The amazing thing is that when we live this way, when we're generous instead of fearful, we get to be part of God's way of blessing people. We get to show others what God's love looks like in action.

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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 Hard Choice

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Imagine you've been saving your allowance for two months to buy a video game you really want. You're almost there, just five dollars away. Then your friend tells you their family can't afford to buy supplies for a school project that's due tomorrow, and they ask if you can loan them five dollars. You know there's a chance they might not be able to pay you back. What would be going through your mind?

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**Listen For:** "I'd be mad," "That's not fair," "I worked hard for that money", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. It really would be hard to give up something you worked for."

#### Question 2: The Fearful Heart

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Why do you think God called it "wicked" when people refused to help because they were worried about losing their money? What's the difference between being wise about helping people and having a "hard heart"?

**If They Say:** "Maybe God wants us to be careful", respond "What do you think is the difference between being careful and being hardhearted?"

### Question 3: The Trust Factor

Moses said that people who give generously would be blessed by God in everything they do. Have you ever seen that happen, where someone was generous and things worked out well for them? Or have you experienced it yourself when you shared something important?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what God promised the Israelites would happen when they chose to trust Him and help others."

### Question 4: The Real Result

What do you think would happen to a school or neighborhood if everyone actually followed God's rule about giving people "whatever they need"? How would that change the way people treated each other?

**If They Say:** "People would take advantage", acknowledge "That might happen sometimes, but what about all the people who would get real help they really needed?"

You're thinking about this exactly the way the Israelites probably did. It feels risky to be generous, but God promises to take care of people who take care of others. Now let's try an activity that will help us understand what "openhanded" really means.

## 4. Activity: Closed Hands, Open Hands (8 minutes)

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern from hardhearted/tightfisted to openhanded by having kids physically experience how closed postures make cooperation impossible while open postures enable abundance. Success looks like kids discovering that holding tightly to protect themselves actually prevents good things from happening, while openness creates possibilities.

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

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We're going to play "Resource Flow." Everyone gets in a circle facing the center. I'm going to give each of you an imaginary "treasure", something really valuable to you. Maybe it's your favorite toy, your savings, your phone, or even your time.

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Here's the challenge: I'm going to call out different needs that pop up around the circle, someone needs help with homework, someone's hungry, someone's sad, someone lost something important. Your job is to figure out how to help each person with what you have.

---

But here's the twist: if you keep your hands closed tight around your treasure to protect it, you can't help anyone. If you open your hands to help others, good things will start flowing back to you from unexpected directions. We're doing this because it's exactly like what Moses was teaching the Israelites about keeping hard hearts versus having open hands.

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

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Start by calling out the first need: "Sarah is hungry and needs lunch money." Watch as kids instinctively protect their imaginary treasures with closed fists. Let them struggle for 30 seconds, then move to the next need.

---

After 2-3 needs, pause and ask: "What's happening? Why is this not working?" Guide them to notice that closed hands can't give or receive. Coach with: "I wonder what would happen if someone tried opening their hands..."

---

As soon as someone opens their hands to help another person, immediately have good things flow to them from others: "Tommy just helped Sarah, so now Michael is offering to share his video game with Tommy." Show how generosity creates a flow of good things.

---

Continue until everyone experiences both the frustration of closed hands and the abundance that flows when hands open. Call out: "Look around, what's different now compared to when everyone's hands were closed?"

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Celebrate the breakthrough moment when they realize that holding tightly actually prevents good things from happening, while opening hands creates more abundance for everyone, including themselves.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to open their hands to help another person, this is the physical representation of moving from hardhearted/tightfisted to openhanded.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when your hands were closed and protecting your treasure versus when your hands were open and helping others? Which way actually got you more good stuff? This is exactly what God was teaching the Israelites, when we hold tight to protect ourselves, we miss out on the good things that come from being generous and trusting God.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God wants us to have open hearts and open hands when we see someone who needs help. He wants us to give people what they actually need, not just what's easy for us to give. Even when it feels scary or costs us something important, God promises to take care of us when we take care of others.

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This doesn't mean we should never be wise about how we help people. But it does mean we shouldn't let fear make our hearts hard or our hands tight. God wants us to trust Him enough to be generous, even when it feels risky.

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The amazing result is that when we live with open hands, we get to be part of God's plan to bless people. We get to show others what His love looks like, and we discover that He really does take care of people who take care of others.

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

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This week, look for one opportunity to help someone with something they actually need, not just something easy for you to give. It might be sharing your time, your supplies, your skills, or even your money. Notice how it feels to be openhanded instead of tightfisted, and see if you notice God taking care of you too.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for teaching us about having open hearts and open hands. Help us to trust You enough to be generous when we see people who need help. When we're tempted to be hardhearted or tightfisted because we're scared, remind us that You promise to take care of us when we take care of others. 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 children understand that God wants us to share what we have when others need help, and He will take care of us 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
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### If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare sharing with others to sharing your toys with your brother or sister, then ask "How does it feel when someone shares with you?"

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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 sharing or God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "If I Were a Butterfly," or "God is So Good." Use movements: clap during "Jesus loves me," spread arms wide during "God is so good," flutter hands during "butterfly."

---

Great singing! Now sit down in our story horseshoe so we can hear about some people who learned something very important about sharing. This story is about being kind with what we have!

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound caring when you're Moses, sound worried when people are scared, sound happy when talking about God's promises.

---

Today we're going to meet God's people who were learning how to share with each other!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

A long time ago, God's people were about to move into a wonderful new home. Their leader Moses wanted to teach them how to be kind to each other. Moses loved God very much and wanted everyone to be happy.

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*[Change to concerned voice, walk to other side]*

---

But Moses knew that sometimes people get scared about sharing. Sometimes when we see someone who needs help, we think "What if I don't have enough left for me?" That makes our hearts feel hard like a rock.

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*[Move to center, make tight fists]*

---

When people get scared, they hold onto their things very tightly. They make fists like this and don't want to let go. God has a word for that, He calls it being "tightfisted."

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*[Move to center, speak with authority but kindness]*

---

But God didn't want His people to be scared like that. He wanted them to have soft, kind hearts that care about others. So God told Moses to teach them something special.

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*[Open hands wide, speak warmly]*

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God said, "When you see someone who needs help, don't close your heart or make tight fists. Instead, open your hands and share what you have with them. Give them what they need!"

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**Deuteronomy 15:7-8 (NIV)**

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*7-8 If anyone is poor among your fellow Israelites... do not be hardhearted or tightfisted toward them. Rather, be openhanded and freely lend them whatever they need.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you think God's people felt worried about sharing their things? Yes! It's normal to feel worried sometimes. But God loves us and wants to help us be brave.

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*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

---

Then God made them an amazing promise! He said, "When you share with others, I will take extra good care of you. When you help someone else, I will make sure you have what you need too!"

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

God doesn't want us to be scared about sharing. He wants us to remember that He has plenty of everything. When we share our toys, our food, our time, or our kindness, God makes sure we're okay too.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

The people learned that God wanted them to have "open hands", hands that are ready to share and help. Not tight fists that hold everything in, but open hands that can give and receive good things.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what happened? When people started sharing with each other, everyone felt happier! People got the help they needed, and the people who shared felt good about being kind.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God learned that God's heart is full of love, and He wants our hearts to be full of love too. When we share with others, we're showing them how much God cares about them.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we see kids at school who need help, or family members who are sad, or neighbors who could use a friend. God wants us to have open hands and kind hearts, ready to share and help.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone needs help, you can share your snack, or your crayons, or give them a hug, or ask a grown-up to help them. God loves it when we take care of each other!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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And remember, God promises to take care of you when you take care of others. You never have to be scared about being kind. God has enough love and enough good things for everyone!

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

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

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Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll 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 think God's people felt when they heard they should share their things?
  2. What's something you like to share with others?
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3. What would you do if you saw someone who looked sad and hungry?

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4. How does it feel when someone shares something special with you?

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5. What's the difference between open hands and closed hands?

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6. Why do you think God wants us to share with others?

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7. What happened to God's people when they started sharing more?

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8. Tell about a time when sharing made you happy.

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9. What would our class be like if everyone shared with each other?

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10. How does God take care of us when we take care of others?

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11. What makes it hard sometimes to share our things?

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12. What's something you could share with someone at school?

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13. How can we have kind hearts like God wants?

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14. What would you say to someone who was scared to share?

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

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16. How do you think God feels when we share with others?

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17. What did Moses want God's people to remember about sharing?

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18. How can we pray for people who need help?

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19. What would happen if everyone in our town shared like God wants?

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20. How can we be like the people in our story who learned to share?

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

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

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

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Select songs about sharing, kindness, or God's care. Suggestions: "Share, Share, Share," "God Will Take Care of You," or "Love One Another." Include movements: reach out hands during "share," point up during "God," hug yourself during "care."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer and think about how we can have open hands and kind hearts this week.

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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 us so much and teaching us how to share.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to have open hands and kind hearts when we see someone who needs help. Help us remember that You will take care of us when we take care of others.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to be brave about sharing and not to be scared or selfish with our things.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for having such a big, loving heart and for always taking care of us. Help us to show others how much You love them. 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 sharing or helping others. Examples: "God, help me share my snacks" or "Thank you God for taking care of us."

Remember, God wants us to have open hands ready to share and help others. Have a wonderful week showing God's love by being kind and generous!

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# Remember and Protect

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*From Suffering to Shield, Does experiencing pain give us special responsibility?*

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**Exodus 22:21-27**

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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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**Exodus 22:21-27 (NIV)**

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*21 "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. 22 Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.*

*25 If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27 because that cloak is the only covering for the other person's body. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."*

## Context

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This passage appears in the midst of God's detailed law code given to Israel at Mount Sinai. Following the dramatic giving of the Ten Commandments, these verses are part of what scholars call the "Book of the Covenant", practical instructions for how God's people should live in community. These laws aren't abstract principles but concrete guidelines for the brand-new nation of Israel learning to organize their society around justice.

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The immediate context focuses on property rights, judicial procedures, and social responsibility. But God suddenly shifts from technical regulations about stolen oxen and damaged fields to the most vulnerable members of society: foreigners, widows, orphans, and the desperately poor. This isn't accidental, it reveals God's heart for those who have no advocate, no protection, no economic power.

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## The Big Idea

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**Our memory of pain should create a shield for others' protection, those who have known suffering bear special responsibility to prevent it.**

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This teaching is both beautiful and challenging. It assumes that suffering can become wisdom, that remembering our own vulnerability should make us fierce protectors of others' dignity. Yet it also raises difficult questions about whether all suffering truly creates compassion, and how we handle the reality that some who suffer most become those who inflict suffering on others.

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## Theological Core

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- **Memory-Based Ethics.** God repeatedly calls Israel to remember their slavery as the foundation for treating others justly. Personal experience of oppression becomes the ethical compass for preventing oppression.
  - **Divine Advocacy for the Vulnerable.** God positions himself as the direct advocate for foreigners, widows, and orphans. When they cry out, God hears and responds with fierce protection.
  - **Justice Beyond Tribal Boundaries.** Remarkably, this command to protect foreigners appears in the very law code that defines Israel's distinct identity. Justice transcends ethnic particularism.
  - **Economic Compassion as Worship.** The lending and cloak provisions show that economic transactions must reflect God's compassionate character. How we treat people's basic needs reveals our understanding of God.
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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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- Personal experience of suffering creates moral obligation to prevent others' suffering, though this process isn't automatic
  - God expects those with power to actively protect the vulnerable, not merely avoid harming them
  - True justice transcends tribal loyalties and ethnic boundaries, even foreigners deserve protection
  - Navigating the complexity that some who suffer become those who cause suffering, requiring wisdom about when and how to apply this principle
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## Grades 4, 6

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- Remembering times we felt left out or scared helps us understand how to treat others who feel that way
  - God especially cares about people who don't have anyone to stand up for them
  - Being kind to others is a choice we make, even when we don't feel like it
  - Sometimes we have to be brave and speak up when someone is being mistreated
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to be kind helpers to people who are sad or need friends
  - God listens when people who are hurting call out to him
  - We can be God's helpers by being kind to new kids and sharing with those who need help
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Assuming All Suffering Creates Compassion.** While the ideal is that pain creates empathy, reality is more complex. Some who suffer deeply become those who inflict suffering. Acknowledge this tension while holding up God's vision for how suffering should transform us.
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- **Guilt-Based Teaching.** Don't shame students about times they haven't stood up for others. Instead, focus on God's heart for the vulnerable and how we can grow in reflecting that heart.
- **Oversimplifying "Foreigner" Protection.** This passage is striking precisely because it calls Israel to protect outsiders. Don't minimize the radical nature of justice that transcends tribal boundaries, but do help students apply this thoughtfully to contemporary situations.
- **Making It Only About Individual Kindness.** This passage is about systemic protection of vulnerable populations, not just personal niceness. Help students see both individual and structural dimensions of justice.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"Why should experiencing bad things make us responsible for protecting others? That doesn't seem fair."**

This question gets to the heart of the passage. Acknowledge that it might not feel fair, when we've suffered, part of us wants protection and comfort, not more responsibility. But God's vision is that suffering can become wisdom. When we know what it feels like to be powerless or afraid, we have special insight into what others need. It's not about adding burden to those who've already carried pain, it's about transforming that pain into purpose. And notice that God doesn't leave the vulnerable to depend only on human protection; he promises to hear their cries directly.

**"What if someone who was hurt badly becomes someone who hurts others? Does that mean this principle doesn't work?"**

You're observing something real and tragic. Some people who suffer deeply do become those who inflict suffering, the abused who become abusers, the marginalized who become oppressors. This passage presents God's intention for how suffering should transform us, not a psychological law that automatically happens. It takes intentional choice, community support, and often healing to transform pain into protection for others. That's why we need both individual transformation and systems that protect the vulnerable regardless of whether individuals choose compassion.

**"Why does God get so angry about mistreating these specific groups? What makes them different?"**

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Foreigners, widows, and orphans represent people who have no built-in advocates or economic power. In ancient societies, your family and tribal connections were your safety net. These groups had no such protection, foreigners were cut off from their birth communities, widows had lost their primary economic provider and social advocate, and orphans had no family structure at all. God's fierce protection of them reveals his heart for anyone who has no voice, no power, and no advocate. Today we might think of refugees, single mothers facing economic hardship, or children in foster care.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God transforms our memory of powerlessness into passionate protection of others who are powerless, suffering becomes a shield when we remember how it felt to need one.**

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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 explore the challenging idea that personal suffering should create obligation to protect others from suffering. Help them wrestle with when this works and when it doesn't, while discovering God's heart for the vulnerable.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Does experiencing pain really give us special responsibility to shield others from pain? Why doesn't suffering automatically make everyone more compassionate?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate that this principle can feel unfair to those who've already suffered, honor their experiences and feelings
  - Acknowledge the complexity that some who suffer become those who inflict suffering, this is real and needs discussion
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- Let students wrestle with the tension rather than rushing to neat answers, the questions themselves are valuable
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about the last time you felt genuinely left out, maybe you were new somewhere, or your friend group suddenly didn't include you, or you couldn't afford something everyone else had. Remember that feeling in your stomach, the way your mind kept replaying what happened, how you analyzed every interaction wondering if people were judging you or genuinely didn't see you.

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Now imagine you're in a position where you could include or exclude someone else who's new, struggling, or different. The obvious response might be kindness, after all, you remember what it felt like. But you also might think, "I suffered through it, so they can too," or "I need to protect myself first," or "I don't have the emotional energy to take care of someone else right now."

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That tension is exactly what we're diving into today. We're looking at a passage where God tells Israel that their memory of being enslaved and oppressed in Egypt should make them passionate protectors of anyone else who's vulnerable, foreigners, widows, orphans, people with nothing. But the question hanging over it is: does suffering really create responsibility?

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As you read, pay attention to why God connects Israel's past pain to present responsibility. Notice who specifically gets protection, and notice the strength of God's reaction when these vulnerable people are mistreated. This isn't a gentle suggestion, it's a command with serious consequences.

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Open your Bibles to Exodus 22, starting at verse 21. We're going to read through verse 27 to get the full picture of what God is saying.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Some students may finish early, that's fine. Watch for confused expressions and be ready to help with vocabulary like "fatherless" (orphaned) or "pledge" (collateral). Let them feel the weight of God's anger in verses 23-24.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What specific groups does God name for protection, and what do they have in common?
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- Why does God reference Israel's time as foreigners in Egypt, what's the connection?
- How intense is God's reaction to mistreating these vulnerable people?
- What emotions would you feel if you were one of these vulnerable people hearing this promise?

### Exodus 22:21-27 (NIV)

*21 "Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. 22 Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. 23 If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. 24 My anger will be aroused, and I will kill you with the sword; your wives will become widows and your children fatherless.*

*25 If you lend money to one of my people among you who is needy, do not treat it like a business deal; charge no interest. 26 If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, 27 because that cloak is the only covering for the other person's body. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic sections, especially verses 23-24 where God's anger is expressed.

**Reader 1:** Verses 21-22 (Commands about foreigners, widows, orphans) **Reader 2:** Verses 23-24 (God's fierce response to mistreatment) **Reader 3:** Verses 25-27 (Economic compassion and God's character)

Listen for the intensity in these verses, this isn't casual advice, it's passionate command. God has strong feelings about how vulnerable people are treated.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this passage?"

Get into groups of 3-4. You have three minutes to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, questions you're actually curious about, not questions you think you're supposed to ask. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "What if..." or "How can..." or "When have you..." Ask about things that confused you, surprised you, or made you think of your own life. Go.

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

**Remember:** Let students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Their questions will likely touch on fairness, the intensity of God's anger, and whether this principle really works.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes. Start with questions most students will relate to, often about fairness or personal application.

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

- "What do foreigners, widows, and orphans all have in common in terms of power and protection?"
  - "Why do you think God specifically reminds Israel 'you were foreigners in Egypt'? What's that supposed to do?"
  - "How would you describe God's emotional reaction to mistreating vulnerable people? What does that tell us about God?"
  - "Can you think of examples where someone who suffered became extra compassionate? What about examples where suffering made someone harder or meaner?"
  - "What's the difference between 'you were hurt, so you understand' and 'you were hurt, so toughen up'?"
  - "Who would be today's version of 'foreigners, widows, and orphans', people without built-in advocates or power?"
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- "What if Israel had said 'we suffered enough, we deserve to be comfortable now'? How does God challenge that thinking?"
- "Why does verse 24 say the punishment will be becoming what you've oppressed? What's the logic there?"

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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? God is saying that memory of powerlessness should create passionate protection of others who are powerless. Your suffering shouldn't make you bitter, it should make you a shield. The people who best understand what vulnerability feels like are the ones God expects to be fiercest about preventing it in others. It's not about adding burden to those who've suffered; it's about transforming pain into purpose.

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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, times when your own hard experiences could either make you more protective of others going through something similar, or could make you think "they need to figure it out themselves"?

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Being new at school when you remember what it felt like to sit alone at lunch
  - Seeing someone get bullied when you remember being picked on
  - Watching classmates struggle financially when your family has faced money stress
  - Encountering international students or immigrants when you remember feeling like an outsider
  - Meeting kids in foster care or whose parents are divorced when you remember family instability
  - Seeing someone get excluded from your friend group when you remember being left out
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice. Acknowledge that sometimes we don't have emotional capacity to help others.

## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone use their own hard experience to become extra protective or kind to others?"
  - "What would help you choose protection over self-protection when you encounter someone who's struggling?"
  - "How do you tell the difference between healthy boundaries and hardening your heart?"
  - "What's the difference between 'I suffered so I understand' and 'I suffered so they should too'?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: God's vision is that our memory of powerlessness becomes passionate protection of others who are powerless. This isn't easy or automatic, pain can make us bitter instead of better, protective of ourselves instead of protective of others. But when we let God transform our suffering into shields for others, we reflect God's own heart.

---

This week, pay attention to moments when you encounter someone who's struggling with something you've also faced. Notice your first instinct, is it "they need to figure it out" or "I remember what that felt like"? Experiment with letting your hard experiences become bridges of understanding rather than walls of protection.

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I'm proud of how thoughtfully you engaged these difficult questions today. Keep wrestling with them, the questions themselves help you become the kind of people God envisions, people who transform suffering into strength for others.

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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 remembering times we felt scared, left out, or needed help should make us extra kind to others who feel that way. We become helpers because we remember what it felt like to

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need help.

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## **If Kids Ask "Why should I help if no one helped me?"**

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Say: "That's a really fair question. Sometimes it feels like since we had to be tough, others should be tough too. But God wants to break that cycle, he wants our hard times to help us understand others, not make us harder."

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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 youth group. Keep them up! Look around, almost everyone has felt this way. Now raise your hand if being new felt exciting and easy and totally comfortable. Hmm, not many hands this time.

---

Here's a harder question. Raise your hand if you've ever seen someone else be the new kid and you remembered what that felt like, so you went over to talk to them or included them. Some of you, good for you! But raise your hand if you've ever seen someone else be the new kid and thought, "Well, I survived being new, so they'll be fine on their own."

---

That second reaction makes total sense. When we've been through something hard, part of us thinks, "I figured it out, so they can too." It's like we build walls around our hearts to protect ourselves. But sometimes those same walls keep us from helping other people who are going through what we went through.

---

It's like in the movie "Inside Out" when Riley moves to San Francisco and feels scared and angry and sad all at once. Later, she could meet another kid who's moving and think either "I know how awful that feels, let me help" or "I had to deal with it alone, so they can too." Same experience, totally different responses.

---

The tricky part is figuring out how to let our hard times make us helpers instead of making us harder. How do we use what we've learned to build bridges instead of walls?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when God told his people, "Remember how awful it felt when you were slaves in Egypt? Good. Now use that memory to make sure you never treat anyone else that way." Let's find out what happened when God asked them to turn their pain into protection for others.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to being new or excluded. Some may share personal examples. Acknowledge briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture the Israelites gathered around Mount Sinai. They've been free from slavery in Egypt for just a few months, and they're still getting used to the idea that they don't have to be afraid all the time.

God has been giving them laws, rules for how to live together as free people. Some rules are about what to do if your cow wanders into someone's field, or how to handle it if someone steals your stuff. Pretty practical things.

But then God says something that makes everyone's hearts skip a beat. He starts talking about the most vulnerable people in their community, people who don't have anyone to stick up for them.

Imagine being there, sitting on the ground with your family, listening as Moses shares God's words. The air is serious and quiet. This isn't just advice, this is a command from the God who rescued them from slavery.

Moses stands up tall and speaks in a voice that carries across the crowd. His words are clear and strong.

Think about what that would be like, hearing God's voice through Moses, knowing that the same God who split the Red Sea has strong feelings about how you treat the kid at school who doesn't speak the same language as everyone else.

The first thing God mentions is foreigners, people who come from other places, who don't know the customs, who might dress differently or talk differently. In the crowd, some people start shifting uncomfortably. It's natural to want to stick with people who are like you.

### **Exodus 22:21 (NIV)**

*"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt."*

Do you hear what God just did? He said "Remember what it felt like to be the outsider. Remember what it felt like when people looked at you like you didn't belong. Remember the fear in your stomach when you didn't know the rules and everyone else did."

But God wasn't finished. He kept going, mentioning other people who might not have anyone to stand up for them, women whose husbands had died and children who didn't have parents to take care of them.

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In those days, if your husband died, you might not have any way to make money. If your parents died, you might not have anyone to make sure you had food and clothes. These were people who really needed others to be kind and fair to them.

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Then God said something that probably made everyone in the crowd feel a chill run down their spine.

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#### **Exodus 22:22-24 (NIV)**

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*"Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless. If you do and they cry out to me, I will certainly hear their cry. My anger will be aroused."*

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Whoa. God wasn't just suggesting kindness, he was promising to personally stand up for anyone who got picked on or treated unfairly. When people who have no power cry out for help, God hears them. And God gets really, really upset when they're mistreated.

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But why does God care so much about these specific people? What makes foreigners, widows, and orphans so special to God?

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Here's the thing, they're all people who don't have built-in protection. Think about it: if you have a problem at school, you can tell your parents and they'll advocate for you. If someone at work treats you unfairly, you might have a boss or a union to speak up for you. But what if you didn't have anyone like that?

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That's what these people faced every day. No one was automatically on their side. No one was guaranteed to stick up for them. They were vulnerable in a way that people with families and money and connections weren't.

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And God looked at that situation and basically said, "I will be their advocate. I will be the one who sticks up for them. And I expect my people to be my hands and feet in protecting them."

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God even gave them specific examples of what this protection should look like.

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#### **Exodus 22:26-27 (NIV)**

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*"If you take your neighbor's cloak as a pledge, return it by sunset, because that cloak is the only covering for the other person's body. What else can they sleep in? When they cry out to me, I will hear, for I am compassionate."*

God was saying, "Pay attention to what people actually need to survive. Don't just follow the technical rules, think about the human being in front of you. If someone is so poor they had to give you their coat as a promise to pay you back, give it back to them at night so they don't freeze."

This is God showing them what it means to remember their own hard times and use that memory to protect others. "You know what it feels like to be powerless," God was saying. "So now that you have power, use it to make sure others don't have to feel that powerlessness alone."

Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice the Israelites faced. We can remember our hard times and think, "I got through it, so everyone else should just toughen up." Or we can remember our hard times and think, "I know how scary and lonely that feels. Let me make sure this person doesn't have to feel that way."

What we learn from this passage is that God wants our painful experiences to become superpowers for helping others. When we've been the new kid, we have special insight into what new kids need. When we've been left out, we know what inclusion feels like. When we've been scared, we understand how to offer comfort.

God's heart is that our hard times don't make us hard people. Instead, our difficult experiences become the very thing that helps us recognize when others are struggling and know exactly how to help them.

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

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

#### **Question 1: The Memory Test**

Think about the last time you felt really left out or like you didn't belong. Maybe it was your first day at a new school, or when everyone else seemed to know some joke or game and you didn't, or when you were the only one wearing the wrong clothes for an event. Can you remember that feeling in your stomach? Now imagine you see someone else in that exact situation. What would help you choose to

reach out instead of thinking "they'll be fine on their own"?

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**Listen For:** "Remember how it felt," "Think about what I needed", affirm: "Yes! Your experience becomes your superpower for helping others."

### Question 2: The Protection Question

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God promises to personally stick up for people who don't have anyone else to advocate for them. If you were someone who felt like you had no one on your side, how would it feel to hear that God himself is your advocate? What would that change about how brave you might feel or how you might treat others?

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**If They Say:** "I'd feel stronger" or "I'd want to help others too", respond "That's exactly what God hopes happens when people know they're loved and protected."

### Question 3: The Choice Point

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In the passage, God reminds Israel "you were foreigners in Egypt", basically, "remember what it felt like to be the outsider." Why do you think God wanted them to remember that painful time instead of just forgetting about it and moving on? What good can come from remembering hard experiences?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Israel's choice so important, their pain could become protection for others."

### Question 4: The Ripple Effect

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Imagine if everyone who had ever felt left out made it their mission to include others, and everyone who had ever been picked on made it their mission to stand up for others who were being picked on. What do you think schools and neighborhoods and families would be like? What would change?

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**If They Say:** "Everything would be nicer" or "No one would be alone", affirm while acknowledging: "That's God's dream. It takes a lot of people making that choice, but it's possible."

You guys are understanding something really important. God doesn't want our hard experiences to make us bitter or closed off. He wants them to make us wise and compassionate. Now let's do an activity that will help us experience what this looks like in real life.

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## 4. Activity: The Bridge Builder Challenge (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 personal experience of isolation can become the foundation for including others. Kids will physically experience being left out, then have the opportunity to use that memory to make sure no one else feels that way. Success looks like kids discovering that their own hard experience becomes their motivation and wisdom for helping others.

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### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

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We're going to do "The Bridge Builder Challenge." I'll divide you into three groups. Groups 1 and 2 will start on opposite sides of the room. Group 3, you'll start in the middle, and here's the challenging part: groups 1 and 2 are going to try to get to each other's sides, but they can't acknowledge that you exist. They have to walk around you, avoid eye contact, and act like you're invisible.

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Group 3, your job is to figure out how to get included in the crossing. Groups 1 and 2, you want to get to the other side, but you're not allowed to let group 3 help you or join you. After a minute, we'll switch so everyone gets to experience being in the middle.

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The challenge is this: after everyone has experienced being ignored in the middle, we'll do a second round where each group remembers what that felt like and has a chance to change how they treat others.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what happened to Israel, they experienced being powerless and excluded, and then God said, "Now use that memory to make sure you never make anyone else feel that way."

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### During the Activity(4 minutes)

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Round 1: Let each group experience being in the middle for about 45 seconds. Watch their faces as they try to get acknowledged and included. Notice their body language when they realize they're being ignored.

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As they struggle to get included, you'll see some kids getting frustrated, some trying harder to get attention, some giving up. Don't intervene yet, let them feel the weight of being excluded for this short

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time.

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Coach the crossing groups: "Remember, you can see group 3 but you need to act like they don't exist. Find ways around them." Coach group 3: "Keep trying to find a way to be part of what's happening."

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Watch for the moment when kids in the middle start to look defeated or frustrated, that's when they're really feeling what it's like to be powerless. This is the physical representation of being a foreigner, widow, or orphan.

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Round 2: Now everyone has felt exclusion. Say: "This time, remember how it felt to be ignored in the middle. Use that memory to decide how to treat others." Watch for the breakthrough when kids start including instead of excluding.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone who was excluded chooses to include others, this is the physical representation of turning pain into protection.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you were being ignored versus when someone chose to include you? In the second round, what made you decide to include others instead of ignoring them like you'd been ignored? You just physically experienced what God was teaching Israel, your own hard experience can become the very thing that motivates you to protect others.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God wants us to remember the times we felt scared, left out, or powerless not so we stay stuck in those feelings, but so we become extra wise and kind to others who feel that way. Our hard experiences can become superpowers for helping others.

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This doesn't mean you have to take care of everyone or fix every problem. It means when you see someone going through something you've been through, you have special insight into what they might need, whether that's a friend to sit with at lunch, someone to include them in a game, or just someone who understands.

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The amazing result is that when we use our hard experiences to help others, our own pain starts to have purpose. Instead of just being something we survived, it becomes something that helps others survive too.

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## This Week's Challenge

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This week, look for someone who might be feeling left out or struggling with something you've also experienced. Instead of thinking "they'll figure it out like I did," try thinking "I remember what that felt like, what would have helped me?" Then do that one thing, even if it's small. It could be sitting with someone at lunch, including someone in a conversation, or just smiling at someone who looks nervous.

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## Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*God, thank you for caring so much about people who feel left out or powerless. Help us remember that you want to use our hard times to make us better helpers, not harder people. When we see someone who's struggling, help us remember what it felt like and choose kindness. 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 helpers to people who need friends, especially those who might feel different or sad.

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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 being kind to people who need help to being a superhero whose special power is making people feel better when they're sad or scared.

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about helping others or God's love. Suggestions: "Love Your Neighbor," "Be Kind," or "God Loves You and Me." Use movements: point to others during "neighbor," give hugs during "love," and smile big during "kind" lyrics.

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Wow, you are amazing singers! That was beautiful. Now sit down in our horseshoe shape because I have an exciting story to tell you about how God wants us to be super helpers to people who need friends.

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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 gentle when you're God, sound confused when people are lost, sound excited when talking about helping.

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Today we're going to meet God's special people, the Israelites. They had been slaves in Egypt for a very long time.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, make a sad face]*

---

Being slaves was very hard and very sad. They had to work all day long, and the mean Egyptian people were not kind to them at all. The Israelites felt scared and alone.

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*[Move to center, smile big, use a strong, kind voice]*

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But God saw how sad they were, and God rescued them! God brought them out of Egypt to be free. They were so happy!

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

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Now the Israelites were learning how to live as God's family. God was giving them rules about how to be kind to each other.

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*[Move to center, speak with God's loving voice]*

---

God said something very important. He said, "Remember how sad you felt when you were slaves? Remember how it felt when people were mean to you?"

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*[Look around at each child, speak gently]*

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Then God said, "Now I want you to be extra kind to people who might feel sad or scared, just like you did."

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**Exodus 22:21-22 (NIV)**

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*"Do not mistreat or oppress a foreigner, for you were foreigners in Egypt. Do not take advantage of the widow or the fatherless."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you know what foreigners are? They're people from different places who might not know anyone. They might look different or talk different. God wanted his people to be their friends!

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*[Move to center, speak with warmth]*

---

God also talked about people who didn't have mommies and daddies to take care of them, and mommies who didn't have daddies to help them. These people needed extra kindness.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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God said, "When people who need help cry out to me, I hear them! I will always listen and help them!"

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

God wants his people to be his helpers. When we see someone who looks sad or scared or lonely, we can be God's hands and feet to help them!

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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What a special job! We get to be like superheroes who make people feel better when they're sad!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God taught the Israelites that when we remember times we felt sad or scared, that can help us be extra good at helping other people who feel sad or scared!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school or at the playground, we might see kids who look lonely or different. Maybe they're new, or maybe they're sitting by themselves, or maybe someone was mean to them.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When that happens, we can remember times we felt sad or lonely, and we can think, "I know what that feels like. Let me be a friend!" We can share our toys, sit with them, or ask them to play.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves it when we use our hearts to help other people. When we're kind to people who need friends, we make God so happy, and we make them happy 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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Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk.

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

### **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 Israelites felt when they were slaves in Egypt?

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2. What would it feel like if you were new at school and didn't know anyone?

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3. Why do you think God wanted the Israelites to remember the sad times?

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4. What would you do if you saw someone sitting alone at lunch?

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5. How does it feel when someone is kind to you when you're sad?

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6. What does it mean that God listens when people call out to him?

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7. How can we be God's helpers to people who are lonely?

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8. What would you want someone to do if you felt scared at school?

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9. How can we be friends to kids who are different from us?

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10. What's one way you can help someone who looks sad?

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11. Why does God care so much about people who need help?

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12. What would happen if everyone was kind to people who needed friends?

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13. How do you think God feels when we help others?

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14. What would you do if you saw someone being mean to a new kid?

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15. How can we remember to be kind even when we're having a bad day?

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16. What's something kind someone did for you when you needed help?

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17. What does it mean to be God's hands and feet?

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18. How can we pray for people who are sad or lonely?

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19. What would change if everyone remembered to be extra kind?

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20. How can we be like the kind helpers God wants us to be?

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

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

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

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Select songs about kindness or helping. Suggestions: "If You're Happy and You Know It (Help a Friend)," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Love One Another." Include movements: clap for friends, hold up hands for "little light," and hug motions for "love one another."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Sit criss-cross applesauce in rows, close your eyes, and fold your hands.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for rescuing your people from Egypt and for always listening when people call out to you...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to be kind to kids who look lonely or sad or different. Help us be your special helpers who make people feel better...*

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*[Pause]*

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*When we see someone who needs a friend, help us remember that you want us to share your love with them. Thank you for loving everyone so much. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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

are sad."

Remember, God gave you a special job this week, to be a kind helper to anyone who looks like they need a friend. You can be God's superhero helper! Have a wonderful week!

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# Dinner with Outsiders

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*Mercy Over Separation, Where do we draw the lines of our table fellowship?*

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**Matthew 9:9-17**

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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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**Matthew 9:9-17 (NIV)**

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*9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

*14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. 16 No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wineskins will be ruined and the wine will be spilled. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."*

## Context

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Jesus has just healed a paralytic and declared his sins forgiven, establishing his authority to address spiritual as well as physical ailments. This dinner scene emerges from that broader mission of restoration. Matthew, a Jewish tax collector working for Roman occupiers, represents the ultimate insider-turned-outsider, someone who knows Jewish faith but has chosen collaboration with the enemy for personal profit.

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The meal occurs in Matthew's house, suggesting this wasn't a chance encounter but a deliberate celebration of Matthew's new allegiance. Table fellowship in first-century Palestinian culture represented the deepest form of social acceptance and relationship. Sharing a meal meant voicing approval of the participants and willingness to be associated with their reputations and choices.

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## The Big Idea

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**Jesus's mission specifically targets those most different from religious ideals, not those already righteous, scandalizing those who equate spiritual health with social separation.**

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This creates genuine tension because the Pharisees' concerns weren't purely hypocritical, association does affect reputation and can risk moral compromise. Jesus doesn't dismiss the risk but radically reframes the priority from maintaining purity through separation to pursuing mercy through engagement.

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## Theological Core

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- **Table fellowship reveals spiritual priorities.** Who we're willing to share meals with demonstrates what we truly value and whom we consider worthy of acceptance and relationship.
  - **Mercy supersedes sacrifice in divine priorities.** Religious practices aimed at maintaining personal purity become meaningless when they prevent engagement with those who need restoration.
  - **Mission requires proximity to brokenness.** Just as doctors must be near sick patients, spiritual healing requires close engagement with spiritual sickness, not distance from it.
  - **Jesus's presence transforms social categories.** The traditional righteous/sinner distinction becomes irrelevant when the physician himself sits at the table, everyone present needs healing, and healing is available to all.
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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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- Religious practices that avoid "sinners" can actually contradict divine priorities of mercy and restoration
  - Jesus's table fellowship model requires wrestling with legitimate concerns about reputation and moral compromise
  - Mission to broken people requires proximity and relationship, not just good intentions from a distance
  - Discerning when engagement maintains witness versus when it becomes unhelpful accommodation
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### Grades 4, 6

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- Jesus chose to include people that religious leaders thought should be excluded
  - Sometimes doing the right thing (showing mercy) makes other people uncomfortable or angry
  - Our choices about who to spend time with reveal what we really believe about God's love
  - It's okay when others disapprove of our kindness, as long as we're following Jesus's example
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### Grades 1, 3

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- Jesus is friends with everyone, even people others don't like
  - God wants us to be kind to people who make mistakes
  - We can invite people to be with us even when others think we shouldn't
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Dismissing legitimate concerns about moral influence.** The Pharisees weren't entirely wrong to worry about association affecting reputation and potentially leading to compromise. Acknowledge this tension while exploring Jesus's different priority.
  - **Suggesting all social boundaries are wrong.** Jesus doesn't eliminate discernment but reframes it around mercy and mission rather than self-protection and social status.
  - **Making the Pharisees cartoon villains.** Their concern for religious purity served important purposes. Help students understand why separation seemed wise before exploring why Jesus chose engagement.
  - **Implying that acceptance means approval of all behaviors.** Jesus's table fellowship represents relationship and hope for transformation, not endorsement of destructive choices.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Doesn't hanging out with bad people make you more likely to do bad things?"**

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Yes, that's a real risk the Pharisees were concerned about. Jesus doesn't pretend association carries no influence. Instead, he shows that the greater risk is having no influence at all on people who need hope. The question becomes: are we strong enough in our faith to be a positive influence rather than being negatively influenced? Jesus models how to engage with broken people while maintaining his mission and values.

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### **"How do we know when we're helping someone versus just accepting their sin?"**

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This is exactly the tension Jesus navigates. Notice he doesn't lecture the tax collectors and sinners at dinner, he simply shares the meal, building relationship first. But he's also clear about his mission: calling people to change, not endorsing their current choices. The relationship creates space for transformation, but the transformation is still necessary. We can love people and hope for their healing without approving everything they do.

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### **"What if my reputation gets ruined by associating with the wrong people?"**

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Jesus's reputation definitely suffered, the religious leaders criticized him throughout his ministry for exactly this issue. He shows us that sometimes following God's heart for mercy matters more than protecting our social standing. But this doesn't mean being reckless. Jesus was secure in his identity and mission, which allowed him to risk misunderstanding. We need wisdom about when we're strong enough to engage difficult situations and when we need to step back.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Jesus shows us that God's priority is mercy toward broken people, even when that mercy makes religious people uncomfortable and risks our reputation.**

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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 honestly with the tension between maintaining Christian witness and engaging people whose lifestyles conflict with Christian values. Help them explore what Jesus's table fellowship reveals about divine priorities.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Where do we draw the lines of our table fellowship? How do we distinguish engagement that maintains witness from accommodation that compromises truth?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of social pressure and reputation concerns, these are real and legitimate
  - Honor the complexity by acknowledging that association does carry influence and risk
  - Let students wrestle with difficult scenarios rather than providing simple answers to complex situations
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Picture this: you're at lunch and you see someone sitting alone who has a reputation for being involved in drugs, or cheating, or something that could get you in trouble if you're associated with them. Part of you feels bad for them sitting alone, but another part knows that if you go sit with them, people will assume things about you.

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Maybe you decide to stay put. After all, you've worked hard to build a good reputation. Your parents trust you, teachers respect you, and your friend group knows you make smart choices. Why risk all that by associating with someone who clearly doesn't share your values? It makes perfect sense to keep your distance.

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Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the stakes were much higher. Jesus had built a reputation as a respected religious teacher, but then he made a choice that shocked everyone who cared about religious purity. He didn't just talk to questionable people, he went to their house and shared a meal with them.

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As we read, pay attention to why this choice was so scandalous, and what Jesus says about his priorities when confronted about it. Notice especially how he uses the doctor metaphor to explain his reasoning.

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Let's open our Bibles to Matthew 9, starting with verse 9, and read silently through verse 17. Take your time with this.

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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 "Pharisees" or "tax collectors." Watch for early finishers and give them time to think deeply. Let them feel the social tension and moral complexity of the situation.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- Who's at this dinner party and why would that be controversial?
  - Why are the Pharisees concerned about Jesus's choice of dining companions?
  - What's surprising or challenging about Jesus's response to their criticism?
  - How would you feel if you were one of Jesus's disciples watching this unfold?
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## Matthew 9:9-17 (NIV)

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*9 As Jesus went on from there, he saw a man named Matthew sitting at the tax collector's booth. "Follow me," he told him, and Matthew got up and followed him. 10 While Jesus was having dinner at Matthew's house, many tax collectors and sinners came and ate with him and his disciples. 11 When the Pharisees saw this, they asked his disciples, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners?" 12 On hearing this, Jesus said, "It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. 13 But go and learn what this means: 'I desire mercy, not sacrifice.' For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

*14 Then John's disciples came and asked him, "How is it that we and the Pharisees fast, but your disciples do not fast?" 15 Jesus answered, "How can the guests of the bridegroom mourn while he is with them? The time will come when the bridegroom will be taken from them; then they will fast. 16 No one sews a patch of unshrunk cloth on an old garment, for the patch will pull away from the garment, making the tear worse. 17 Neither do people pour new wine into old wineskins. If they do, the skins will burst; the wineskins will be ruined and the wine will be spilled. No, they pour new wine into new wineskins, and both are preserved."*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but allow students to pass. Choose confident readers for the dialogue sections to bring the conflict to life.

**Reader 1:** Verses 9-10 (Setting up the controversial dinner) **Reader 2:** Verse 11 (The Pharisees' criticism) **Reader 3:** Verses 12-13 (Jesus's defense)

As you listen this time, notice the tone of conflict and tension. This isn't just a theological discussion, people are genuinely upset about what Jesus is doing.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to generate questions. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this story?"

Get into groups of three or four. I want you to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, not questions you already know the answer to, but things you're actually curious or confused about. For example, "Why didn't Jesus just meet with these people privately?" or "How did the other disciples feel about this?" You have three minutes to discuss and come up with your best questions.

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

**Remember:** Students drive the discussion with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Build on their curiosity.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around association, reputation, boundaries, and mission. Start with questions most students will relate to.

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

- "What made tax collectors and sinners so problematic to associate with in Jesus's culture?"
- "Why do you think Jesus chose to eat with these people rather than just talk to them on the street?"
- "Were the Pharisees completely wrong to be concerned about Jesus's associations?"
- "What's the difference between the 'healthy' and 'sick' in Jesus's doctor analogy?"
- "How do we decide when association helps someone versus when it compromises our witness?"
- "What would be modern equivalents to this dinner party that would make religious people uncomfortable?"
- "What would have happened if Jesus had chosen a different approach with these outsiders?"
- "Why does Jesus say 'mercy, not sacrifice'? What's he getting at with that distinction?"

### **Revealing the Pattern**

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus is saying that God's priority isn't protecting the reputation of religious people, it's extending mercy to broken people. The Pharisees' approach of avoiding sinners to maintain purity actually contradicts what God most desires. Jesus shows that sometimes following God means risking misunderstanding and criticism from religious people.

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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 school, social media, family dynamics, friendships. Who are the people in your world that others think you shouldn't associate with, and how do you navigate those situations?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Sitting with the kid everyone thinks is weird or problematic at lunch
  - Being friendly with someone your family disapproves of because of their lifestyle
  - Defending someone online who's being attacked, even when it makes you a target
  - Maintaining friendships with people who've made poor choices that affect their reputation
  - Engaging with social justice causes that some Christians find too controversial or political
  - Choosing between fitting in with your church youth group and reaching out to struggling classmates
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone show mercy to someone others had written off?"
  - "What would help you when you're trying to decide whether to engage a difficult situation or person?"
  - "How do you tell the difference between showing Christ-like mercy and just going along with things you know are wrong?"
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- "What's the difference between being wise about influence and being judgmental about association?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus shows us that God's heart is always toward mercy for broken people, even when that mercy makes religious people uncomfortable and risks our reputation. This doesn't mean abandoning wisdom or accepting destructive behavior, but it does mean that sometimes love requires us to engage messy situations rather than staying safely distant.

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This week, pay attention to the people in your world that others avoid or write off. Notice your own impulses, when do you pull back to protect yourself, and when might mercy call you to engage? Ask yourself what Jesus's table fellowship might look like in your specific relationships and situations.

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I'm impressed with the thoughtful questions you asked today and the honest way you wrestled with this tension. These aren't easy issues, and there aren't simple answers. Keep asking the hard questions and trusting God to give you wisdom for specific situations.

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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 Jesus includes people others exclude, even when it makes religious people uncomfortable, because God's priority is mercy toward those who need help.

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### If Kids Ask "Why didn't Jesus care what the Pharisees thought?"

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Say: "Jesus did care, but he cared more about helping people who needed God's love. Sometimes doing the right thing means some people won't understand or approve."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been in the lunchroom and noticed someone sitting all by themselves. Keep your hand up if you wanted to go sit with them but weren't sure if you should. Now raise your hand if you've ever actually gone over and invited someone to join your table.

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Here's a harder question: raise your hand if there's someone at school that other kids say you shouldn't be friends with, maybe because they get in trouble a lot, or they're different somehow, or they've done things that made people upset with them. Part of you might feel sorry for them, but another part thinks, "If I'm friends with them, people will think I'm like them too."

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Those feelings make perfect sense. We all want people to think good things about us. We want to fit in and be accepted. And sometimes being kind to certain people can make others question whether we're making good choices. It's genuinely hard to know what to do.

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This reminds me of the movie *Coco*, where Miguel's family has rules about who they associate with because of their bad experiences. Or like in *Wonder*, where kids had to decide whether to be friends with Auggie even though other kids might judge them for it. The question is always: do we follow the safe social rules, or do we follow our hearts toward kindness?

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The tricky part is figuring out when kindness is worth the risk of other people not understanding or approving. How do you know when it's right to reach out to someone even when others think you shouldn't?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus faced exactly this choice. He had to decide whether to follow religious rules about who to spend time with, or to follow his heart toward people who really needed a friend. Let's find out what happened and see what we can learn from his choice.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate strongly to lunchroom dynamics and social pressure. Acknowledge their experiences briefly but keep momentum moving toward the story. Some may share specific examples, affirm their observations.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture Jesus walking through the busy marketplace in his town. There are vendors selling food, children running around, and people everywhere going about their daily business.

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As Jesus walks, he notices a man sitting in a small booth. This man is Matthew, and his job is collecting taxes for the Roman government. Now, here's the thing about tax collectors, most Jewish people really,

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really didn't like them.

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Tax collectors worked for the enemy soldiers who had taken over their country. Plus, they often cheated people by charging extra money and keeping it for themselves. So when people saw a tax collector, they thought "traitor" and "thief."

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Imagine if someone at your school worked for bullies, helping them figure out which kids to pick on, and got paid for it. That's kind of how people felt about tax collectors. They saw them as people who had chosen money over loyalty to their own people.

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But Jesus looks at Matthew and sees something different. Maybe he sees loneliness. Maybe he sees someone who's made bad choices but could change. Maybe he just sees someone who needs a friend.

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Jesus walks right up to Matthew's booth, looks him in the eyes, and says something that shocks everyone around them: "Follow me."

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Can you imagine what that felt like for Matthew? Here was this respected teacher, someone people looked up to, and instead of walking past like everyone else, he's inviting Matthew to be part of his group. Matthew didn't even hesitate, he got up and followed Jesus.

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Now here's where it gets really interesting. Matthew was so excited about this new friendship that he threw a dinner party. He invited Jesus and all his disciples to come eat at his house.

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Think about what that would be like. You've just become friends with the most amazing person you've ever met, and you want to introduce him to all your other friends. So Matthew invited his friends too, and guess what? Most of Matthew's friends were also tax collectors and other people that religious folks didn't approve of.

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In Jesus's culture, eating dinner with someone was a really big deal. It meant you accepted them as a friend. It meant you were willing to be seen with them and connected to them. It wasn't just being polite, it was saying "I want to be associated with these people."

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So picture this dinner party. Jesus is sitting around the table with Matthew and all his questionable friends, laughing and talking and sharing food. They're having a great time.

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But outside, some religious leaders called Pharisees are watching through the windows, and they are not happy. The Pharisees were like the rule-keepers of their religion. They worked really hard to follow every rule perfectly, and part of their rules was staying away from people they considered sinful.

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The Pharisees couldn't believe what they were seeing. Here was Jesus, who was supposed to be a good religious teacher, eating dinner with the worst people in town. It was scandalous. It was shocking. It was completely wrong, according to their rules.

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So the Pharisees went up to Jesus's disciples and said, "Why does your teacher eat with tax collectors and sinners? Doesn't he know this makes him look bad? Doesn't he care about his reputation?"

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When Jesus heard what they were saying, he had a perfect answer:

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**Matthew 9:12-13 (NIV)**

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*"It is not the healthy who need a doctor, but the sick. I desire mercy, not sacrifice. For I have not come to call the righteous, but sinners."*

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Do you see what Jesus was saying? He was explaining that he's like a doctor, and doctors don't spend their time with healthy people, they go where the sick people are, because that's where they're needed most.

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Jesus was saying, "These people you call sinners? They're the ones who need God's love the most. And I can't help them if I stay away from them. I have to be willing to be their friend."

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Jesus was also saying something really important about God's heart. He said "I desire mercy, not sacrifice." He meant that God cares more about being kind and loving toward people who are hurting than he cares about following rules that keep us separated from them.

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So Jesus made his choice. Even though it made the religious leaders angry and confused, even though it might hurt his reputation, he chose to show mercy to people who needed it. He chose friendship over safety.

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And you know what happened? Matthew's life completely changed. He became one of Jesus's closest followers. He even wrote one of the books in the Bible, the book we're reading from today. All because Jesus was willing to look past what everyone else saw and offer friendship.

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But it wasn't just Matthew. All those other people at the dinner party got to see that Jesus cared about them too. They got to experience being included instead of excluded. They learned that God's love was bigger than their mistakes.

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This dinner party changed everything. It showed that Jesus came for everyone, especially people who thought God could never love them. Sometimes the most important thing we can do is share a meal with someone everyone else has given up on.

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This is like when we choose to sit with the lonely kid at lunch, or stick up for someone everyone's being mean to, or be kind to someone who's made mistakes. It might make others uncomfortable, but it's exactly what Jesus would do.

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What we learn from this story is that God wants us to show mercy, kindness and love, to people who need it, even when other people don't understand. Even when it's risky. Even when it's hard.

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The most important thing isn't protecting our reputation or following social rules. The most important thing is having God's heart for people who are hurting, lonely, or left out.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine you're Matthew sitting in that tax booth every day, and everyone who walks by either ignores you or gives you dirty looks because they think you're a bad person. Then suddenly, this amazing teacher walks up and says "Follow me." How do you think Matthew felt in that moment? What would that have been like?

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**Listen For:** "Surprised," "happy," "couldn't believe it", affirm: "Yes! After feeling rejected by everyone, suddenly someone important wanted to be his friend."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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Jesus knew that eating dinner with Matthew's friends would make the religious leaders angry and might hurt his reputation. But he did it anyway. Why do you think Jesus decided it was worth the risk? What was more important to him than protecting his reputation?

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**If They Say:** "He cared more about helping people", respond "Exactly! What do you think might have happened if Jesus had stayed away from these people?"

### Question 3: The Doctor Comparison

Jesus said he's like a doctor who goes to sick people, not healthy ones. If Jesus is the doctor and these people are the "sick" ones, what kind of sickness do you think he was talking about? What did they need to be healed from?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Jesus different, he saw people's loneliness and mistakes as things that could be healed, not reasons to stay away."

### Question 4: What Changed

Think about what was different at the end of the story versus the beginning. Matthew went from being rejected and alone to being one of Jesus's closest friends. What do you think would have happened to Matthew if Jesus had listened to the religious leaders and stayed away from him?

**If They Say:** "He would have stayed lonely" or "He never would have changed", affirm "Right! Sometimes people can't change until someone shows them they're worth caring about."

You guys have great insights. The amazing thing about this story is that Jesus shows us what it looks like to choose mercy over safety. Now let's try an activity that will help us experience what this kind of choice feels like.

## 4. Activity: The Inclusion Bridge (8 minutes)

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of inclusion over exclusion by having kids physically experience how choosing to include someone isolated requires courage and creates connection. Success looks like kids discovering that reaching across social barriers, even when it feels risky, creates community that

benefits everyone.

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

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We're going to play "Inclusion Bridge." I need you to divide into three groups. Group One, you're the "Safe Community", stand together on this side of the room. Group Two, you're the "Isolated Individuals", each of you stand alone scattered around the far side of the room. Group Three, you're the "Bridge Builders", you start in the middle.

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Here's the challenge: The Safe Community wants to stay together and not risk their safety by reaching out. The Isolated Individuals can't move toward others, they have to wait for someone to come to them. Bridge Builders, your job is to physically connect isolated people to the community by forming human bridges.

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But here's the twist: every time a Bridge Builder reaches toward an isolated person, they temporarily have to leave the safety of the community. And the Safe Community can choose whether to welcome the new person the Bridge Builder brings back.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like Jesus's situation, he had to leave the safety of religious approval to reach Matthew and his friends, and he had to convince his community to welcome them.

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

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Watch what happens first, usually the Safe Community will stay together and the Bridge Builders will feel torn between safety and mission. Let them wrestle with this for about a minute. Notice who feels the tension.

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As they start reaching toward isolated individuals, watch for the moment when someone realizes they need help from the Safe Community. The isolated people can only be fully connected when the whole community participates in welcoming.

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Coach with phrases like: "Bridge Builders, what do you need from your community to make this work?" and "Safe Community, what happens to isolated people if no one risks reaching them?" Don't give away the answer, let them discover it.

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The breakthrough usually comes when the Safe Community realizes they need to move toward the Bridge Builders and isolated people, not just wait for them to come back. This creates a true community that includes everyone.

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Celebrate when everyone is connected! Have them notice how different the room feels when everyone is included versus when people were separated and isolated.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to risk their position in the Safe Community to help connect an isolated person, this is the physical representation of Jesus's choice to risk religious approval for mercy.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when some people were isolated versus when everyone was connected? Bridge Builders, what was it like to risk leaving the safe group to reach someone alone? This is exactly what Jesus did, he risked his position with religious leaders to reach people like Matthew, and then he created a new community that included everyone.

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

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Here's what we learned today: Jesus includes people that others exclude, even when it makes religious people uncomfortable, because God's priority is showing mercy to people who need help. Just like Jesus reached out to Matthew when everyone else saw him as hopeless, we can reach out to people others have given up on.

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This doesn't mean we ignore wisdom or safety, but it does mean we care more about including lonely people than we care about what others think of us. Sometimes doing the right thing means some people won't understand or approve.

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The amazing result is what happened to Matthew, when someone shows mercy to us, it can completely change our lives. And when we show mercy to others, we get to be part of that life-changing love.

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

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Look for someone in your world who seems lonely or left out, maybe at school, in your neighborhood, or even in your family. Ask yourself: what would it look like to build a bridge toward them this week? Maybe it's sitting with them at lunch, including them in a game, or just saying something kind. Be a bridge builder like Jesus was.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to be our bridge builder. Help us to have hearts like his, hearts that care more about including people than protecting ourselves. Give us courage to reach out to lonely people this week, and help us remember that your love is big enough for everyone. 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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Show kids that Jesus is friends with everyone, especially people who need help, and we can be kind to people even when others don't like them.

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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 tax collectors to tattletales who work for bullies, then ask "How would it feel if the nicest kid in school wanted to be your friend?"

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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 or friendship. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "Make New Friends," or "God's Love is So Wonderful." Use movements: point to friends during "little children," hold hands and walk during "make new friends," or spread arms wide during "so wonderful."

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Great singing! Now let's sit in our special story horseshoe so you can see and hear everything. We're going to hear about a time when Jesus made a very surprising choice about friendship!

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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 you're Jesus, sound grumpy when you're the Pharisees, sound surprised when you're Matthew.

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Today we're going to meet a man named Matthew who thought no one liked him.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, look sad]*

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Matthew had a job that made people very angry with him. He collected money for mean soldiers who had taken over his town. People thought he was working for the bad guys.

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*[Use grumpy voice, cross your arms]*

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Every day, Matthew sat in his little money booth, and people would walk by and frown at him. They would whisper mean things. Nobody wanted to be his friend. Matthew felt very lonely.

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

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But then one day, someone very special was walking through the town. It was Jesus! Jesus was the kindest, most wonderful person anyone had ever met.

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

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Jesus walked right up to Matthew's booth and looked at him with kind eyes. Do you know what Jesus said? He said, "Matthew, follow me! I want you to be my friend!"

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*[Move to side, sound amazed]*

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Matthew couldn't believe it! The most amazing person in the whole world wanted to be HIS friend? Matthew was so happy he jumped right up and followed Jesus!

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**Matthew 9:9 (NIV)**

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*"Follow me," Jesus told him, and Matthew got up and followed him.*

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

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Can you imagine how happy Matthew was? He was so excited that he decided to throw a big dinner party! He wanted all his friends to meet Jesus too.

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*[Move to center, gesture like you're eating]*

---

So Matthew invited Jesus and all Jesus's friends to his house for dinner. And Matthew invited his friends too. They all sat around the table eating and laughing and having the best time!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, lower your voice]*

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But some religious men called Pharisees were watching through the window. And they were NOT happy. They thought Jesus was making a big mistake.

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*[Stop walking, use stern voice]*

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The Pharisees said, "Why is Jesus eating dinner with these people? Doesn't he know they're bad? Good people shouldn't be friends with bad people!"

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*[Speak with gentle but firm voice]*

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When Jesus heard this, he had a perfect answer. He said, "Sick people need a doctor, don't they? I came to help people who need help the most!"

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*[Pause dramatically, then smile]*

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Jesus was saying that his job was to love people who were hurting and lonely. Just like a doctor helps sick people get better, Jesus helps sad people feel loved!

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*[Speak directly to the children, move closer]*

---

And you know what? Because Jesus was kind to Matthew, Matthew's whole life changed! He became one of Jesus's very best friends. He even wrote part of the Bible, the story we just heard!

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*[Move closer to the children, speak warmly]*

---

Sometimes there are kids that other people don't like. Maybe they get in trouble, or they're different, or they made mistakes. But Jesus teaches us to be kind to everyone, especially people who need a friend.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

Jesus shows us that God loves everyone, and we can be kind to people even when others don't like them. That's exactly what Jesus did, and look how wonderful it turned out!

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

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

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

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

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### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think Matthew felt when everyone was mean to him?
  2. How would you feel if the nicest person in school wanted to be your friend?
  3. Why do you think Jesus wanted to eat dinner with Matthew?
  4. What would you do if you saw someone sitting alone who needed a friend?
  5. What changed about Matthew after he became friends with Jesus?
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6. Why did Jesus say he was like a doctor helping sick people?

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7. What happened at the dinner party that made everyone happy?

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8. Do you know someone at school who might need a friend?

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9. How can we be like Jesus to lonely people?

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10. What would happen if everyone was kind to people who needed friends?

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11. Why were the Pharisees upset with Jesus?

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12. How can we show God's love to people others don't like?

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13. What does it mean that God loves everyone?

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14. How would you invite someone new to play with you?

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15. What would you tell Matthew about why Jesus chose him?

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16. How did Jesus show Matthew that he was special?

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17. What did we learn about God's heart from this story?

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18. How can we pray for people who feel lonely?

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19. What would have happened if Jesus had walked past Matthew?

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20. How can we be brave like Jesus when we're being kind?

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

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness or friendship. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements like pointing to others during "be kind," flowing motions during "like a river," or holding up fingers like candles during "little light."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Fold your hands and bow your heads like we're talking 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 Jesus who is friends with everyone...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to be kind to people who need friends, just like Jesus was kind to Matthew. Give us brave hearts to include people others might ignore...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you love everyone, and we can share that love by being good friends to lonely people...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that your love is big enough for everyone, and that you want us all to be friends. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind to lonely people. Examples: "Help me be nice to everyone" or "Thank you for loving me."

Remember, Jesus wants us to be kind to everyone, especially people who need friends! Have a wonderful week being like Jesus to people around you!

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# God Defends the Vulnerable

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*When Powerful People Hurt Others, How does God's defense work in practice?*

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**Psalm 10:12-18**

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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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**Psalm 10:12-18 (NIV)**

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*12 Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. 13 Why does the wicked person revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? 14 But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. 15 Break the arm of the wicked person; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.*

*16 The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. 17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, 18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.*

## Context

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Psalm 10 is part of an ancient prayer book expressing the full range of human experience with God. The psalmist has been wrestling with a painful reality: wicked people seem to prosper while they oppress the vulnerable. The psalm begins with frustration, "Why, Lord, do you stand far off?", but moves through complaint to confident trust. This reflects the honest faith journey many believers experience when confronting injustice.

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The immediate context shows the psalmist moving from despair to hope. After describing how the wicked exploit the poor and boast that God doesn't see, the writer makes a deliberate choice to appeal to God's character and power. This isn't denial of reality, the oppression is still happening, but rather a decision to ground hope in who God is rather than in current circumstances. The psalm's structure mirrors the movement from lament to trust that characterizes mature faith.

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## The Big Idea

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**God hears the cries of afflicted people, actively encourages them, and defends the vulnerable so that powerful oppressors cannot continue to spread terror.**

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This isn't a promise that bad things won't happen to good people, but rather an assurance that God's character includes special attention to those who suffer under the power of others. The psalm acknowledges the real tension between God's ultimate justice and the immediate experience of injustice, while affirming that God's defense ultimately levels the playing field between "mere earthly mortals" and those they seek to terrorize.

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## Theological Core

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- **Divine Attentiveness.** God specifically hears, sees, and responds to the afflicted, this isn't passive awareness but active engagement with their suffering.
  - **Encouragement as Defense.** God's defense includes emotional and spiritual support, not just physical protection, encouraging the hearts of those who face oppression.
  - **Terror's End.** God's ultimate goal is that powerful people will no longer be able to use their position to spread fear and harm among the vulnerable.
  - **Mortal Limitation.** The phrase "mere earthly mortals" emphasizes that human power, no matter how intimidating, is limited compared to divine authority and will ultimately be held accountable.
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## Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- God's special attention to the afflicted doesn't mean instant rescue but includes ongoing encouragement and ultimate justice
  - The tension between divine defense and continuing oppression requires wrestling with how God works through human agents and systems
  - Recognizing "mere earthly mortals" helps put intimidating powerful people in perspective, their power is limited and accountable
  - Participants can discern when to be God's agents of defense and when to trust God's ultimate justice
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## Grades 4, 6

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- God pays special attention when powerful people hurt those who can't defend themselves
  - Sometimes God protects by sending helpers, changing hearts, or giving people courage to speak up
  - When we see bullying or unfairness, we can be part of how God protects others
  - Even when we feel scared or powerless, God hears our prayers and works to make things better
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God listens when we're scared or hurt by people who are being mean
  - God is stronger than anyone who tries to scare us
  - We can pray when someone is being mean to us or to others
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Promising Instant Rescue.** This psalm doesn't guarantee immediate intervention but rather ongoing divine attention and ultimate justice. Avoid suggesting that prayer always brings immediate relief from oppression, while still affirming that God genuinely cares and acts.
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- **Dismissing Current Suffering.** Don't minimize real pain by jumping straight to "God will fix it." The psalm honestly acknowledges that wicked people do cause genuine harm and terror. Validate the reality of suffering while pointing to God's ultimate response.

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- **Separating Divine and Human Agency.** God's defense often works through human agents, laws, institutions, brave individuals who speak up. Avoid creating false dichotomy between God's work and human responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

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- **Ignoring Power Dynamics.** The psalm specifically addresses situations where there's a power imbalance, "fatherless and oppressed" versus those who can "strike terror." Don't dilute this to general conflict between equals; honor the focus on protecting those who lack power to protect themselves.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Why doesn't God stop bad things from happening to kids?"**

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This is the heart of the psalm's struggle. The writer is asking similar questions. What the psalm teaches is that God does hear and see, that God's heart is especially tender toward those who are vulnerable, and that God works to end terror, sometimes through changing hearts, sometimes through people who stand up for others, and ultimately through perfect justice. It doesn't explain why God allows suffering, but it assures us that God cares deeply and is actively working against evil, even when we can't see it immediately.

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### **"How can I tell if God is defending someone or if I'm supposed to help?"**

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Often it's both. The psalm says God defends the oppressed, but throughout the Bible, God frequently works through people who choose to care for the vulnerable. If you see someone being hurt and you have the power to help safely, that might be exactly how God wants to provide defense. Pray for wisdom, talk to trusted adults, and remember that sometimes the most important thing you can do is refuse to stay silent when you witness injustice.

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### **"What if the powerful person is someone I'm supposed to respect, like a teacher or parent?"**

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This touches on one of the hardest aspects of the psalm's situation. The phrase "mere earthly mortals" applies to everyone, including people in authority. No human has the right to use their power to terrorize others, regardless of their position. If an authority figure is causing genuine harm, God sees that and cares. Finding a trustworthy adult to talk to becomes crucial, sometimes God's protection comes through other adults who can intervene appropriately.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God's heart is specifically tuned to hear the cries of those who suffer under someone else's power, and God actively works to end the terror that powerful people spread.**

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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 authentically with the tension between God's promise to defend the vulnerable and their real-world observations of ongoing oppression. Help them explore how divine defense might work practically without providing easy answers to complex questions.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How does God's defense of the vulnerable actually work in a world where powerful people still cause real harm to those who can't protect themselves?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of witnessing or experiencing injustice, don't rush to theological explanations
  - Honor the psalm's own struggle rather than presenting neat solutions to messy realities
  - Let them wrestle with whether and when they might be God's agents of defense rather than lecturing about obligation
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about the last time you watched the news or scrolled through social media and saw something that made you angry because someone powerful was hurting people who couldn't fight back. Maybe it was a story about corruption, abuse, bullying, or discrimination. You probably felt that familiar mix of anger and helplessness, wanting someone to do something but not knowing what that would look like.

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That feeling makes complete sense. When we see injustice, especially involving people who can't protect themselves, we instinctively want intervention. We want someone with the power to stop it to actually step in and act. The desire for justice isn't just a nice ideal, it's built into how we're made as human beings.

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Today we're looking at someone who felt that same frustration, except they were dealing with it in their own community, possibly in their own life. The psalmist is watching wicked people oppress the vulnerable and wondering where God is in all of it. But by the end of this prayer, they arrive at some surprising conclusions about how God responds to oppression.

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As we read, pay attention to how the psalmist describes God's response to vulnerable people. Notice what verbs are used, what exactly does God do, according to this prayer? Also watch for how the psalmist views powerful oppressors versus how they view God's ultimate authority.

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Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 10 and start with silent reading. We'll read verses 12-18, which is where the psalm shifts from complaint to confidence.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This is a psalm, not a narrative, so reading might feel different. Watch for students who finish early and seem ready to discuss. Let the weight of the psalm's honesty about oppression and its confident appeal to God's justice sink in.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What specific actions does the psalmist ask God to take against oppressors?
  - How does the psalmist describe God's relationship with afflicted people?
  - What's the ultimate goal of God's intervention, according to verse 18?
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- What do you notice about the confidence level between the beginning and end of this section?
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### Psalm 10:12-18 (NIV)

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*12 Arise, Lord! Lift up your hand, O God. Do not forget the helpless. 13 Why does the wicked person revile God? Why does he say to himself, "He won't call me to account"? 14 But you, God, see the trouble of the afflicted; you consider their grief and take it in hand. The victims commit themselves to you; you are the helper of the fatherless. 15 Break the arm of the wicked person; call the evildoer to account for his wickedness that would not otherwise be found out.*

*16 The Lord is King for ever and ever; the nations will perish from his land. 17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, 18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who are comfortable reading with expression. This is prayer language, not just information, it should sound like someone talking to God about real pain and real hope.

**Reader 1:** Verses 12-13 (Appeal and frustration) **Reader 2:** Verses 14-15 (God's awareness and action)

**Reader 3:** Verses 16-18 (Confidence and ultimate goal)

Listen for the emotional tone, this isn't academic theology but a real person talking to God about injustice they're witnessing or experiencing.

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#### 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 by asking "What surprised you most about how this person talks to God?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, not questions you think you're supposed to ask, but things you're actually curious about. Good questions might start with "Why does...?" "How can...?" "What does it mean when...?" or "If this is true, then why...?" You have three minutes. Go.

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

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**Remember:** Let their questions drive the discussion. You're facilitating their discovery, not delivering a lecture. Guide them deeper rather than giving quick answers.

**Collecting Questions:** Write their questions on the board. Look for themes around God's response to injustice, the tension between divine promises and current reality, and how divine defense actually works.

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

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- "What pattern do you notice in verses 17-18 about God's response to afflicted people?"
  - "The psalmist says God 'encourages' the afflicted, how might that work practically?"
  - "What do you think it means that God will make sure 'mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror'?"
  - "How do you reconcile this confident statement with the reality that powerful people still harm vulnerable people today?"
  - "When have you seen examples of someone defending 'the fatherless and oppressed', either divinely or through human agents?"
  - "If God 'hears the desire of the afflicted,' what would that mean for current situations of injustice you know about?"
  - "What would be different if the psalmist had written 'so that earthly mortals might someday stop' instead of 'will never again strike terror'?"
  - "How do you decide when to pray about injustice versus when to act on it yourself?"
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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? The psalmist moves from asking God to act to declaring confidence that God does act. But it's not just any action, it's specifically about God hearing, encouraging, listening, and defending. This isn't about God fixing all problems instantly, but about God's character being especially attentive to vulnerable people and ultimately working to end the terror that powerful people spread. The pattern suggests that divine defense includes both emotional support and practical intervention, often working through people who choose to care about injustice.

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

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Let's get real about your lives and your world. Where do you see this same pattern of powerful people spreading terror among those who can't protect themselves? Think about school dynamics, social media, family situations, community issues, or global news. Where do you witness the kind of oppression that would make you want to pray this psalm?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- School bullying where administrators don't intervene or where the bully has social power
  - Family situations where someone uses their authority to harm or control others
  - Workplace or social situations where people are excluded, harassed, or intimidated by those with more power
  - Online harassment campaigns against people who speak up about injustice
  - Systemic discrimination in institutions where vulnerable populations are regularly mistreated
  - Global situations where governments or powerful groups oppress civilians, refugees, or minorities
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to fix or explain everything. Some situations require different responses. Help them think through discernment, when to act, when to seek help, when to trust God's ultimate justice, rather than giving blanket advice.

#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone be God's agent of defense for vulnerable people?"
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- "What would help you discern when you should act versus when you should pray and trust God's ultimate justice?"
- "How do you balance believing God defends the oppressed with acknowledging that oppression still happens?"
- "What's the difference between genuine defense of the vulnerable and just wanting to be the hero?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you from today: God's heart is specifically tuned to hear the cries of those who suffer under someone else's power. This psalm isn't promising that bad things won't happen, but it's declaring that God sees, listens, encourages, and actively works to end the terror that powerful people spread. Sometimes that work happens through people like you who choose to stand up for others, and sometimes it's beyond what any human can do.

This week, pay attention to moments when you witness power being used to help versus harm. Notice when you have the opportunity to be part of God's defense for someone who needs it. Also notice your own prayers when you're frustrated by injustice, you're in good company with the psalmists who brought their real feelings about unfairness directly to God.

You asked really thoughtful questions today about complicated issues that adults still wrestle with. Keep asking those questions, keep caring about justice, and keep bringing your frustration about injustice to God. That's exactly the kind of faith this psalm models, honest enough to acknowledge the problem, confident enough to trust God's ultimate character.

## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God sees when powerful people hurt others and works to protect those who can't protect themselves, often through people who choose to care.

## If Kids Ask "Why doesn't God stop all the mean people?"

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Say: "That's exactly what the person who wrote this psalm was wondering. God does work to stop mean people, sometimes by changing their hearts, sometimes by sending helpers, and sometimes in ways we can't see yet. But God definitely cares and is working on it."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever seen someone being mean to a person who couldn't fight back. Maybe it was a bigger kid picking on a smaller kid, or someone making fun of a kid who was different, or someone using their strength or popularity to hurt someone else. Keep your hands up if that made you feel angry or sad or frustrated.

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Now here's a harder question. Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where you wanted to help someone who was being hurt, but you felt scared or didn't know what to do. Maybe you worried that if you said something, the mean person would start picking on you too. Or maybe the mean person was bigger than you, or had more friends, or was someone that other people listened to more than they listen to kids.

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Those feelings make perfect sense. It's natural to want to help people who are being hurt, but it's also normal to feel scared when the person doing the hurting has more power than you do. Part of you wants to be brave and help, but another part thinks about what might happen to you if you try. That's a hard spot to be in.

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This reminds me of stories in movies like Finding Nemo, where Marlin wants to protect Nemo but feels too small and scared to stand up to the big scary fish. Or in Moana, where she wants to help her island but feels like just one girl against huge, powerful forces. The characters have to figure out how to be brave when they feel outmatched.

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The tricky part is figuring out what to do when you see someone being hurt by someone more powerful. Do you try to help directly? Do you get a grown-up? Do you just hope someone else will handle it? How do you know the right thing to do when you feel small and the situation feels big?

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Today we're going to hear about someone who felt exactly this way. They were watching powerful people hurt others who couldn't defend themselves, and they felt frustrated and powerless. But they discovered something amazing about how God responds when vulnerable people are being hurt. Let's find out what they learned about God's protection.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will likely relate to feeling powerless against bullies or unfair situations. Acknowledge their experiences briefly with phrases like "That's exactly the feeling" but keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there was a person who loved God very much, but they were watching something that made them really upset. All around them, they saw mean people using their power to hurt others who couldn't fight back. These weren't fair fights between equals, these were situations where someone big and strong and popular was picking on people who were small or different or alone.

The person who loved God watched this happening and felt angry and confused. They knew God was good and powerful, but they wondered, "Where is God when these terrible things are happening? Why doesn't God stop these mean people from hurting others? It seems like the bullies are winning and God isn't doing anything about it."

Have you ever felt that way? When you see someone being mean and getting away with it, and you wonder where the grown-ups are, or where God is? It's a hard feeling because you want someone powerful and good to step in and make things right.

Imagine watching this day after day, seeing kids get pushed around, seeing people get left out on purpose, seeing someone use their strength or popularity to make others feel scared and small. It would make you feel frustrated and helpless, especially if no grown-ups seemed to be stopping it.

So this person decided to pray. But their prayer wasn't polite and quiet, it was honest and upset. They basically said to God, "This isn't fair! These mean people are hurting others and they think you don't see it. They think they can get away with anything because they're powerful and you won't stop them!"

The person was so frustrated that they begged God to act. "Please, God, don't let these bullies keep getting away with it! Don't forget about the people who can't protect themselves! Do something about these mean people who think they're so important!"

But then, as they prayed, something began to change in their heart. Instead of just focusing on how upset they were, they started remembering what God is really like. They started thinking about God's character and God's promises.

It was like when you're really angry about something unfair, and then your mom or dad reminds you that they're working on fixing it, and suddenly you remember that you're not alone in caring about the problem. Someone bigger and stronger than you is also upset about the unfairness.

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As they prayed, they realized that God does see everything that's happening. God watches when powerful people hurt those who can't defend themselves. God notices every act of meanness, every time someone uses their strength to scare others, every moment when vulnerable people cry out for help.

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And then they remembered something amazing about how God responds to vulnerable people. Let me read you exactly what they discovered:

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**Psalm 10:17-18 (NIV)**

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*17 You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, 18 defending the fatherless and the oppressed, so that mere earthly mortals will never again strike terror.*

Did you catch that? God hears when people who are being hurt cry out for help. God doesn't ignore their feelings or tell them to just deal with it. God actually listens to their hearts and encourages them when they feel scared or alone. God pays special attention to people who don't have anyone else to protect them.

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But God doesn't just listen, God defends. That means God actively works to protect vulnerable people from those who want to hurt them. God stands up for kids who don't have someone standing up for them.

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And here's the really important part: God's goal is that powerful people will never again be able to use their power to scare others. God wants to end the terror that bullies spread. God doesn't want anyone to have to live in fear of someone who's bigger or stronger or more popular.

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Now, this doesn't mean God fixes everything instantly. Mean people still do mean things, and unfair situations still happen. But it does mean that God is actively working to protect vulnerable people and to stop bullies from spreading fear.

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Sometimes God works by changing the bully's heart. Sometimes God works by sending helpers, teachers, parents, friends, or other kids who choose to stand up for others. Sometimes God works by

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giving the hurt person courage or helping them find their voice or their strength.

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The person who prayed this prayer realized that God's power is bigger than any human power. Even the scariest, most popular, most influential bully is just a "mere earthly mortal", just a regular person whose power is tiny compared to God's power.

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When we see someone being hurt by someone more powerful, we can pray for God's protection and we can also ask God if there's a way we can be part of the help. Sometimes God uses other people, including kids like you, to be the defenders and encouragers that vulnerable people need.

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God's heart is especially tender toward people who are being hurt by those who are supposed to be stronger. When you see unfairness, when you witness bullying, when you feel upset about someone being mean, your feelings match God's feelings. You care about justice because God cares about justice.

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And just like this person who prayed discovered, God is actively working to protect the vulnerable and to make sure that powerful people can't keep spreading fear and hurt. Sometimes we can see God's work happening, and sometimes we have to trust that God is working even when we can't see it yet.

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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 Scared Feeling

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Imagine you're watching someone your age get picked on by a group of older kids at the playground. The older kids are laughing and pushing and saying mean things, and the younger kid looks scared and alone. You want to help, but you're also worried about what the older kids might do to you if you get involved. What would you be feeling inside your heart?

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**Listen For:** "Scared," "Mad," "Worried", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. Your heart wants to help but your brain is trying to keep you safe."

#### Question 2: The Helper Question

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In our story, the person realized that God hears when vulnerable people cry for help and God defends them. Sometimes God sends helpers to do the protecting. If you were in that playground situation, what

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are some ways you could be part of God's help without putting yourself in danger?

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**If They Say:** "Get a grown-up" or "Tell them to stop", respond "Those are both ways of being God's helper. What do you think gives you courage to act?"

### Question 3: The God Sees Everything

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The psalm says God sees the trouble of people who are being hurt and God considers their grief, God pays attention to how they feel. How do you think it would feel to know that God sees exactly what's happening to you when someone is being mean, and that God cares about your feelings?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly why the person who prayed felt hopeful instead of helpless. God's attention makes a difference."

### Question 4: The Power Truth

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The psalm calls even the scariest bullies "mere earthly mortals", just regular people whose power is actually pretty small compared to God's power. Think about someone who seems really powerful and intimidating. How might it change your feelings about them to remember that they're just a "mere earthly mortal" and God is much more powerful?

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**If They Say:** "It would make them seem less scary", respond "Exactly! Remembering who has real power can help us feel less afraid and more hopeful."

What I'm hearing from you is that God really does care when people get hurt by those who are more powerful. God listens, encourages, and works to protect vulnerable people. And sometimes God uses people like us to be part of that protection. Now let's do an activity that shows how God's protection works.

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## 4. Activity: The Circle of Protection (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 physically demonstrates how God's protection often works through people who choose to stand with the vulnerable. Success looks like kids experiencing the difference between being isolated and being surrounded by defenders, and discovering that many small defenders together can stand against intimidating threats.

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

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We're going to play something called "The Circle of Protection." I need one volunteer to be someone who needs protection, maybe they're smaller, or new, or different in some way that makes them a target. Everyone else will start as bystanders scattered around the room, just watching what happens.

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I'm going to be the intimidating powerful person, someone bigger, louder, more popular, who wants to scare and control others. My job is to try to get close to the person who needs protection and make them feel small and afraid. Bystanders, your job is to decide what to do. You can stay where you are and just watch, or you can choose to become defenders.

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Here's the twist: if you choose to become a defender, you link arms with the person who needs protection or with other defenders to form a protective circle. The more people who choose to help, the stronger the protection becomes. But you have to decide for yourself whether to stay a bystander or become a defender.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like our psalm situation, one vulnerable person facing someone powerful, and God working through people who choose to care. Let's see what happens when people decide to be God's agents of protection.

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

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Start with the vulnerable person standing alone in the center while you approach them with intimidating but not actually mean behavior, just big presence and loud voice. Let the other kids see the imbalance of power for 30 seconds. Watch their faces and body language.

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As kids start to feel uncomfortable watching, some will naturally want to help. When the first brave kid links arms with the vulnerable person, celebrate it: "Look! Someone chose to be a defender!" Continue your intimidating approach but show that the protection is starting to work.

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Coach the remaining bystanders without giving away the answer: "I notice some people are still watching. I wonder what would happen if more people decided to become defenders? I'm curious if this

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one circle is strong enough or if it needs more people?"

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When more kids join the protective circle, point out the change: "Wow! Look how strong this protection is becoming! The more defenders there are, the safer everyone feels and the less power the intimidating person has!" Act impressed and even a little worried about facing so many defenders.

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Once most kids have joined the circle, try to get through but act frustrated and defeated: "This isn't working anymore! There are too many of you protecting each other! I can't scare anyone when you all stand together like this!" Then step back and smile.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to step in and defend rather than just watch, this is the physical representation of God working through people who care about vulnerable others.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt to be protected versus being alone? How did it feel to be a defender versus just watching? This is exactly how God's protection often works, through people who choose to stand with those who need help. When we link arms with vulnerable people, we become part of how God defends them and ends the terror that powerful people try to spread.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God pays special attention when powerful people hurt those who can't protect themselves. God hears their cries, encourages their hearts, and works to defend them so that bullies can't keep spreading fear and terror.

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This doesn't mean God fixes everything instantly or that mean people never do mean things. But it does mean God is actively working to protect vulnerable people, often through people like you who choose to care and help instead of just watching.

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Remember that even the scariest, most powerful person is just a "mere earthly mortal", their power is small compared to God's power, and God will ultimately make sure they can't keep hurting others.

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

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This week, pay attention to moments when you see someone being treated unfairly by someone more powerful. Ask God to help you know when and how to be part of God's protection for that person.

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Sometimes it might be including someone who's been left out, sometimes telling a trusted grown-up, sometimes just being kind to someone who's been hurt.

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

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*Dear God, thank you that you see when people are being hurt and that you care about protecting them. Help us to be your helpers when we see someone who needs defending. Give us courage to stand up for others and wisdom to know how to help safely. Help us remember that your power is bigger than any bully's power. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids know that God listens when they're scared and helps protect them from people who are being mean.

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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 God's protection to a parent who hears their child crying and comes to help, then ask "How do you think God feels when someone is being mean to you?"

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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 protection or care. Suggestions: "God is So Good," "Jesus Loves Me," or "My God is So Big." Use movements: stretch arms wide during "so big," point upward during "God," hug yourself during "loves me," march in place during strong verses.

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Great singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because I have an important story to tell you about how God takes care of people who need help. Come sit on the carpet facing me.

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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.

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when talking about scared people, sound strong and confident when talking about God's protection.

---

Today we're going to meet someone who talked to God about a big problem. They saw some very mean people being mean to others.

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, look worried]*

---

The mean people were bigger and stronger, and they were using their size to scare smaller people. It was like if big kids on the playground were pushing little kids around and taking their toys and making them cry.

---

*[Make a sad face, speak gently]*

---

The person who saw this happening felt very sad and upset. They thought, "This isn't fair! Where are the grown-ups? Why isn't someone helping these little ones who are being hurt?"

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look up toward heaven]*

---

So they decided to pray to God about it. They said, "God, please help! These mean people are scaring others, and the scared people don't have anyone to protect them!"

---

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

---

And you know what? God heard that prayer! God always listens when people are scared or hurt. God's ears are always open to hear when someone cries for help.

---

*[Move to side, speak excitedly]*

---

As they prayed, the person remembered something wonderful about God. They remembered that God is the best protector ever!

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**Psalm 10:17 (NIV)**

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*You, Lord, hear the desire of the afflicted; you encourage them, and you listen to their cry, defending the fatherless and the oppressed.*

---

*[Pause and look around at each child with a big smile]*

---

Do you know what that means? It means God listens when people are scared! God hears when someone is crying because someone is being mean to them!

---

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

---

But God doesn't just listen. God helps! God protects people who don't have anyone else to protect them. God stands up for kids who need someone big and strong on their side.

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, speaking confidently]*

---

God is bigger and stronger than any mean person. God is more powerful than any bully. Even the scariest, meanest person is not as strong as God!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

The person who prayed learned that God wants to stop mean people from scaring others. God doesn't want anyone to have to be afraid of bullies!

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

Sometimes God protects people by sending helpers, like teachers, or parents, or friends who choose to be kind. Sometimes God gives scared people courage to use their voice or to find help.

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God's heart feels sad when someone is being mean to others. God loves to help and protect people who are being hurt!

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in your life, you might see someone being mean at school or on the playground. When that happens, you can remember that God sees it too, and God cares about making it better.

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When you're scared of someone who's being mean, you can pray to God for help. When you see someone else being scared, you can pray for them too, and you can ask God how to help them feel safe.

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

Remember, God is always listening for the cries of people who need help, and God is always ready to be their protector and helper!

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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.

---

Stand up and find a partner! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, and you can take turns sharing your ideas. You'll have about one minute to talk together.

---

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

---

### **Discussion Questions**

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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 scared people felt when they knew God was listening?

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2. When have you seen someone help protect another person?

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3. What would you do if you saw someone bigger being mean to someone smaller?

---

4. How does it feel to know God hears you when you're scared?

---

5. What makes someone a good helper for scared people?

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6. Who are some grown-ups who help protect kids?

---

7. How do you think God feels when people are being mean?

---

8. What could you do at school if someone was being left out?

---

9. How could you be God's helper for someone who's sad?

---

10. What do you do when you feel scared?

---

11. Why is God stronger than mean people?

---

12. How can you pray for someone who's being hurt?

---

13. What makes you feel safe and protected?

---

14. Who do you talk to when someone is being mean?

---

15. How can friends help each other feel safe?

---

16. What did you learn about God today?

---

17. How does God show love to scared people?

---

18. What would you tell a friend who was scared of a bully?

---

19. When do you remember that God is protecting you?

---

20. How can you be kind to someone who feels afraid?

---

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines for our closing song. Who wants to share one thing they talked about with their 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 God's strength or protection. Suggestions: "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," "God is Bigger than the Boogie Man," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Include movements: stretch arms wide for "whole world," flex muscles for "stronger," point to classmates for "children."

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for prayer time. Sit criss-cross in your rows, close your eyes, and fold your hands. Let's 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 that you listen when we're scared or sad...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that you are stronger than any mean person and that you want to protect us when we need help...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us be kind helpers for other kids who feel scared, and help us know that we can always pray to you when we need protection...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you that you love us and care about keeping us safe. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about feeling safe or helping others. Examples: "Thank you God for protecting me" or "Help me be kind to scared kids."

Remember, God always listens when you need help, and God is always stronger than anyone who tries to scare you. Have a wonderful week, and look for ways to be God's helper for others!

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