

# Justice and Compassion

*Volume 15*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

Volumes in This Series

### **Forgiveness and Letting Go**

Volumes 1 to 4

### **Loving Difficult People**

Volumes 5 to 8

### **Living in Community**

Volumes 9 to 12

### **Justice and Compassion**

Volumes 13 to 16

### **Managing Anger and Conflict**

Volumes 17 to 20

### **Character and Integrity**

Volumes 21 to 24

*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Justice and Compassion

*Volume 15*

Published by

**1611 Press**

[www.1611press.com](http://www.1611press.com)

*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons: Justice and Compassion*

Copyright 2026 by 1611 Press

All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed, or transmitted in any form or by any means without the prior written permission of the publisher, except for brief quotations in critical reviews and certain noncommercial uses permitted by copyright law.

Scripture quotations are from the Holy Bible, New International Version, NIV.

Copyright 1973, 1978, 1984, 2011 by Biblica, Inc.

Used by permission of Zondervan. All rights reserved worldwide.

[www.zondervan.com](http://www.zondervan.com)

First Edition: 2026

## **About This Series**

---

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

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

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

## **A Note on Scripture Sources**

---

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

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

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

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

## **How to Use This Book**

---

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

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

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

### **For Individual Study**

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

### **For Families**

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

\* \* \*

*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*

# Love the Foreigner

---

*Divine Love for Outsiders, How does memory of being vulnerable "foreigners" ourselves reshape our treatment of current foreigners?*

---

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22**

---

## 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

---

**Deuteronomy 10:12-22 (NIV)**

---

*12 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?*

*14 To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. 15 Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. 16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. 17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.*

*18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. 19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. 20 Fear the Lord your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. 21 He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for*

*you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. 22 Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.*

## Context

---

These words come during Moses' farewell speeches to Israel before they enter the Promised Land. After receiving the stone tablets a second time following the golden calf incident, Moses addresses a pivotal question: what does faithful covenant relationship with God actually look like? This passage is part of Moses' answer, outlining the character of God and the character of faithful response.

---

The immediate context follows Moses' account of interceding for Israel after their idolatry and God's renewal of the covenant. Moses has just reminded them that they broke God's covenant, yet God graciously provided new stone tablets. Now he explains what obedience to this renewed covenant requires, and surprisingly, love for foreigners appears as a central demand, grounded in both divine character and Israel's own historical experience.

---

## The Big Idea

---

**God's own love for foreigners becomes the foundation for Israel's commanded love for foreigners, with their memory of being vulnerable outsiders providing the experiential bridge to understanding.**

---

This isn't merely a nice sentiment about being welcoming. Moses presents loving foreigners as fundamental covenant obedience, rooted in imitating God's character and remembering their own experience of vulnerability. The dual grounding, divine example and historical memory, suggests that automatic suspicion or mistreatment of outsiders contradicts both who God is and who Israel has been.

---

## Theological Core

---

- **Divine Love for Outsiders.** God actively "loves the foreigner," providing practical care through food and clothing. This isn't passive tolerance but engaged, protective love for those without natural community support.
-

- **Historical Memory as Motivation.** Israel's experience as foreigners in Egypt provides the emotional and experiential foundation for understanding what foreigners need and feel. Memory becomes moral obligation.
- **Practical Provision.** Love for foreigners isn't merely attitudinal but involves concrete actions, food, clothing, and defending their cause. The command has visible, material dimensions.
- **Foreigner Category.** The text recognizes a distinct category of people who are ethnically or nationally different, residing without native community ties. Their vulnerability stems from their outsider status, requiring intentional protection and care.

---

## Age Group Overview

---

### What Each Age Group Learns

---

#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Divine character (loving foreigners) provides the theological foundation for treating ethnic and national outsiders with love rather than suspicion
- Historical memory of vulnerability can reshape attitudes toward current outsiders, but communities without such shared memory must rely on divine character alone
- Love for foreigners requires practical action (food, clothing, defending their cause) not just good intentions or tolerance
- Faithful covenant relationship with God includes how we treat those who are ethnically or nationally different from us

---

#### Grades 4, 6

- God actively loves people who are different from us and provides for their needs
  - We should choose to include and help people who seem different, especially when they're new or need support
-

- Remembering times when we felt like outsiders helps us understand how to treat others who feel left out
  - Being kind to people who are different is part of following God, even when it feels uncomfortable at first
- 

### Grades 1, 3

---

- God loves all people, even those who look different or come from different places
  - God wants us to be kind and helpful to people who are different from us
  - We can share food, clothes, and friendship with people who need help
- 

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

---

- **Oversimplifying Cultural Differences.** Don't reduce the complexity of ethnic and national differences to mere preference or cosmetic variation. The text acknowledges real distinctiveness while commanding love across those differences.
  - **Ignoring Historical Context.** Israel's specific experience as foreigners in Egypt provides crucial grounding for the command. Don't skip the importance of historical memory, but also don't assume all communities have similar foundational experiences.
  - **Making it Only Attitudinal.** The command includes concrete actions like providing food and clothing. Love for foreigners must have practical dimensions, not just warm feelings or general acceptance.
  - **Avoiding Contemporary Application.** While being sensitive to political complexity, don't retreat from exploring how this passage might challenge contemporary attitudes toward immigrants, refugees, or ethnic minorities. The text demands concrete engagement with real outsiders.
- 

## Handling Hard Questions

---

## **"What about people who might be dangerous or have bad intentions?"**

---

This is a legitimate concern that the text doesn't directly address. The command to love foreigners doesn't eliminate prudent discernment or appropriate boundaries. However, it does challenge us to examine whether our caution is based on real evidence or automatic suspicion based on ethnicity or nationality. The text suggests that God's character and our own experience of vulnerability should be our starting point, with specific safety concerns addressed case by case rather than through blanket suspicion.

---

## **"What if we don't have any memory of being foreigners or outsiders ourselves?"**

---

Not every community has Israel's specific experience of being foreigners in Egypt. However, most people have some experience of feeling like an outsider, being new at school, visiting an unfamiliar place, or being different in some way. More importantly, the text provides divine character as the primary foundation: God loves foreigners, therefore we should love foreigners. Historical memory supports this command but doesn't replace the theological foundation.

---

## **"Doesn't this conflict with loving your own people or taking care of your own community first?"**

---

The text doesn't suggest abandoning care for your own community, but it does challenge the idea that ethnic or national difference automatically determines the scope of moral obligation. The passage places love for foreigners within the broader context of fearing God and following divine commands. This suggests that loving outsiders is part of faithful community life, not a threat to it. The challenge is expanding our understanding of who deserves our care and protection.

---

## **The One Thing to Remember**

---

**God's love for foreigners, combined with our own memories of vulnerability, should reshape how we treat those who are ethnically or nationally different from us, moving from automatic suspicion to active love.**

---

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

---

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

## Your Main Job Today

---

Guide students to wrestle with how divine character and historical memory challenge automatic responses to people who are ethnically or nationally different. Help them discover that loving foreigners isn't optional kindness but fundamental covenant obedience.

---

## The Tension to Frame

---

How does memory of being vulnerable "foreigners" ourselves reshape our treatment of current foreigners, and what happens when we have no such memory to draw upon?

---

## Discussion Facilitation Tips

---

- Acknowledge that students may have different family experiences with immigration, displacement, or cultural difference
  - Honor the complexity of contemporary immigration and refugee issues without getting lost in political debates
  - Let students explore the tension between practical concerns and theological commands rather than rushing to simple answers
- 

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

---

Imagine you're starting at a new school in the middle of the semester. You don't know anyone, you're not sure where things are, you don't understand the unwritten social rules, and you can feel people staring at you because you're obviously new. Maybe you dress differently, speak with an accent, or just carry yourself in a way that signals "outsider." How do you want people to treat you?

---

Now flip the scenario. A new student shows up at your school. They dress differently, maybe speak with an accent, and they're clearly trying to figure out how things work. Your first instinct might be to be nice, but it might also be to be cautious. What if they don't fit in? What if they're weird? What if helping them somehow makes you look weird by association?

---

This tension between our own desire to be welcomed when we're outsiders and our hesitation to welcome others when we're insiders is ancient. Today we're looking at a passage where Moses addresses this exact human tendency, but the stakes are much higher than high school social dynamics.

---

As we read, notice how Moses grounds his command to love foreigners. He doesn't just say "be nice to different people." He gives two specific reasons for why Israel must love foreigners. See if you can identify both.

Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 10:12-22 and read silently. Pay attention to how the command to love foreigners fits into the larger context of what God requires.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage has some dense theological language that might challenge younger students. Help with pronunciation but let them wrestle with meaning. Watch for students who finish early and encourage them to reread verses 18-19 specifically.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What does Moses say God does for foreigners, and how does God feel about them?
- What specific reasons does Moses give for why Israel should love foreigners?
- What does "love" for foreigners actually look like in practical terms?
- How does this command fit with the other things Moses says God requires?

### Deuteronomy 10:12-22 (NIV)

*12 And now, Israel, what does the Lord your God ask of you but to fear the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, to love him, to serve the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, 13 and to observe the Lord's commands and decrees that I am giving you today for your own good?*

*14 To the Lord your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it. 15 Yet the Lord set his affection on your ancestors and loved them, and he chose you, their descendants, above all the nations, as it is today. 16 Circumcise your hearts, therefore, and do not be stiff-necked any longer. 17 For the Lord your God is God of gods and Lord of lords, the great God, mighty and awesome, who shows no partiality and accepts no bribes.*

*18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing. 19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt. 20 Fear the Lord your God and serve him. Hold fast to him and take your oaths in his name. 21 He is the one you praise; he is your God, who performed for you those great and awesome wonders you saw with your own eyes. 22 Your ancestors who went down into Egypt were seventy in all, and now the Lord your God has made you as numerous as the stars in the sky.*

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

---

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

---

**Selecting Readers:** This passage has some challenging Hebrew concepts. Choose confident readers for the longer sections. Let students know they can ask for help with pronunciation.

**Reader 1:** Verses 12-14 (God's requirements and cosmic authority) **Reader 2:** Verses 15-17 (God's choice of Israel and impartial character) **Reader 3:** Verses 18-22 (God's love for outsiders and Israel's response)

---

Listen for the emotional tone as we read this aloud. This isn't just law, it's Moses' passionate farewell speech to people he loves, addressing something that could make or break their faithfulness to God.

---

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

---

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you?" or "What seems difficult to live out?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4 and come up with one or two questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or find challenging. Good questions might start with "Why does Moses...?" or "How would you...?" or "What does it mean when...?" You have three minutes. Ask about what you're actually wondering, not what you think you should ask.

---

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

---

**Remember:** Students lead with their questions. Write their questions on the board, look for themes, and use the probing questions below to go deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture.

**Collecting Questions:** Let me hear your questions and write them on the board. Start with questions that multiple groups are curious about.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What specific things does Moses say God does for foreigners? What does that tell us about God's attitude toward outsiders?"
- "Moses gives two reasons why Israel should love foreigners, one about God's character and one about Israel's history. Which reason do you think would be more compelling, and why?"
- "What's the difference between tolerance and the kind of love Moses is describing here?"
- "Why do you think Moses brings up that 'you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt'? How might that memory change how you treat current outsiders?"
- "If someone has never been an outsider or foreigner themselves, what should motivate them to love foreigners?"
- "Moses mentions specific actions: giving food and clothing, defending their cause. Why isn't it enough to just have good feelings about foreigners?"
- "What would have happened to Israel's relationships with surrounding nations if they had actually lived this out?"
- "How does loving foreigners connect to 'fearing God' and the other requirements Moses lists?"

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what Moses is doing here? He's not just giving a random nice suggestion about being welcoming. He's grounding the command to love foreigners in two unshakeable foundations: God's own character and Israel's own experience. God loves foreigners, therefore you must love foreigners. You were foreigners, therefore you know what foreigners need. It's brilliant, and it suggests that how we treat ethnic and national outsiders is actually a test of our faithfulness to God.

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

Let's get real about your lives and our world. Where do you see the same tension Moses is addressing, between natural suspicion of people who are different and the command to love them? Think about school, social media, your community, and the broader conversations happening in our country about immigration and refugees.

---

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

---

- How students treat international students or kids from different ethnic backgrounds at school
  - Family conversations about immigration policy or refugee resettlement
  - Social media reactions to news about immigrants or foreign conflicts
  - Church decisions about supporting refugee families or ESL programs
  - Community responses to new ethnic restaurants, cultural centers, or religious buildings
  - Personal decisions about building friendships across ethnic or cultural lines
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations involve legitimate safety concerns, others reveal unconscious bias. Help them think through discernment rather than providing blanket answers. Honor political complexity without avoiding moral challenge.

### **Discussion Prompts**

---

- "When have you seen someone actually live out this kind of love for people who were ethnically or nationally different?"
  - "What would help you move from automatic caution to intentional love when encountering people who seem foreign to you?"
  - "How do you discern between legitimate safety concerns and prejudice based on ethnicity or nationality?"
  - "What's the difference between loving foreigners as Moses describes it and just being politically correct or tolerant?"
- 

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

---

Here's what I want you to take with you: loving people who are ethnically or nationally different isn't optional kindness for followers of God, it's fundamental obedience. Moses grounds this command in who God is and what we've experienced. When we automatically suspect or exclude people based on their foreignness, we contradict both divine character and our own need for welcome when we're the outsiders.

---

This week, pay attention to your first reactions when you encounter someone who seems foreign to you, different accent, different way of dressing, different cultural background. Notice whether your instinct is curiosity and openness or caution and distance. Ask yourself: what would change if you started with the assumption that God loves this person and wants you to love them too?

---

Your questions today were excellent. Keep wrestling with how ancient commands apply to contemporary complexity. This passage doesn't solve every immigration debate, but it does challenge us to examine our hearts and our starting assumptions. I'm confident you can figure out what faithful love looks like in your specific contexts.

---

## Grades 4, 6

---

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

### Your Main Job Today

---

Help kids understand that God actively loves people who are different from us and wants us to love them too, especially when they need help or feel left out.

---

### If Kids Ask "What if the different person is mean or dangerous?"

---

Say: "God wants us to be wise and safe, but also to be kind. We can be careful and loving at the same time. The important thing is not to assume someone is bad just because they're different."

---

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

---

Raise your hand if you've ever been the new kid, new school, new team, new neighborhood, new church. Keep your hand up if you remember feeling nervous or lonely because you didn't know anyone and weren't sure how things worked. Now look around at all these hands. Most of us know what it feels

---

like to be the outsider.

---

Now here's a harder question. Have you ever been in a group where someone new showed up, and part of you wanted to be friendly, but another part of you felt weird about it? Maybe they dressed differently, or talked differently, or just seemed really different from your friends. It's like part of your brain says "be nice" but another part says "be careful, they might be weird."

---

Those feelings make total sense. Our brains are designed to notice differences and sometimes be cautious about them. There's nothing wrong with you if you've felt that way. The tricky part is that while you're being cautious about someone else because they seem different, they're probably feeling scared and lonely because they don't fit in yet.

---

This reminds me of movies like *Encanto*, where Mirabel feels like an outsider in her own family, or *Coco*, where Miguel has to navigate between his family's traditions and his own dreams. Sometimes being different feels lonely, even when you're not actually in danger.

---

The tricky part is figuring out how to be both wise and welcoming. How do you stay safe but also be the kind of person who helps others feel included? How do you move past that first "they're different" reaction to actually caring about someone who might need a friend?

---

Today we're going to hear about a time when God told his people exactly how to handle this situation. God gave them a rule about how to treat people who were different from them, people who came from other countries, spoke other languages, and had other customs. Let's find out what God said and why.

---

**What to Expect:** Kids may share specific experiences of feeling left out or being unsure about new people.

Acknowledge their stories briefly with "That sounds hard" or "I bet that was confusing," then keep momentum moving toward the biblical story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

---

Picture the nation of Israel, God's chosen people, standing at the edge of the Promised Land. They've been wandering in the desert for forty years, and now they're finally about to enter the land God promised them. Moses, their leader, is old now, this is going to be his last speech to them before they go in without him.

---

Moses knows that when they get into this new land, they're going to meet lots of different people. Some will be enemies who worship false gods and do terrible things. But others will be foreigners, people

---

from other countries who aren't enemies, just different. They'll have different languages, different clothes, different ways of doing things.

---

Moses is worried. He knows that when people meet strangers, they often get suspicious. "What do these people want? Are they going to cause trouble? Should we trust them?" It's natural to feel that way, but Moses knows it can lead to being mean to people who don't deserve it.

---

Imagine being in a huge crowd, thousands and thousands of people, all listening to this old man who has led you out of slavery and through the desert. He's the one who talks to God face to face. When Moses speaks, everyone gets quiet because they know this might be the last time they hear from him.

---

Moses starts by reminding them what God requires: "Love God with all your heart and soul. Obey his commands. Serve him." Pretty straightforward. But then Moses says something that might have surprised them.

---

First, Moses tells them something amazing about God's character. He says God is the most powerful being in the universe, he owns everything, he's mighty and awesome. But here's the incredible part: this all-powerful God pays special attention to people who have no one else to help them.

---

#### **Deuteronomy 10:18 (NIV)**

---

*18 He defends the cause of the fatherless and the widow, and loves the foreigner residing among you, giving them food and clothing.*

---

Did you hear that? God doesn't just tolerate foreigners or put up with them. God loves them. Not only that, but God takes care of them, gives them food when they're hungry, clothes when they're cold, and defends them when people treat them unfairly. This powerful God has a soft spot for outsiders.

---

But Moses doesn't stop there. He's about to give them a command that connects directly to their own experience. Moses reminds them of their own story, how they used to be the foreigners, the outsiders, the ones who needed help.

---

#### **Deuteronomy 10:19 (NIV)**

---

*19 And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*

---

Moses is basically saying, "Remember when you were the different ones? Remember when you were living in Egypt, speaking a different language, following different customs? Remember how it felt to be the outsiders? Well, now you need to love foreigners the way you would have wanted to be loved."

---

This wasn't just about having nice feelings. Moses made it clear that loving foreigners meant actually helping them, giving them food when they were hungry, clothes when they needed them, and standing up for them when others treated them badly. It meant sharing what they had and making room for people who were different.

---

The Israelites must have looked at each other and thought, "Wow. God really means this." It wasn't a suggestion or a nice idea. It was a command, right alongside loving God and obeying his other laws. Loving foreigners was part of being faithful to God.

---

Moses was giving them two powerful reasons: first, because God loves foreigners, and second, because they knew what it felt like to be foreigners themselves. He was saying, "Don't forget what it was like when you were the ones who needed help. Don't become the kind of people who make outsiders feel unwelcome."

---

And you know what's amazing? When Israel actually did this, when they welcomed foreigners and treated them well, something beautiful happened. Some of those foreigners decided they wanted to worship Israel's God too. People like Ruth, who came from a foreign country but became part of God's people and even became King David's great-grandmother.

---

But when Israel forgot this command and started treating foreigners badly, it always led to problems. God would get angry with them, not because he didn't love Israel, but because he loves everyone, including the foreigners that Israel was supposed to love too.

---

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who are different from us, maybe they speak different languages, or their families come from different countries, or they dress differently, or they have different traditions. God's command is still the same: love them. Not because it's easy, but because God loves them and because we know what it feels like to be the different one sometimes.

---

What we learn is that God's love is big enough for everyone, including people who seem foreign or strange to us. And when we love people who are different from us, we're doing exactly what God does.

---

The amazing thing about following God's command to love foreigners is that it makes our communities more interesting, more kind, and more like what God wants them to be. When we include people instead

---

of excluding them, everyone benefits.

---

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

---

#### Question 1: The Feelings

---

Think about a time when you were the new person somewhere, new school, new team, new neighborhood. You walk into a room and everyone already knows each other, and you're standing there hoping someone will be nice to you. How do you want people to treat you in that moment? What would make you feel welcome versus what would make you feel worse?

---

**Listen For:** "Be nice," "Include me," "Not stare at me", affirm: "Yes, you want people to notice you're new and help you feel included, not ignore you or just stare."

#### Question 2: The Challenge

---

Now flip it. Someone new comes to your school or your team, and they're really different, maybe they dress differently, talk differently, or just seem like they don't fit in with your friend group. What goes through your mind? Be honest, what makes it hard to reach out to someone who seems really different from you?

---

**If They Say:** "I might look weird," "What if they're mean?", respond: "Those worries make sense. Sometimes being kind feels risky. What would help you be brave enough to try anyway?"

#### Question 3: God's Heart

---

Moses told Israel that God loves foreigners and takes care of them, gives them food and clothes and defends them. Why do you think the God who rules the whole universe cares so much about people who are outsiders? What does that tell you about what God is like?

---

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made God's command so important, God's heart is especially big for people who need extra help and care."

## Question 4: The Memory

---

Moses reminded Israel, "You were foreigners in Egypt, so you should love foreigners now." How does remembering a time when you felt left out or different change how you think about someone else who feels that way? What would be different if we always remembered what it felt like to need someone to be kind to us?

---

**If They Say:** "I'd be nicer," "I'd remember how it feels", affirm: "Exactly. Our own experience of needing kindness can make us better at giving kindness."

You guys are getting it. Moses knew that when we remember what it feels like to need help or friendship, it makes us more willing to give help and friendship to others. And when we do that, we're acting just like God.

---

## 4. Activity: The Welcome Circle (8 minutes)

---

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

### Purpose

---

This activity reinforces the pattern of inclusion by having kids physically experience what it feels like to be outside a group and what it feels like to intentionally welcome someone in. Success looks like kids discovering that including others feels good for everyone and creates stronger communities.

---

### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

---

We're going to do the Welcome Circle. I need about two-thirds of you to form a tight circle, standing close together with your arms linked. The rest of you will be the "foreigners", you'll stand outside the circle and try to find a way in.

---

Here's the challenge: people in the circle, your job is to stay connected as a circle, but you're also supposed to figure out how to let the outsiders join you. Outsiders, your job is to try to become part of the circle, but you can't force your way in or hurt anyone, you need the circle to welcome you.

---

The twist is that the circle only wins if everyone ends up included, and the outsiders only win if they find a way to belong. We're doing this because it's exactly like Moses' situation, how do you stay strong

---

as a community while also welcoming people who are different?

---

I'll give you the signal to start, and we'll see how long it takes for everyone to end up in one big circle.

---

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

---

At first, the circle will probably stay tightly closed while the outsiders try to figure out how to get in. Let this go for about a minute so they feel the challenge. Watch for frustration or exclusion, that's part of the learning.

---

As they start to struggle, offer coaching: "Circle people, what do the outsiders need from you? Outsiders, how can you help the circle people understand that you want to belong?" Don't give away the solution, but guide them toward realizing they need to work together.

---

Eventually, someone in the circle will start to make room or someone outside will ask politely to join. When this happens, celebrate it: "Look what's happening here! Someone is choosing to make room!" Keep encouraging until everyone is included in one large circle.

---

Once they've succeeded, have them notice the difference in how it felt when some people were excluded versus when everyone was included. "Look at how much bigger and stronger our circle is now that everyone belongs!"

---

The breakthrough moment represents exactly what Moses was commanding, the choice to make room for people who are different because it makes the whole community better and stronger.

---

**Watch For:** The moment when someone in the circle chooses to make space or ask an outsider to join, this is the physical representation of loving the foreigner.

---

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

---

What did you notice about how it felt when some people were left outside versus when everyone was included? The outsiders felt lonely and frustrated, but even the people in the circle probably felt a little tense because they knew others were being left out. When everyone was included, the whole circle felt stronger and happier. That's exactly what Moses was teaching Israel, including foreigners doesn't weaken your community, it makes it better.

---

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

---

Here's what we learned today: God actively loves people who are different from us, people from other countries, with other languages, other customs. And God wants us to love them too, not just put up with them. Moses told Israel to remember what it felt like when they were the foreigners, the outsiders who needed help.

---

This doesn't mean you have to become best friends with every new person or ignore your parents' safety rules. But it does mean that when you meet someone who seems different or foreign, your first thought should be "How can I make them feel welcome?" instead of "I wonder if they're weird."

---

The amazing result is that when we include people instead of excluding them, everyone wins. Our classrooms become more interesting, our teams become stronger, and our communities become more like what God wants them to be.

---

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

---

This week, look for someone at school or in your neighborhood who might feel like an outsider, maybe they're new, maybe they're just different from your usual group. Think of one specific way you could help them feel more welcome. It could be as simple as sitting with them at lunch, asking them a question, or including them in a game.

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for loving everyone, including people who are different from us. Help us remember what it feels like when we're the outsiders who need kindness. Give us brave hearts to include others instead of leaving them out. Help us make our schools and communities places where everyone feels welcome. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

## **Grades 1, 3**

---

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

---

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Help kids understand that God loves everyone, including people who look different or come from different places, and we should be kind to them.

---

## Movement & Formation Plan

---

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

## If Kids Don't Understand

---

Compare foreigners to new kids at school, then ask "How do we want people to treat new kids?"

---

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

---

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about God's love for everyone. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "God's Love is So Wonderful," or "We Are the Church." Use movements: spread arms wide during "everyone," point to different children during "you and me," and make big circle motions during "all around the world."

---

Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit in our story horseshoe because I have an amazing story about how God wants us to treat people who are different from us. Find your spot on the floor and get ready to listen!

---

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

---

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound serious and important when you're Moses, sound warm and loving when you talk about God.

---

Today we're going to meet Moses, God's special helper who talked to God face to face!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Moses was very old, and he had something super important to tell God's people before they went into their new home. The people were called Israel, and they had been traveling in the desert for a long, long time.

---

*[Use serious, important voice]*

---

Moses knew that in their new home, they would meet lots of different people. Some would be friends, and some would be enemies. But some would just be different, people from other countries who talked differently and dressed differently.

---

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

---

Moses wanted to tell the people something amazing about God. He said, "Do you know what God does for people who are different and need help?"

---

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

---

God loves the people who are different! God gives them food when they're hungry and clothes when they're cold. God takes care of people who don't have anyone else to help them!

---

*[Move to side, sound excited]*

---

But then Moses said something even more important. He told the people, "You need to love the different people too, just like God does!"

---

**Deuteronomy 10:19 (NIV)**

---

*And you are to love those who are foreigners, for you yourselves were foreigners in Egypt.*

---

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you know why Moses said this? Because God's people used to be the different ones! They used to live in a place called Egypt where they were the foreigners. They knew what it felt like to be different and need help!

---

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

---

Moses said, "Remember when you needed someone to be kind to you? Now you need to be kind to people who need help!"

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

This wasn't just about saying nice words. Moses meant really helping, giving food to hungry people, giving clothes to cold people, and being friends with people who seemed lonely!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

God's people were supposed to remember: "We used to be the different ones. We used to need help. Now we should help others who are different!"

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And you know what happened when God's people obeyed? Beautiful things! Some of the different people decided they wanted to love God too! Everyone became friends!

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God's heart is big enough for everyone, people who look like you and people who look different, people who talk like you and people who talk differently!

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we meet kids who are different from us, maybe they just moved here from another country, or they dress differently, or their families do things differently. God wants us to be kind to them!

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When you see someone who seems different or left out, you can share your snack, invite them to play, or just smile and say hello!

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves everyone, and when we're kind to people who are different, we're being just like God!

---

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

---

**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, just share what you think!

---

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

---

### Discussion Questions

---

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

---

1. How do you think the different people felt when no one was nice to them?
  2. How do you feel when you're new somewhere and don't know anyone?
  3. What would Moses want you to do if you met a kid from another country?
  4. What would you want someone to do if you were the new, different kid?
  5. Why do you think God loves people who are different?
  6. How can you tell if someone needs a friend?
  7. What's one kind thing you could do for someone who seems different?
  8. How do you think God feels when we're mean to people who are different?
  9. How do you think God feels when we're kind to people who are different?
  10. What makes it hard to be nice to someone who seems really different?
  11. Who is someone you know who is good at being kind to everyone?
  12. What would happen if everyone was kind to people who are different?
  13. How can you remember to be kind when you meet someone new?
  14. What would you tell God in prayer about being kind to different people?
-

15. How does it feel when someone is kind to you when you're feeling left out?

---

16. What's the difference between being curious about someone and being mean?

---

17. How can your family be kind to people who are different?

---

18. What would Jesus do if he met a kid who was different from everyone else?

---

19. What if someone different becomes your friend, what could you learn from them?

---

20. How can we be like Moses and remind others to be kind to different people?

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

Choose songs that reinforce loving everyone. Suggestions: "If You're Happy and You Know It" (modified with verses about being kind), "This Little Light of Mine," or "Love, Love, Love." Include movements like hugging yourself during "love," reaching out to others during "share," and spinning during "everyone."

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Criss-cross applesauce, hands folded, and let's talk to God.

---

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

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for loving everyone, even people who are different from us.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us be kind to kids who are new or different. Help us remember to share our toys and include everyone in our games.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you that your love is big enough for everyone in the whole world. Help us be like you by loving everyone too. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

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

Remember, God loves everyone and wants us to love everyone too! Have a wonderful week being kind to people who might be different from you!

---

```html html

---

# True Fasting

---

*When Worship Becomes Justice, Can ritual and justice be separated?*

---

**Isaiah 58:1-11**

---

## 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

---

**Isaiah 58:1-11 (NIV)**

---

*1 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. 2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of their God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'"*

*"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?"*

*6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe them,*

*and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."*

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The Lord will guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."*

## Context

Isaiah 58 comes during the post-exilic period when the Jewish people had returned from Babylon and were rebuilding their religious practices. They were faithful in performing ritual fasts, seeking God's favor, and appearing outwardly religious. Yet something was wrong, God seemed distant, their prayers unanswered, their spiritual disciplines ineffective.

The immediate context reveals a community frustrated with God's apparent silence despite their religious devotion. They fasted, prayed, and sought God's guidance, but felt ignored. This passage is God's response to their complaint: the problem isn't God's hearing, but their understanding of what true worship requires.

## The Big Idea

**Religious practice disconnected from justice is not just incomplete, it's rejected by God. True fasting manifests in breaking oppression, feeding hunger, housing homelessness, and clothing nakedness.**

This doesn't minimize the importance of spiritual disciplines, but reveals their purpose: to form us into people who embody God's justice and mercy in the world. The tension lies in how we balance personal spiritual practice with social action, and whether they can ever truly be separated.

## Theological Core

- **Justice-connected worship.** Spiritual practices that don't lead to care for the oppressed miss their mark entirely.
- **False versus true fasting.** External religious observance without internal transformation toward justice becomes empty ritual.
- **Practical mercy as spiritual expression.** Feeding the hungry, clothing the naked, and housing the homeless are acts of worship, not mere charity.
- **Flesh and blood obligation.** We have special responsibility to care for those closest to us, family, community, those who share our struggles.

---

## Age Group Overview

---

## What Each Age Group Learns

---

### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Spiritual devotion must express through justice and mercy, or it becomes false piety
- Religious practices can become self-serving when disconnected from care for the oppressed
- True worship costs something, it requires material sacrifice and systemic change
- The tension between personal devotion and social action requires wisdom and balance, not either/or thinking

---

### Grades 4, 6

- Going to church and praying is good, but it's not enough if we ignore people who are suffering
  - Our actions toward hurting people show what we really believe about God
  - When we help others, God notices and is pleased, it's a form of worship
  - Sometimes helping others feels hard or inconvenient, but it's the right thing to do anyway
-

## Grades 1, 3

---

- God wants us to help people who don't have enough food, clothes, or a place to live
  - When we help others, we're showing our love for God
  - We can share what we have with people who need it
- 

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

---

- **Creating guilt about spiritual practices.** Don't shame students for enjoying prayer, worship, or Bible study. The issue isn't spiritual discipline itself, but when it's disconnected from justice.
  - **Reducing faith to social action.** Avoid suggesting that justice work replaces spiritual practices. Isaiah calls for both, but insists they must be connected.
  - **Oversimplifying "flesh and blood" obligations.** The phrase suggests special responsibility to family and ethnic community, which creates tension with universal care, acknowledge this complexity rather than dismissing it.
  - **Making this only about individual charity.** Isaiah speaks of breaking yokes and loosing chains, systemic oppression that requires structural change, not just personal kindness.
- 

## Handling Hard Questions

---

**"What if I pray and read my Bible but don't do justice work? Does God hate my spiritual practices?"**

---

God doesn't hate your prayers or Bible reading, but Isaiah reveals that they're incomplete without justice. Think of it like a tree, spiritual practices are the roots, but justice is the fruit. Roots without fruit suggest something's wrong, but the solution isn't to cut down the tree. Instead, we ask what's blocking the fruit from growing. God wants both your prayers and your care for the oppressed.

---

**"How can I focus on justice when my family needs me? Doesn't charity begin at home?"**

---

Isaiah actually supports this concern, "not to turn away from your own flesh and blood" suggests we do have special obligations to family. The question becomes how we balance care for those closest to us with care for the wider community. It's not either/or, but understanding that love begins with those nearest and extends outward in widening circles.

---

### **"Is Isaiah saying that spiritual practices are fake or useless?"**

---

No, Isaiah is saying they become fake when disconnected from justice. Notice that God promises to answer their prayers and be their light when they care for the oppressed. The spiritual practices aren't eliminated; they're fulfilled through justice. The problem wasn't that they fasted, but that their fasting didn't transform them into people who break yokes and feed the hungry.

---

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

---

**True worship of God cannot be separated from justice for the oppressed, they're not two different things, but one integrated way of life.**

---

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

---

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

---

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between personal spiritual practices and social justice, helping them discover that true worship integrates both rather than choosing between them.

---

### **The Tension to Frame**

---

Can religious devotion and social justice be separated, or must genuine spiritual practice necessarily produce care for the oppressed?

---

### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

---

- Validate both spiritual practices and social action, don't pit them against each other
  - Honor the real complexity of balancing family obligations with wider justice concerns
-

- Let students wrestle with hard questions rather than providing easy answers
- 

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

---

Imagine you're part of a youth group that prays together every week, studies the Bible, goes on mission trips, and really seems to care about God. But you notice something: when the conversation turns to the homeless guy who sleeps outside your church, or the families in your school district who can't afford lunch, or the way certain kids get treated differently because of their race or family income, suddenly everyone gets quiet or changes the subject.

---

Part of you thinks, "At least we're praying and reading Scripture. That matters, right? God cares about our hearts, not just our actions." But another part of you wonders if something's missing. You start to feel like your spiritual life is happening in one world, while the real problems around you exist in a completely different world.

---

This disconnect probably makes sense to you because it's easier to pray about hunger than to share your lunch money, easier to sing worship songs than to defend someone who's being excluded, easier to study Bible verses than to question systems that keep some people down.

---

Today we're looking at a community that faced this exact tension. They were devoted to spiritual practices, fasting, praying, seeking God, but God seemed distant. They couldn't figure out why their religious devotion wasn't working. As we read, notice what God diagnoses as the problem and what God prescribes as the solution.

---

Open your Bibles to Isaiah 58. We're going to read silently first, then discuss what you discover.

---

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

---

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Some students may need help with words like "oppressed" or "yoke." Watch for students who finish early and point them to the reflection questions. Let them sit with the weight of God's words, this passage is meant to challenge.

### As You Read, Think About:

---

- What were the people doing religiously, and how did they feel about God's response?
-

- What does God say is wrong with their fasting and spiritual practices?
- What kind of "fasting" does God actually want, what specific actions are listed?
- How would you feel if you were in this community and heard this message?

**Isaiah 58:1-11 (NIV)**

*1 "Shout it aloud, do not hold back. Raise your voice like a trumpet. Declare to my people their rebellion and to the descendants of Jacob their sins. 2 For day after day they seek me out; they seem eager to know my ways, as if they were a nation that does what is right and has not forsaken the commands of their God. They ask me for just decisions and seem eager for God to come near them. 3 'Why have we fasted,' they say, 'and you have not seen it? Why have we humbled ourselves, and you have not noticed?'"*

*"Yet on the day of your fasting, you do as you please and exploit all your workers. 4 Your fasting ends in quarreling and strife, and in striking each other with wicked fists. You cannot fast as you do today and expect your voice to be heard on high. 5 Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?"*

*6 "Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? 7 Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood? 8 Then your light will break forth like the dawn, and your healing will quickly appear; then your righteousness will go before you, and the glory of the Lord will be your rear guard. 9 Then you will call, and the Lord will answer; you will cry for help, and he will say: Here am I."*

*"If you do away with the yoke of oppression, with the pointing finger and malicious talk, 10 and if you spend yourselves in behalf of the hungry and satisfy the needs of the oppressed, then your light will rise in the darkness, and your night will become like the noonday. 11 The Lord will*

*guide you always; he will satisfy your needs in a sun-scorched land and will strengthen your frame. You will be like a well-watered garden, like a spring whose waters never fail."*

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

---

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

---

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different voices, choose confident readers who can handle the emotional weight. Reader 1 gets the complaint, Reader 2 gets God's criticism, Reader 3 gets God's vision.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-3 (The community's complaint about God's silence) **Reader 2:** Verses 3-5 (God's criticism of empty ritual) **Reader 3:** Verses 6-11 (God's vision of true worship)

---

Listen for the emotion behind the words, this is a confrontation, not just information. Hear the frustration, the criticism, and the hope.

---

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

---

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" Let their curiosity drive the discussion.

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 questions that you're actually curious about from this passage. Not questions you think I want to hear, but things you're genuinely wondering about. Good questions might start with "Why does God...?" or "What if...?" or "How do we know...?" You have three minutes. Go.

---

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

---

**Remember:** Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Resist the urge to lecture. Guide discovery by asking follow-up questions that help them think through the complexity.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board, look for themes, start with questions that multiple groups will relate to.

---

## Probing Questions (to go deeper)

---

- "What evidence do you see that these people were genuinely religious and spiritually devoted?"
  - "Why do you think God calls their religious practices 'rebellion' when they seem to be trying hard?"
  - "What's the difference between bowing your head and 'loosing the chains of injustice', why does God prefer one over the other?"
  - "How do you make sense of the phrase 'not to turn away from your own flesh and blood' alongside caring for strangers?"
  - "Do you think it's possible to genuinely love God while ignoring injustice around you? Why or why not?"
  - "What would it look like in our community to 'break every yoke' or 'set the oppressed free'?"
  - "What if someone argued that prayer and Bible study are more important than social action because they're 'spiritual'?"
  - "Why do you think God promises to answer prayers when justice and worship are connected, but not when they're separated?"
- 

## Revealing the Pattern

---

Do you notice what's happening here? God isn't rejecting spiritual practices, God's rejecting spiritual practices that don't transform us into people who care about justice. The real fast isn't about avoiding food; it's about sharing food. True worship isn't about bowing our heads; it's about lifting up the oppressed. God wants both our prayers and our participation in justice, but insists they can't be separated.

---

## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

---

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out between spiritual activity and justice concerns? Think about your church, your youth group, your family's faith, even your personal relationship with God. Are there areas where the two feel disconnected?

---

## Real Issues This Connects To

---

- Youth groups that pray for the poor but never advocate for better lunch programs at school
- Families that say grace before meals but ignore food insecurity in their community
- Churches that sing about God's love but stay silent about racial inequality or LGBTQ+ students being bullied
- Students who post Bible verses on social media but don't speak up when classmates are excluded or mistreated
- Mission trips that feel good but don't address the systems that create poverty
- Personal devotions that make us feel spiritual but don't change how we treat people different from us

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations are more complex than others. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about what they "should" do.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone's faith naturally lead to caring for people who are hurting?"
- "What would help you connect your spiritual practices more intentionally to justice concerns?"
- "How do you decide when to focus on family needs versus broader community needs?"
- "What's the difference between genuine justice work and just doing good things to feel better about yourself?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Isaiah doesn't give us an easy answer to the tension between spiritual devotion and social justice. Instead, he insists they're not actually two different things, they're one integrated way of life. True worship transforms us into people who can't ignore injustice, and working for justice draws us deeper into relationship with God. It's not either/or; it's both/and.

This week, pay attention to your own spiritual practices. Notice whether they're making you more aware of suffering around you and more willing to act, or whether they're creating a comfortable spiritual bubble. Experiment with connecting them, pray for specific people who are struggling, then ask what

practical action your prayer might lead to.

---

The thinking you did today was honest and important. Keep wrestling with these hard questions. The world needs people who refuse to separate loving God from pursuing justice, and I believe you can be those people.

---

## Grades 4, 6

---

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

### Your Main Job Today

---

Help kids understand that loving God means caring for people who are hurting, it's not enough to just pray and go to church if we ignore people who need help.

---

### If Kids Ask "Why doesn't God care about prayer and church anymore?"

---

Say: "God does care about prayer and church! But God also wants our prayers and church time to make us into people who help others. It's like being on a sports team, practice is important, but the real goal is playing the game well."

---

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

---

Raise your hand if you've ever been to a birthday party where someone got amazing presents, said all the right thank-you words to their parents, but then completely ignored the other kids at the party, maybe even was mean to them. How did that make you feel about their thank-you words?

---

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where adults talked about loving God and being kind, but then you saw those same adults ignore someone who really needed help, maybe a homeless person, or a kid who was being picked on, or a family that didn't have enough money for groceries.

---

That feeling you might have in your stomach right now, that something doesn't match up, makes total sense. Part of you thinks, "Well, at least they believe in God and go to church. That's good, right?" But another part of you wonders if believing in God should change how we treat people who are struggling.

---

It's kind of like that scene in *The Lion King* where young Simba learns about the Circle of Life, everything's connected. Or like in *Moana* when she discovers that healing the heart of Te Fiti heals the whole ocean. The health of one thing affects everything else.

---

The tricky part is figuring out what it really means to love God. Is it enough to pray and sing worship songs and read the Bible? Or does loving God have to include caring for people who are hungry, or lonely, or treated unfairly?

---

Today we're going to hear about a time when people who loved God got a surprising message about what God really wanted from them. They thought they were doing everything right, but God had something important to teach them. Let's find out what happened.

---

**What to Expect:** Some kids may share stories about adults they know. Acknowledge these briefly, "That sounds confusing" or "I can see why that would bother you", then move toward the story to explore solutions.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

---

Our story takes place long, long ago, in a time when God's people had been through some really hard times. They had been forced to leave their homes and live in a foreign country for many years. But now they were back, and they wanted to do everything right with God.

---

So what did they do? They went to their special building for worship. They prayed every day. They fasted, which means they chose not to eat for certain periods to show God they were serious about their faith. They read God's words and tried to follow all the rules.

---

From the outside, these people looked like the most religious, God-loving community you could imagine. They were doing all the spiritual things they thought God wanted them to do.

---

But then something strange happened. Even though they were praying and fasting and following the rules, they started to feel like God wasn't listening to them. Their prayers felt empty. It seemed like God was far away, not close like they expected.

---

Imagine how confusing this must have been! They were doing everything they thought was right, but it felt like God didn't care or wasn't paying attention to their efforts.

---

So they started to complain. They said things like, "God, why aren't You noticing all our hard work? We're fasting and praying and doing everything we're supposed to do. Why do You seem so distant?"

---

Have you ever felt that way? Like you were doing your best, but it seemed like no one noticed or cared? That's exactly how these people felt about their relationship with God.

---

But then God sent them a message through the prophet Isaiah. And this message was going to surprise them, and challenge them, in ways they never expected.

---

God looked at all their religious activities and saw something they couldn't see. While they were busy fasting and praying, they were also treating people badly. They were mean to their workers. They fought with each other. They ignored people who were hungry or homeless.

---

God said, "Wait a minute. You're asking Me why I'm not answering your prayers? Look around you! While you're bowing your heads in prayer, you're stepping over people who need help!"

---

#### **Isaiah 58:5 (NIV)**

---

*"Is this the kind of fast I have chosen, only a day for people to humble themselves? Is it only for bowing one's head like a reed and for lying in sackcloth and ashes? Is that what you call a fast, a day acceptable to the Lord?"*

Imagine hearing those words if you had been working so hard to be religious and spiritual! God was basically saying, "The way you're trying to worship Me isn't what I really want."

---

But God didn't just criticize, God showed them a better way. God painted a picture of what true worship actually looks like, and it was very different from what they expected.

---

Instead of just bowing their heads and going without food, God wanted them to help people escape from unfair treatment. Instead of just praying in private, God wanted them to share their food with people who were hungry.

---

#### **Isaiah 58:6-7 (NIV)**

---

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe them, and not to turn away from your own flesh and blood?"*

God was saying, "If you really want to show Me you love Me, then love the people I love. Take care of those who are hurting. When you see someone who doesn't have enough food, share yours. When you see someone without warm clothes, help them get what they need."

---

This wasn't just about being nice occasionally. God was talking about making sure people were treated fairly, that no one was left out or pushed down by others who had more power.

---

And here's the amazing part: God promised that when people worshiped this way, by caring for others who were hurting, then their prayers would be powerful, and they would feel close to God again.

---

God said it would be like the sun coming up after a dark night, like a garden that always has plenty of water, like having the strongest friend in the universe always ready to help you.

---

The people learned something incredibly important that day: you can't separate loving God from loving people. They go together like two parts of the same thing.

---

When we pray and read the Bible and go to church, those things are good! But if they don't make us more caring toward people who are struggling, then we're missing the point.

---

Sometimes in our lives, we might think, "I already go to Sunday school and say grace before dinner. Isn't that enough?" But Isaiah teaches us that loving God also means noticing when our classmates are lonely, when families in our community don't have enough food, or when some people are treated unfairly because they're different.

---

God doesn't want us to choose between prayer and helping people, God wants both! Because when we really connect with God through prayer, it makes us care more about the things God cares about. And God cares a lot about people who are hurting.

---

The beautiful truth is that when we love God by caring for others, it doesn't make our prayers less important, it makes them more powerful. We get to be partners with God in making the world more fair and loving for everyone.

---

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

---

#### Question 1: The Confusion

---

Imagine you were one of those people who had been praying and fasting and trying so hard to please God, but it felt like God wasn't listening. You were doing everything you thought was right, but something still felt wrong. How do you think you would have felt when God pointed out that you were ignoring hungry and homeless people?

**Listen For:** "Confused," "embarrassed," "defensive", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. It would be hard to realize you were missing something important."

### Question 2: The Challenge

God told the people that real worship means helping people who are treated unfairly, sharing food with the hungry, and making sure everyone has what they need. That sounds really good, but it also sounds kind of hard and expensive. What do you think would be the hardest part about worshipping God in this way?

**If They Say:** "It costs money," "It takes time," or "What if people take advantage?", respond: "You're thinking realistically. These are real challenges that caring people have to figure out."

### Question 3: The Connection

Why do you think God cares so much about how we treat people who are struggling? What's the connection between loving God and caring for people who are hungry, lonely, or treated unfairly? Why can't we just keep them separate?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what Isaiah was trying to help people understand, when we really know God's heart, we start to care about the same things God cares about."

### Question 4: The Application

What would it look like in your school or neighborhood if people took this lesson seriously? Think about kids who get picked on, families who don't have much money, or people who are left out. What would change if everyone understood that loving God means caring for people like this?

**If They Say:** "No one would be mean anymore", respond: "What specific things do you think would be different? What would you see happening that doesn't happen now?"

You're seeing something really important: when people truly understand God's heart, it changes how they treat everyone around them, especially people who are struggling or different. This is what God was trying to teach those people long ago, and what God wants us to learn today.

---

#### **4. Activity: The Circle of Care (8 minutes)**

---

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

##### **Purpose**

---

This activity reinforces that spiritual connection and caring for others are not separate activities, they strengthen each other. Success looks like kids discovering that when they focus only on themselves, they become weaker, but when they include others, everyone becomes stronger.

---

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

---

We're going to do an activity called "The Circle of Care." Everyone stand up and form one big circle, all facing the center. Now, everyone take one step backward so we have a bigger circle. Perfect.

---

Here's your challenge: I want you to make the strongest, most stable circle possible using only your bodies. You can sit, lean, hold hands, link arms, or whatever you think will work, but everyone has to be part of the circle, and the goal is to make it so strong that it could support everyone.

---

But here's the catch: you have to start by only thinking about making yourself stable. For the first minute, focus only on your own balance and strength, and don't help anyone else or accept help from others.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like the people in Isaiah's story, they were focusing on their own spiritual strength but not helping anyone else.

---

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

---

For this first minute, remember, focus only on making yourself stable and strong. Stand on one foot, do a balance pose, whatever makes you feel strong, but don't help or accept help from others. Go!

---

I see some of you starting to wobble, but remember, no helping each other yet. Just focus on your own balance. How's it going? Are you feeling stronger or weaker as time goes on?

---

Okay, now here's the change: you can now help each other and accept help. The goal is still the same, make the strongest, most stable circle possible, but now you can work together. What ideas do you have?

---

Look what's happening! I see people linking arms, sitting and bracing each other, creating supports for people who need them. How does the circle feel now compared to when you were on your own?

---

This is amazing! Look how much stronger you all are when you're taking care of each other. Everyone sit down right where you are, but stay in the circle.

---

**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize they need each other to create real stability, this is the physical representation of how spiritual devotion and caring for others strengthen each other.

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

---

What did you notice about how it felt when you were trying to be strong all by yourself versus when you could help each other? When were you actually stronger, when you focused only on yourself, or when you cared for each other too? This is exactly what God was trying to teach those people in Isaiah! Loving God by ourselves makes us wobbly, but loving God by caring for each other makes us strong and stable. It's not two different things, it's one circle of care.

---

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

---

Here's what we learned today: God loves it when we pray and read the Bible and come to church, but God wants those things to make us into people who care about the same things God cares about. And God cares a lot about people who are hungry, lonely, treated unfairly, or left out.

---

This doesn't mean you have to solve every problem in the world or feel guilty about enjoying your relationship with God. It means that when you really connect with God, you'll start noticing people around you who are struggling, and you'll want to help them.

---

The amazing result is that when you love God by caring for others, your prayers become more powerful, your faith becomes stronger, and you feel closer to God than ever before. It's like our circle activity, everyone becomes stronger together.

---

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

---

This week, every time you pray, thank God for something, or talk about faith, ask yourself: "What is one thing I can do to help someone who is struggling?" It might be sharing lunch with someone who forgot theirs, including a lonely classmate, or asking your family how you can help with community service. See how your prayers and your actions can work together.

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank You for teaching us what really matters to You. Help us love You not just with our words and prayers, but also by caring for people who are hungry, lonely, or treated unfairly. Show us ways we can help others this week, and help us remember that loving You and loving others go together. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

## **Grades 1, 3**

---

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Help kids understand that God wants us to help people who are hungry, cold, or lonely, this is how we show our love for God.

---

### **Movement & Formation Plan**

---

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

### **If Kids Don't Understand**

---

Compare helping people to sharing toys or snacks, when we share good things, it makes God happy because it shows we love Him and we love other people.

---

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

---

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about loving God and others. Suggestions: "Love the Lord Your God," "Jesus Loves Me," or "If You Love Me." Use movements: point up to God during "love God" lyrics, hug yourself during "love me" lyrics, and reach out to others during "love others" lyrics.

---

Great singing! I loved seeing you point up to God and reach out to others. Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about what God really wants from us.

---

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

---

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound confused when you're the people, sound strong and loving when you're God.

---

Today we're going to meet some people who really, really loved God and wanted to make God happy.

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

These people prayed every day! They went to their special place to worship God. They even did something called fasting, where they didn't eat food to show God how much they loved Him.

---

*[Use a confused, worried voice]*

---

But something strange happened. Even though they were praying and doing all these religious things, they felt like God wasn't listening to them! They felt sad and confused.

---

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

---

They said, "God! We're praying! We're not eating food! We're doing everything right! Why don't You seem to care about us?"

---

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

---

But then God spoke to them, and God said something that surprised them. God said, "I see you praying and not eating, but I also see something else. You're not being kind to people who need help!"

---

*[Move to side, sound surprised]*

---

The people didn't understand. They thought praying and going to their worship place was enough. But God had more to teach them.

---

**Isaiah 58:6-7 (NIV)**

---

*"Is not this the kind of fasting I have chosen: to loose the chains of injustice and untie the cords of the yoke, to set the oppressed free and break every yoke? Is it not to share your food with the hungry and to provide the poor wanderer with shelter, when you see the naked, to clothe them?"*

---

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think those people were confused? Yes! They were trying so hard to love God, but they forgot something really important.

---

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

---

God explained it to them. God said, "If you really want to show Me you love Me, here's what I want you to do: Help people!"

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, using gestures]*

---

God said, "When you see someone who is hungry, share your food with them. When you see someone who is cold, help them get warm clothes. When you see someone who doesn't have a place to live, help them find a home."

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

The people learned that loving God and helping people aren't two different things, they go together like peanut butter and jelly!

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And God promised something amazing! God said when we help people who are hungry and sad and lonely, then our prayers become super strong, and we feel really close to God!

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God wants us to pray and sing songs and learn about the Bible, that's good! But God also wants us to help people who are hurting.

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in your life, you might see kids at school who don't have lunch, or someone who looks really sad and lonely, or a family that doesn't have warm clothes. God wants us to help them!

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When you help someone who is hungry or cold or lonely, you're not just being nice, you're showing God how much you love Him!

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves it when we pray, but God also loves it when we share our snacks, include someone who is left out, or help our family give clothes to people who need them. That makes God so happy!

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

## Discussion Questions

---

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

---

1. How do you think those people felt when God said they forgot to help others?

---

2. What are some ways kids your age can help people who are hungry?

---

3. Why do you think God cares so much about people who are sad or lonely?

---

4. What would you do if you saw a kid at school who didn't have lunch?

---

5. How does it feel when someone helps you when you're sad or hurt?

---

6. What does it mean to "share your food with someone hungry"?

---

7. Who in your neighborhood might need help staying warm?

---

8. How can helping others show God that we love Him?

---

9. What would happen if everyone in your school helped people who were lonely?

---

10. What are some ways your family could help people who don't have homes?

---

11. Why do you think praying and helping people both make God happy?

---

12. What would you want someone to do if you were really hungry or cold?

---

13. How can you tell when someone needs help?

---

14. What are some things you have that you could share with others?

---

15. How does God help us when we're sad or scared?

---

16. What makes you feel happy when you help someone?

---

17. Who taught you how to be kind to others?

---

18. What would you pray for someone who doesn't have enough food?

---

19. How would your school be different if everyone helped each other?

---

20. What is one way you want to help someone this week?

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

Select songs about helping others or God's love. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands," or "This Little Light of Mine." Use movements: hug motions during love songs, big arms during "whole world," and finger pointing up during "light" songs.

---

Beautiful singing! I could see you thinking about loving others while we sang. Now let's sit down for our prayer time.

---

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

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank You for teaching us how to show You we love You.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember to help people who are hungry, cold, or lonely. Help us share what we have and be kind to everyone we meet.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank You that when we help others, it makes You so happy. Help us love You by loving other people too. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

**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 share my snacks" or "God, help me be nice to lonely kids."

This week, remember that every time you help someone who is hungry or sad or lonely, you're showing God how much you love Him. Have a wonderful week being God's helpers!

---

# Radical Hospitality

---

*Invite Without Expectation, Who Gets Left Out of Your Guest List?*

---

**Luke 14:7-24**

---

## Instructor Preparation

---

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

---

## The Passage

---

**Luke 14:7-24 (NIV)**

---

*7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. 14 Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

*15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." 16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' 19 Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' 20 Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

*21 The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 22 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' 23 Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"*

## Context

Jesus is dining at the home of a prominent Pharisee on the Sabbath, surrounded by religious leaders and social elites. This isn't casual conversation, it's a strategic teaching moment in hostile territory. The dinner party itself becomes Jesus's classroom for challenging social hierarchies and religious assumptions about honor, worth, and divine favor.

What prompted this teaching was Jesus observing the guests jockeying for the best seats and the host's carefully curated guest list of social peers. In a culture where meals communicated social status and relationships, Jesus uses this very setting to dismantle the reciprocity-based social exchange that governed both religious and secular hospitality practices.

## The Big Idea

**Kingdom hospitality operates on radically different principles than social hospitality, it prioritizes those who cannot reciprocate over those who can enhance our status.**

This isn't simply about being nice to poor people or adding diversity to our social circles. Jesus is challenging the entire economic logic that underlies social relationships, calling his followers to practice

hospitality that mirrors God's grace rather than human networking strategies.

---

## Theological Core

---

- **Non-reciprocal grace.** God's hospitality toward us isn't based on what we can offer in return, and our hospitality should mirror that same unearned welcome.
  - **Marginalized priority.** Those excluded from reciprocal social networks, the poor, disabled, and socially powerless, become priority recipients of kingdom hospitality.
  - **Eschatological repayment.** True blessing comes from God's recognition at the resurrection rather than immediate social returns from human networking.
  - **Social exchange critique.** Jesus exposes how seemingly generous hospitality can actually be disguised social investment designed to build networks of mutual obligation.
- 

## Age Group Overview

---

### What Each Age Group Learns

---

#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

---

- How our invitation patterns reveal whether we're practicing kingdom hospitality or social networking disguised as generosity
  - The tension between maintaining friendships and prioritizing those who cannot reciprocate our invitations
  - Practical ways to restructure social gatherings to include those typically excluded from reciprocal social circles
  - How to discern the difference between authentic welcome and hospitality that's unconsciously transactional
- 

#### Grades 4, 6

---

- True kindness means including people who can't do anything for us in return
- The choices we make about who to invite reveal what we value most
- When we only include people who will invite us back, we miss out on real friendship
- It's okay to feel nervous about including different people, but doing it anyway is what makes it brave and right

### Grades 1, 3

- Jesus wants us to include everyone, especially kids who usually get left out
- God loves it when we're kind to people who can't be kind back to us
- We can invite people to play even if they're different from us

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Friendship guilt.** Jesus isn't condemning relationships with friends and family, but highlighting how reciprocity-driven hospitality systematically excludes those who most need welcome. Affirm healthy friendships while challenging unconscious social networking.
- **Charity condescension.** This isn't about feeling sorry for "less fortunate people" but about recognizing that our typical invitation patterns reflect skewed values. Avoid positioning this as charity rather than justice.
- **All-or-nothing implementation.** Students may feel overwhelmed by the radical nature of this teaching. Acknowledge the tension and help them find practical starting points rather than demanding immediate perfection.
- **Merit-based misunderstanding.** Don't imply that poor or disabled people are automatically more deserving of kindness, but that they're excluded from networks of reciprocal invitation through no fault of their own.

## Handling Hard Questions

---

### **"Does this mean I can't have birthday parties with my friends anymore?"**

---

Jesus isn't outlawing friendship or celebration. He's challenging us to examine who gets consistently left out of our social circles. The question isn't whether you can celebrate with friends, but whether your pattern of hospitality only includes people who can enhance your social status. Consider how you might expand your circle to include someone who typically gets overlooked.

---

### **"What if the poor person steals something or makes my family uncomfortable?"**

---

This question reveals important assumptions about poverty and social difference that need gentle examination. Real hospitality involves some risk and discomfort, even Jesus faced criticism for his dining companions. Start small, perhaps with supervised group settings, and focus on seeing people as individuals rather than categories. Address practical safety concerns without assuming the worst about people.

---

### **"How is this fair to people who work hard and can actually contribute something?"**

---

This touches on deep cultural values about merit and reciprocity. Jesus isn't saying hard work doesn't matter, but that human worth isn't determined by what someone can contribute back to us. The point isn't fairness as we typically calculate it, but grace that operates beyond our typical social calculations. Kingdom hospitality mirrors God's unearned welcome toward us.

---

## **The One Thing to Remember**

---

**True kingdom hospitality prioritizes those who cannot reciprocate, challenging us to practice grace rather than social networking disguised as generosity.**

---

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

---

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

---

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Guide students to examine their own invitation patterns and discover how Jesus calls us to practice hospitality that mirrors God's grace rather than human social networking. Help them wrestle with the

---

practical tension between maintaining friendships and prioritizing those who cannot reciprocate.

---

## **The Tension to Frame**

---

How do we practice genuine hospitality that includes those who can't help us back without abandoning the friendships and relationships that matter to us?

---

## **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

---

- Validate that this teaching feels radical and challenging, it's supposed to
  - Honor the complexity of social relationships while pushing toward kingdom values
  - Let students discover the implications rather than lecturing about what they should do
- 

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

---

Think about the last party, hangout, or gathering you organized, or helped plan. Maybe it was a birthday party, a group going to see a movie, a study session, or just deciding who to sit with at lunch. Picture the moment when you were making the guest list or choosing who to invite. What went through your mind as you decided who made the cut?

---

If you're honest, you probably thought about things like: Who do I actually want to spend time with? Who would fit in with this group? Who would make this more fun? Who might invite me to something cool later? These all make perfect sense, of course you want your gatherings to be enjoyable and your relationships to be reciprocal.

---

But Jesus once attended a dinner party where he watched this exact dynamic play out among religious leaders and social elites. He saw people networking, positioning themselves for honor, and carefully curating their guest lists for maximum social benefit. And then he said something that would make any party planner's head spin.

---

As we read this passage, pay attention to how Jesus distinguishes between normal social hospitality and what he calls kingdom hospitality. Notice especially his specific instructions about who to invite and who not to invite, it's more radical than you might expect.

---

Open your Bibles to Luke 14 and let's start reading from verse 7. Read silently first, and think about how this would sound to people who were just trying to have a nice dinner party.

---

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Watch for students who seem confused by the cultural context, this dinner party setting may seem foreign. Help with vocabulary like "reciprocal" or "resurrection of the righteous" if needed. Let them feel the challenge of Jesus's words.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors is Jesus observing and critiquing at this dinner party?
- Why does Jesus tell people not to invite friends, family, or wealthy neighbors?
- What's surprising or difficult about Jesus's alternative guest list recommendations?
- How would you feel if someone told you this about your own social gatherings?

### Luke 14:7-24 (NIV)

*7 When he noticed how the guests picked the places of honor at the table, he told them this parable: 8 "When someone invites you to a wedding feast, do not take the place of honor, for a person more distinguished than you may have been invited. 9 If so, the host who invited both of you will come and say to you, 'Give this person your seat.' Then, humiliated, you will have to take the least important place. 10 But when you are invited, take the lowest place, so that when your host comes, he will say to you, 'Friend, move up to a better place.' Then you will be honored in the presence of all the other guests. 11 For all those who exalt themselves will be humbled, and those who humble themselves will be exalted."*

*12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. 14 Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

*15 When one of those at the table with him heard this, he said to Jesus, "Blessed is the one who will eat at the feast in the kingdom of God." 16 Jesus replied: "A certain man was preparing a great banquet and invited many guests. 17 At the time of the banquet he sent his servant to tell those who had been invited, 'Come, for everything is now ready.' 18 But they all alike began to make excuses. The first said, 'I have just bought a field, and I must go and see it. Please excuse me.' 19 Another said, 'I have just bought five yoke of oxen, and I'm on my way to try them out. Please excuse me.' 20 Still another said, 'I just got married, so I can't come.'*

*21 The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.' 22 'Sir,' the servant said, 'what you ordered has been done, but there is still room.' 23 Then the master told his servant, 'Go out to the roads and country lanes and compel them to come in, so that my house will be full. 24 I tell you, not one of those who were invited will get a taste of my banquet.'"*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Choose confident readers for the dialogue sections. The parable in verses 16-24 has dramatic tension that benefits from expressive reading.

**Reader 1:** Verses 7-11 (Jesus's advice to guests) **Reader 2:** Verses 12-14 (Jesus's advice to hosts)

**Reader 3:** Verses 15-24 (The parable of the great banquet)

Listen for the emotional tone in these teachings, Jesus isn't offering gentle suggestions but challenging fundamental assumptions about social relationships and divine priorities.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups listening for genuine curiosity and confusion. Help stuck groups start with "What confused you most about Jesus's dinner advice?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions where you already know the answer, but things you're actually puzzled or curious about. For example, "Why does Jesus seem to be against inviting friends?" or "How is this supposed to work in real life?" You've got three minutes to discuss and decide on your best questions.

---

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

---

**Remember:** Let student questions drive the discussion. Guide discovery rather than providing answers. This passage is meant to feel challenging and radical.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around practicality, fairness, friendships, and social dynamics. Start with questions most students will relate to.

---

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

---

- "What patterns do you notice in Jesus's alternative guest list, who specifically does he mention?"
  - "Why do you think Jesus emphasizes people who 'cannot repay you', what's the significance of that phrase?"
  - "What's the difference between hospitality that expects repayment and hospitality that doesn't?"
  - "Is Jesus actually forbidding friendship, or pointing out something else about how we choose who to include?"
  - "What would change about your social gatherings if you took this teaching seriously?"
  - "How do you see this playing out in school social dynamics, family gatherings, or online spaces?"
  - "What would happen if the popular kids at school suddenly started following Jesus's guest list advice?"
  - "Why might this teaching be particularly challenging for people who are used to being socially successful?"
- 

### **Revealing the Pattern**

---

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus is exposing how our supposedly generous hospitality can actually be disguised social investment. We invite people who enhance our status, who will reciprocate,

---

who make us look good. But kingdom hospitality operates on completely different principles, it prioritizes those who can't do anything for us in return. That's what makes it mirror God's grace rather than human networking.

---

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

---

Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about your school, your social media, your family dynamics, your friend groups. Where do you see people practicing reciprocal hospitality versus the kind Jesus describes?

---

#### Real Issues This Connects To

---

- Lunch table dynamics, who gets invited to sit with the popular groups and who gets consistently excluded
  - Birthday party guest lists, choosing based on who will invite you back versus who needs friendship
  - Social media follows and interactions, engaging with people who boost your online status
  - Group project partnerships, choosing people who will help your grade versus including someone who struggles
  - Community service attitudes, volunteering to look good versus genuinely caring about marginalized people
  - Family holiday planning, inviting relatives who contribute financially versus including the ones who are struggling
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to fix or judge them. This teaching is genuinely difficult to implement. Help them think through wisdom and discernment rather than giving blanket rules.

#### Discussion Prompts

---

- "When have you seen someone practice the kind of hospitality Jesus describes, what did it look like?"
  - "What would help you notice when your invitation patterns are driven by social networking versus genuine welcome?"
-

- "How do you balance maintaining real friendships with prioritizing people who usually get left out?"
- "What's the difference between inclusive hospitality and performative charity that makes you look good?"

---

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you today: Jesus isn't trying to destroy your social life or make you feel guilty about your friendships. He's challenging you to examine whether your pattern of hospitality mirrors God's grace or just mirrors the world's social networking. True kingdom hospitality prioritizes those who cannot reciprocate, and that's revolutionary.

This week, pay attention to your invitation patterns. Who gets included in your plans and who gets consistently overlooked? Look for one specific opportunity to extend welcome to someone who can't enhance your social status but could use genuine friendship. This isn't charity, it's practicing the kind of radical hospitality that reflects God's character.

You wrestled with some hard questions today and didn't shy away from the challenge of Jesus's teaching. That kind of honest wrestling is exactly what faith formation looks like. Keep asking the difficult questions, and don't be satisfied with easy answers that don't require anything to change.

---

## Grades 4, 6

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

---

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that true kindness means including people who can't do anything for us in return, and that this is what makes our friendship special and God-honoring.

---

### If Kids Ask "Does this mean I can't have best friends?"

Say: "Jesus wants you to have good friends! He's teaching us to also include kids who usually get left out, not instead of friends but along with friends."

---

## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

---

Raise your hand if you've ever been to a birthday party where someone made a really big deal about who got invited and who didn't. Keep your hand up if you've ever felt nervous about whether you'd make someone's guest list. Now keep it up if you've ever been the one planning a party and had to make tough choices about who to invite.

---

Here's a harder question: Have you ever been in a situation where you wanted to invite someone, but you weren't sure your other friends would like them? Maybe they're different from your usual group, or they might not fit in, or your friends might think it's weird that you included them. Part of you wants to be nice, but another part of you worries about what everyone else will think.

---

Those feelings make perfect sense! It's genuinely hard when you want to be kind but you also want your friends to have fun and for everything to go smoothly. There's nothing wrong with wanting your gatherings to work well and for people to enjoy themselves.

---

This reminds me of a movie like "Wonder" where Auggie wants to be included but some kids worry about inviting him because they think others might not understand. Or think about how in "Encanto," Mirabel gets excluded from family celebrations because people focus on who has special gifts instead of who needs love and belonging.

---

The tricky part is figuring out this question: What makes an invitation truly special? Is it when we invite people who will make us look good, or when we invite people who really need to know they belong, even if they can't do anything for us in return?

---

Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus went to a dinner party and completely changed how everyone thought about guest lists. The religious leaders thought they had it all figured out, they knew exactly who belonged at the important tables. But Jesus had some surprising things to say about who deserves a seat at the table. Let's find out what happened.

---

**What to Expect:** Kids may share stories about being excluded or feeling pressure about invitations.

Acknowledge briefly but keep moving toward the discovery in the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

---

Picture a fancy dinner party at the home of one of the most important religious leaders in town. This isn't pizza and soda in someone's basement, this is the kind of gathering where people dress up, watch their manners, and worry about where they sit because seating shows how important you are.

---

Jesus had been invited to this dinner, which was already pretty bold since some of these religious leaders didn't like him very much. But Jesus came anyway, and as he looked around the room, he started noticing some interesting things about how people were behaving.

---

First, he watched the guests arrive and immediately start eyeing the best seats at the table. In those days, where you sat told everyone how important the host thought you were. The most honored guests got seats close to the host, while less important people got stuck at the far end.

---

Imagine watching adults basically play musical chairs, but instead of music stopping, it's people trying to figure out how to get the best spot without looking too obvious about it. They're casually walking by the good seats, pretending to look for their place cards while secretly hoping someone would invite them to move up.

---

Jesus saw this and thought, "This is interesting. Let me tell you a better way to handle dinner party seating." So he told them a story about taking the humble seat and letting the host honor you, instead of grabbing honor for yourself and risking embarrassment when someone more important shows up.

---

But then Jesus did something even more surprising. He turned to the host, the person who had invited him, and started giving him advice about his guest list. And this is where things got really interesting, because Jesus's advice was about to turn everything upside down.

---

#### **Luke 14:12-14 (NIV)**

---

*12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed. 14 Although they cannot repay you, you will be repaid at the resurrection of the righteous."*

Can you imagine the awkward silence that probably followed? Here's Jesus, at a dinner party surrounded by exactly the kind of people he just said not to invite, friends, relatives, and wealthy neighbors, telling the host he's doing it all wrong!

---

Jesus wasn't being mean or trying to ruin anyone's friendships. He was pointing out something really important about the difference between two kinds of kindness. There's the kind where we're nice to people because we know they'll be nice back to us. And then there's the kind where we're kind to people who can't do anything for us in return.

---

Think about the people Jesus mentioned: the poor, people with disabilities, people who usually get overlooked or left out. These weren't people who could invite the host to their own fancy dinner parties. They couldn't help his social status or make him look important. But Jesus said, "These are exactly the people you should prioritize."

---

The reason this matters is because it shows what our hearts are really like. When we're only kind to people who can help us back, we're kind of like traders making deals. But when we're kind to people who can't pay us back, that's when our kindness becomes like God's love, given freely, not because we earned it.

---

Then someone at the table said, "Well, it's going to be amazing when we get to eat at God's big party in heaven!" And Jesus told another story to help them understand that God's guest list might be very different from what they expected.

---

#### **Luke 14:21 (NIV)**

---

*21 The servant came back and reported this to his master. Then the owner of the house became angry and ordered his servant, 'Go out quickly into the streets and alleys of the town and bring in the poor, the crippled, the blind and the lame.'*

In Jesus's story, the important people who were invited to the great banquet all made excuses and didn't come. So the host sent his servant to invite exactly the people that others usually ignore, the poor, the disabled, the people who usually get left out of celebrations.

---

This is what God's kingdom is like. God's invitation goes especially to people who usually don't get invited to the important gatherings. Not because they deserve it more, but because God's love is different from human love, it's not based on what you can give back.

---

Sometimes in our lives, we have chances to be like that servant in the story. We can look around and notice who usually gets left out, maybe the new kid, or someone who's different, or someone who doesn't have cool clothes or the latest gadgets. And we can decide to extend the invitation.

---

When we include people who can't boost our popularity or help us get invited to cooler parties, something beautiful happens. Our kindness starts looking like God's kindness. It becomes the real thing, not just a way to make friends who will help us later.

---

This doesn't mean we can't have good friends or celebrate with people we care about. Jesus had close friends too! But it means we also look for ways to include people who really need to know they matter, even if they can't do anything special for us in return. That's when our friendship becomes truly powerful.

---

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

---

#### Question 1: The Awkward Moment

---

Imagine you're sitting at that dinner party when Jesus starts telling the host that his guest list is all wrong. How do you think the other guests felt when Jesus said they shouldn't invite friends and relatives? What would you be thinking if you were there?

---

**Listen For:** "Embarrassed," "Confused," "Mad", affirm: "Those are exactly the feelings real people would have. Jesus was challenging something everyone thought was normal."

#### Question 2: The Two Kinds of Kindness

---

Jesus talked about inviting people who can pay you back versus people who can't. Think about your own life, when have you been kind to someone because you knew they'd be kind back? When have you been kind to someone who couldn't really help you in return? What felt different about those two situations?

---

**If They Say:** "It felt better when they couldn't help me back", respond "What made it feel better? What was special about that?"

#### Question 3: The Guest List Challenge

---

If you were planning a party and decided to follow Jesus's advice, who are some people you might invite who usually don't get invited to things? What do you think would be hard about this? What do you think might be amazing about it?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Jesus's teaching so challenging and so beautiful, it's hard but it changes everything."

#### Question 4: The Ripple Effect

In Jesus's story, the people who got invited off the streets probably never expected to be included in such a great celebration. How do you think it felt for them to suddenly be welcomed? What might change about how they see themselves and how they treat other people?

**If They Say:** "They'd be really happy", ask "What else might change? How might they treat other people differently after experiencing that kind of welcome?"

You've helped each other understand something really important: True kindness is most beautiful when we extend it to people who can't pay us back. That's when it becomes like God's love, freely given, not because it's earned, but because everyone deserves to know they belong.

#### 4. Activity: The Welcome Circle (8 minutes)

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

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces Jesus's teaching about inclusive hospitality by having kids physically experience the difference between reciprocal inclusion (only welcoming those who can welcome you back) and radical inclusion (welcoming those who cannot reciprocate). Success looks like kids discovering that the most meaningful welcome happens when they include people who can't help them back.

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

We're going to play "The Welcome Circle" to experience what we just learned about different kinds of invitation. First, I need three volunteers to be the "Party Planners." Everyone else will get a special role

card, but don't show it to anyone else.

---

Party Planners, your job is to create the best possible party circle by inviting people to join you. But here's the thing: some people have "gifts" they can share with your party to make it better, and some people don't have anything to offer except themselves. You'll figure out who has what as you talk to them.

---

Everyone else, when a Party Planner talks to you, you'll know whether you have something to offer their party or not. If you have a "gift," you can tell them what it is. If you don't, just say "I don't have anything special to bring, but I'd really love to be included." Remember, you can't lie about what you have to offer.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like Jesus's dinner party situation, some people can "pay back" the invitation and some can't. Let's see what happens when we have to choose who to welcome.

---

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

---

First phase: Let the Party Planners walk around and talk to people for about two minutes. Watch as they naturally start gravitating toward people who can offer something "valuable" to their party. Some people will get invited quickly, others will be overlooked.

---

The struggle: Notice who's getting left out and who's getting chosen first. After about two minutes, pause and point out the pattern without judgment: "Interesting! I notice some people got invited quickly and others are still waiting. Party Planners, what's been influencing your choices?"

---

Coaching phrases: "I wonder what Jesus would notice about these party circles... What did he say about who to prioritize when you're planning a celebration... Think about what makes an invitation truly special..." Don't give away the answer, let them discover it.

---

The breakthrough: Celebrate when a Party Planner chooses to invite someone who can't offer anything in return. When this happens, say loudly: "Did you see that? [Name] just made a choice that looks like Jesus's kind of hospitality!" Help everyone notice this moment.

---

Completion: Once everyone is included in a circle (even if it takes coaching), have them look around at who ended up where. Ask them to notice how it felt different when people were chosen for what they could offer versus chosen even when they couldn't offer anything.

---

**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to include a person who can't contribute anything, this is the physical representation of Jesus's radical hospitality teaching.

---

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

What did you notice about how it felt to be chosen for what you could offer versus being chosen even when you couldn't offer anything? Party Planners, what felt different about those two kinds of invitations you gave? This is exactly what Jesus was teaching, the most powerful kind of welcome is the kind we give to people who can't pay us back, because that's when our kindness becomes like God's love.

---

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

Here's what we learned today: True kindness is most beautiful when we include people who can't do anything for us in return. Jesus didn't say we can't have close friends or people we especially care about. He said we should also make room for people who usually get left out, because that's when our friendship starts looking like God's love.

This doesn't mean every single gathering has to include everyone in the world. It means we pay attention to our pattern of invitations and look for ways to include people who really need to know they belong. When we do that, something amazing happens, both for them and for us.

The amazing result is that our parties, our lunch tables, our hangouts become places where people experience the kind of welcome that Jesus gives, not because they earned it or because they can help us back, but just because they matter. That's the kind of friendship that changes everything.

---

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

Look around this week for one person who usually gets left out of things, maybe at lunch, in PE, during group work, or in your neighborhood. Find one specific way to include them or invite them to something. It doesn't have to be huge; it just has to be real. Notice how it feels different when your kindness is truly free, given without expecting anything back.

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for welcoming us even though we can't give you anything that you need. Help us to be brave enough to include people who others might overlook. When we feel nervous about inviting someone different, remind us that this is how we share your love with the world. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

## Grades 1, 3

---

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

### Your Main Job Today

---

Help kids understand that Jesus wants us to include everyone, especially kids who usually get left out.

---

### Movement & Formation Plan

---

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

### If Kids Don't Understand

---

Compare Jesus's dinner party to their lunch table at school, then ask "Who usually sits alone and might want a friend?"

---

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

---

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about including others or being kind. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "We Are Family in God's House," or "Love One Another." Use movements: spread arms wide during

---

"everyone/all" lyrics, point to different children during "you and me" parts, and make welcoming gestures with arms open.

---

Great singing! I love how you included everyone in our circle. Now let's sit in our story shape because we're going to hear about a very special dinner party where Jesus taught people about including everyone.

---

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

---

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound surprised when you're Jesus noticing things, sound warm when you talk about including people, sound sad when you mention people being left out.

---

Today we're going to meet Jesus at a very fancy dinner party!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Picture the fanciest restaurant you've ever seen. Now make it even fancier! There were important people everywhere, wearing their best clothes, trying to sit in the most special seats.

---

*[Look around with wide eyes, pretend to be looking at fancy things]*

---

Jesus was watching everyone, and he noticed something interesting. Everyone wanted to sit close to the most important person. They were all trying to look super important too!

---

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

---

So Jesus told them a story about being humble and letting other people honor you instead of trying to make yourself look important. But then he did something really surprising!

---

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

---

Jesus turned to the person who invited him and started talking about who to invite to parties. And what he said was very different from what everyone expected!

---

*[Move to side, sound like you're sharing a secret]*

---

Usually people invite their friends and their family and people who might invite them back to other fun parties. That makes sense, right?

---

**Luke 14:12-13 (NIV)**

---

*12 Then Jesus said to his host, "When you give a luncheon or dinner, do not invite your friends, your brothers or sisters, your relatives, or your rich neighbors; if you do, they may invite you back and so you will be repaid. 13 But when you give a banquet, invite the poor, the crippled, the lame, the blind, and you will be blessed."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think the fancy people were surprised to hear this? Yes! Jesus was telling them to invite people who usually don't get invited to parties!

---

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

---

Jesus wasn't saying "Don't be friends with your friends." He was saying something beautiful: "Also invite people who can't invite you back, because that's when your kindness becomes really special!"

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Think about kids at your school who sometimes sit alone at lunch. Or kids who don't get invited to birthday parties. Or kids who are different and sometimes get left out. Jesus says those are exactly the kids we should make sure to include!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

When we invite people who can't do anything special for us back, something amazing happens. Our kindness becomes like God's kindness! God loves us even though we can't give him anything he needs.

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

Then Jesus told another story about a big party where the important people didn't want to come, so the host invited all the people who usually get left out. And they had the best party ever!

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God's kingdom is like that party. Everyone is welcome, especially people who usually don't get invited to special things. God wants everyone to know they belong!

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes at school or in your neighborhood, you might see someone who looks lonely or left out. Jesus wants you to be like the good host in his story, invite them to play, sit with them, include them in your games!

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When you include someone who can't give you anything back except friendship, you're doing exactly what Jesus taught. You're sharing God's love by making sure everyone knows they matter!

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves it when we notice people who are left out and invite them in. That's how we help everyone know they're special to God!

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

### **Discussion Questions**

---

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

---

1. How do you think the fancy people felt when Jesus told them to invite different people to their parties?

---

2. Who is someone at school who sometimes sits alone or gets left out?  

---
3. How would you feel if you were always left out and then someone invited you to something fun?  

---
4. What would you do if your friends didn't want you to invite someone different to your party?  

---
5. What changed in Jesus's story when the host invited the people from the streets?  

---
6. Why do you think God especially cares about people who get left out?  

---
7. What would happen at your school if everyone followed Jesus's rule about including others?  

---
8. How could you include someone new in your games at recess?  

---
9. What makes it hard sometimes to invite someone who's different from you?  

---
10. Who do you know who's really good at including everyone?  

---
11. Why do you think Jesus told this story at a fancy dinner party?  

---
12. How can you tell if someone wants to be included but feels left out?  

---
13. What's the difference between being nice to get something back and being nice just because?  

---
14. How do you think God feels when we include people who usually get left out?  

---
15. What would you want someone to do if you were feeling left out?  

---
16. How could you make sure everyone feels welcome in your class?  

---
17. What did you learn about God's love from Jesus's dinner party story?  

---
18. How could you pray for kids who feel lonely or left out?  

---
19. What would Jesus say about lunch tables at your school?  

---
20. How can you be like Jesus when you're choosing who to play with?  

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

Choose songs that reinforce including others and kindness. Suggestions: "Make New Friends," "If You're Happy and You Know It" (with verses about helping others), or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: reach out to others during "friends" lyrics, make helping gestures during kindness verses, and shine light motions with hands.

---

Beautiful singing about including others! Now let's sit in our prayer rows to talk to God about what we learned today.

---

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

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for inviting us to be part of your family even though we can't give you anything special...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us notice kids who feel lonely or left out at school, at home, or in our neighborhood. Give us brave hearts to invite them to play with us and sit with us...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that including everyone is how we show your love. When we feel nervous about inviting someone different, help us remember that you love everyone...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for loving us so much that you invite us to your heavenly party. Help us invite others too. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about including others. Examples: "Help me be kind to lonely kids" or "Thank you that everyone matters to you."

Remember, Jesus wants you to include everyone, especially kids who usually get left out. Look for someone this week who could use a friend, and be brave enough to invite them. Have a wonderful week showing God's love!

---

# Stop Making Enemies

*Economic Restoration, How do we identify economic practices that turn neighbors into enemies?*

**Nehemiah 5:1-11**

## 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

**Nehemiah 5:1-11 (NIV)**

*1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. 2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." 4 Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, we have had to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."*

*6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. 7 I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!" And I called together a large meeting to deal with them 8 and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find nothing to say.*

*9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! 11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them, one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil."*

## Context

---

Nehemiah led Jewish exiles returning from Babylonian captivity to rebuild Jerusalem's walls. The massive construction project required enormous labor and sacrifice from an already struggling community. Families had mortgaged their homes and fields to survive the famine and pay Persian taxes, but wealthy Jewish nobles exploited this desperation by charging interest on loans, turning fellow Jews into slaves when they couldn't pay.

This crisis threatened everything Nehemiah was building. How could they claim to be rebuilding God's city when the wealthy were enslaving the poor? External enemies already mocked their efforts; internal economic exploitation gave those enemies even more ammunition. The community was fracturing from within just as they needed unity most.

## The Big Idea

---

**Economic exploitation turns neighbors into enemies, fracturing the very community it claims to strengthen.**

This isn't just about ancient lending practices. When economic systems within a community extract resources from the vulnerable to benefit the powerful, they create enmity where there should be kinship. Nehemiah's solution required both stopping the harmful practices and returning what had been extracted, systemic change, not just individual charity.

## Theological Core

---

- **Economic enmity destroys community.** When economic practices make enemies of people who should be neighbors, they attack the foundation of covenant community.
-

- **Fear of God demands justice.** True reverence for God prevents exploitation of the vulnerable and compels us to examine our own economic practices.
- **Restoration requires returning extracted resources.** Real reconciliation means giving back what was taken, not just promising to do better in the future.
- **Self-inclusion prevents hypocrisy.** Nehemiah includes himself in the correction, modeling that economic justice applies to everyone, especially those with power.

---

## Age Group Overview

---

### What Each Age Group Learns

---

#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

---

- Economic systems can create enmity within communities when they extract resources from the vulnerable
  - External perception matters, internal conflict weakens community credibility and mission effectiveness
  - True restoration requires both stopping harmful practices and returning what was extracted
  - Leaders must include themselves in economic corrections to avoid hypocrisy and model systemic change
- 

#### Grades 4, 6

---

- Unfair money practices can turn neighbors into enemies even when they should be helping each other
  - When someone has been hurt by unfair economic practices, saying sorry isn't enough, we have to give back what we took
  - People outside the community notice when there's fighting inside, and it makes the whole group look bad
-

- Being angry about unfairness is okay, and sometimes we need to confront people who are hurting others
- 

### Grades 1, 3

---

- God wants people to be fair with money and help each other instead of hurting each other
  - When people take advantage of others who need help, God gets angry
  - If we hurt someone, we need to give back what we took and stop being mean
- 

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

---

- **Oversimplifying to individual charity.** This passage is about systemic economic practices that create structural enmity. Don't reduce it to "be nice to poor people", focus on how economic systems can turn neighbors into enemies.
  - **Ignoring the unity concern.** Nehemiah's concern about "reproach from Gentile enemies" isn't vanity, it's strategic. Internal economic conflict undermines community mission and gives ammunition to actual opponents.
  - **Missing the self-inclusion principle.** Nehemiah includes himself in the correction ("I and my brothers"), which prevents the reform from becoming an us-versus-them dynamic. Economic justice requires everyone to examine their practices.
  - **Avoiding contemporary applications.** While we should be sensitive, this passage directly challenges economic practices that extract resources from the vulnerable within communities. Help students think about modern parallels without being partisan.
- 

## Handling Hard Questions

---

**"Isn't this just ancient history that doesn't apply to modern economics?"**

---

While economic systems have changed dramatically, the core principle remains: when economic practices within a community create hostility between people who should be neighbors, they damage

---

the community's foundation. We can examine whether contemporary practices, rent extraction, predatory lending, or employment practices, create similar dynamics without getting into partisan politics. The pattern matters more than the specific ancient context.

---

### **"How do we know when economic practices are actually harmful versus just normal business?"**

---

Nehemiah's test is revealing: does this practice create enemies of people who should be kin? If economic relationships are generating hostility, resentment, or desperation within the community, that's a warning sign. Another test is the "fear of God" standard, does this practice honor human dignity and community wellbeing, or does it extract resources from the vulnerable? The focus should be on community health, not just individual profit.

---

### **"What if returning extracted resources would be too economically disruptive?"**

---

This is exactly the tension Nehemiah faced. The nobles probably argued that their lending practices were keeping the economy afloat. But Nehemiah recognized that community fracture was the bigger threat. Sometimes preserving community requires economic sacrifice from those who have benefited from extraction. The question becomes: what's more important, short-term economic efficiency or long-term community health? Nehemiah chose community.

---

## **The One Thing to Remember**

---

**Economic practices that make enemies of neighbors attack the foundation of community, and restoration requires both stopping extraction and returning what was taken.**

---

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

---

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

---

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Guide students to wrestle with how economic practices can create enmity within communities and what systemic restoration looks like. Help them see the connection between economic justice and community health without lecturing about solutions.

---

## The Tension to Frame

---

How do we identify economic practices in our communities that turn neighbors into enemies, and what would genuine restoration require?

---

### Discussion Facilitation Tips

---

- Validate their observations about economic unfairness while helping them think systemically, not just about individual bad actors
  - Honor the complexity, sometimes economic practices that seem normal can create genuine harm within communities
  - Let them wrestle with what "giving back what was extracted" might mean today rather than providing easy answers
- 

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

---

Imagine you're part of a community service project, maybe building homes for families who lost everything in a disaster. Everyone's working long hours, sacrificing their weekends, doing whatever it takes to get these families back on their feet. You feel good about being part of something meaningful, something that really matters.

---

But then you discover that some of the project leaders have been charging those same desperate families huge fees for basic materials, or demanding they sign contracts that will keep them in debt for years. The people you're trying to help are being exploited by the people organizing the help. Your idealism crashes into a harsh reality: the very project meant to restore community is creating new forms of harm.

---

You'd probably feel angry and betrayed. But here's what makes it really complicated: the project is important work, the families desperately need help, and the leaders doing the exploiting aren't cartoon villains, they're people you know, people who probably believe they're doing good work. So what do you do with that anger? How do you address the harm without destroying the mission?

---

Today we're looking at a leader named Nehemiah who faced exactly this dilemma. He was trying to rebuild Jerusalem after decades of exile, and the project was crucial for the Jewish people's survival. But he discovered that wealthy Jews were exploiting poor Jews in ways that were destroying the community from within. Pay attention to how he handled both the anger and the complexity.

---

Turn to Nehemiah chapter 5, and let's start by reading silently to get the full picture of what was happening.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult terms like "mortgaging" or "reproach." Watch for students who finish early, some will want to discuss immediately. Let them feel the weight of the economic crisis being described.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific economic crisis is happening, and who's involved?
- Why do you think Nehemiah got so angry about this situation?
- What's surprising about his proposed solution in verses 10-11?
- How would you feel if you were one of the poor families being described?

### Nehemiah 5:1-11 (NIV)

*1 Now the men and their wives raised a great outcry against their fellow Jews. 2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." 4 Still others were saying, "We have had to borrow money to pay the king's tax on our fields and vineyards. 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, we have had to subject our sons and daughters to slavery. Some of our daughters have already been enslaved, but we are powerless, because our fields and our vineyards belong to others."*

*6 When I heard their outcry and these charges, I was very angry. 7 I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!" And I called together a large meeting to deal with them 8 and said: "As far as possible, we have bought back our fellow Jews who were sold to the Gentiles. Now you are selling your own people, only for them to be sold back to us!" They kept quiet, because they could find*

*nothing to say.*

*9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! 11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them, one percent of the money, grain, new wine and olive oil."*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers and let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for emotionally charged sections like the complaints in verses 2-5.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-5 (The outcry of the poor families) **Reader 2:** Verses 6-8 (Nehemiah's anger and confrontation) **Reader 3:** Verses 9-11 (Nehemiah's demand for restoration)

Listen for the emotion in these voices, this isn't abstract economics, it's families losing everything and a leader who's genuinely outraged about injustice.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about Nehemiah's response?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or confused by. Good questions are things like "Why did Nehemiah include himself in the correction?" or "What's the difference between normal business and exploitation?" Don't worry about having answers, just ask about what struck you or what you want to understand better. You have 3 minutes.

## Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

---

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

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions, what did you want to understand better? I'll write them on the board and we'll dig into them together.

---

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

---

- "What evidence do you see that this wasn't just individual greed but a systemic problem?"
  - "Why do you think Nehemiah was more concerned about 'reproach from enemies' than just the suffering itself?"
  - "What's the difference between charging interest and 'exploiting your own people' in Nehemiah's mind?"
  - "Why include himself in the correction, what does 'let us stop charging interest' accomplish?"
  - "How is 'give back immediately' different from just promising to be better in the future?"
  - "Where do you see economic practices today that might create similar 'enemies of kin' situations?"
  - "What would have happened to the wall-building project if this economic conflict had continued?"
  - "How do you balance economic necessity with community health when they seem to conflict?"
- 

### Revealing the Pattern

---

Do you notice what's happening here? Economic practices that were probably legal and maybe even necessary were creating enemies out of people who should have been working together. Nehemiah saw that community fracture was a bigger threat than economic disruption. The pattern is: when economic relationships generate hostility within the community, they attack the foundation of what you're trying to build together.

---

## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

---

Let's get real about your communities, school, neighborhood, even online spaces you're part of. Where do you see economic practices that create tension or resentment between people who should be on the same side? Think about school fundraising, part-time jobs, social media influence economics, or family financial stress.

---

### Real Issues This Connects To

---

- School fundraising that creates class-based resentment between students who should be teammates
  - Family financial stress that pits relatives against each other over money decisions
  - Workplace practices that exploit desperate employees, creating resentment within teams
  - Social media economics that reward exploitation of personal drama for views and engagement
  - College admissions consulting that advantages wealthy families while creating community-wide stress
  - Local business practices that extract resources from community members without giving back
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Help them see patterns rather than focusing on individual blame. Some economic relationships are complex and don't have easy answers.

### Discussion Prompts

---

- "When have you seen economic practices damage relationships within a community you care about?"
  - "What would 'giving back what was extracted' look like in a situation you've observed?"
  - "How do you tell the difference between fair economic practices and exploitation within community?"
  - "What would it mean to include yourself in economic corrections rather than just criticizing others?"
- 

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

---

Here's what I want you to take with you: economic practices aren't just about money, they're about whether we're building community or destroying it. When economic relationships create enemies out of people who should be neighbors, they attack the foundation of everything else we're trying to accomplish together. This isn't simple, and it doesn't have easy answers.

---

This week, pay attention to the economic relationships around you, not to judge them, but to notice their effect on community health. Where do you see practices that bring people together versus practices that create resentment or division? And ask yourself Nehemiah's question: am I including myself in any corrections I think need to happen, or am I just pointing fingers at others?

---

You did good thinking today about complex issues that don't have simple solutions. Keep wrestling with these questions, they matter for building the kind of communities where people can flourish together rather than exploit each other.

---

## Grades 4, 6

---

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

### Your Main Job Today

---

Help kids understand that unfair economic practices hurt people who should be helping each other, and that making things right requires giving back what was taken.

---

### If Kids Ask "Why didn't the poor families just find different lenders?"

---

Say: "When people are desperate, they don't have many choices. The wealthy people knew this and took advantage instead of helping like neighbors should."

---

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

---

Raise your hand if you've ever been part of a team, sports, school project, family chores, anything where you had to work together to accomplish something important. Keep your hands up if you really cared about the team succeeding. Good, most of you know what it feels like to be invested in a group effort.

---

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever seen teammates turn against each other when things got stressful. Maybe someone hogged all the credit, or took more than their share, or found a way to benefit while others suffered. That sick feeling in your stomach when you realize someone on your own team is working against you, that's what we're talking about today.

---

What makes it so painful is that these people should be on your side. You expect enemies to try to hurt you, but when your own teammates create problems, it feels like betrayal. Part of you wants to fight back, but another part just feels confused and disappointed. You wonder if you can trust anyone on the team anymore.

---

This reminds me of what happens in movies like "Toy Story" when the toys start competing with each other instead of working together, or in "The Incredibles" when family members' different powers create conflict instead of making them stronger. The people who should be helping each other end up hurting each other instead.

---

The tricky part is figuring out how to address the betrayal without destroying the team completely. Do you fight back? Do you ignore it? Do you try to convince the person to change? How do you rebuild trust when your own teammates have hurt you?

---

Today we're going to hear about a leader named Nehemiah who discovered that wealthy people in his community were taking advantage of poor people in ways that were destroying everything they were trying to build together. Let's find out how he handled this betrayal within his own team.

---

**What to Expect:** Kids will want to share examples of team betrayal immediately. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

---

Picture a city with walls that have been broken down for decades, rubble everywhere, gates burned, every family vulnerable to attack. This was Jerusalem after the Jewish people had been taken away to other countries as prisoners.

---

But now some of them were finally allowed to come home! A man named Nehemiah felt called by God to rebuild those walls and make Jerusalem safe again. This was a huge project, tons of stone to move, gates to rebuild, walls to construct from scratch.

---

Everyone had to pitch in. Rich families, poor families, young people, old people, the whole community working together from sunrise to sunset. They were building something bigger than themselves, something that would protect their children and their children's children.

---

Imagine working on the most important project of your life, knowing that your family's safety depends on getting it finished quickly. You're tired, you're sore, but you keep going because you believe in what you're building.

---

But then a problem started. There wasn't enough food because of a famine, and people had to pay heavy taxes to the Persian king who ruled over them. Poor families were running out of money and getting desperate.

---

So they did what anyone would do, they went to their wealthy neighbors for help. "Can you lend us money to buy food? Can you lend us grain to feed our children? We'll pay you back when things get better."

---

The wealthy Jewish families said yes, but here's what made Nehemiah so angry: they started charging huge amounts of interest. They took people's homes and fields as collateral. And when poor families couldn't pay the loans back, the wealthy families took their property permanently.

---

Think about what that would be like. You're working on the wall project all day, then you come home to discover that your house now belongs to someone else, someone who's supposed to be on your team.

---

Some families became so desperate they had to sell their children as servants just to survive. These weren't strangers doing this to each other, these were neighbors, fellow Jews, people who worshiped the same God and were supposed to be rebuilding their community together.

---

The poor families finally couldn't take it anymore. They came together and made a formal complaint against the wealthy families.

---

#### **Nehemiah 5:2-3, 5 (NIV)**

---

*2 Some were saying, "We and our sons and daughters are numerous; in order for us to eat and stay alive, we must get grain." 3 Others were saying, "We are mortgaging our fields, our vineyards and our homes to get grain during the famine." 5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, we have had to*

*subject our sons and daughters to slavery.*

Do you hear the pain in their voices? "We're the same flesh and blood as you are. Our children are as good as yours. But you're treating us like enemies instead of family." This wasn't just about money, it was about betrayal within the community.

When Nehemiah heard about this, he didn't just feel sad, he felt furious. These wealthy people were destroying the very community they were all supposed to be building together.

But here's what's amazing about Nehemiah's anger: he didn't just blow up at people. He took time to think carefully about what to do.

#### **Nehemiah 5:7 (NIV)**

*7 I pondered them in my mind and then accused the nobles and officials. I told them, "You are charging your own people interest!"*

He called a big public meeting and confronted the wealthy leaders directly. "You are exploiting your own people!" he told them. "We've been working to buy back Jews who were sold as slaves to foreign countries, and now you're turning around and enslaving them yourselves!"

The wealthy leaders had no good answer. They knew what they were doing was wrong, but they probably thought nobody would call them out on it.

Then Nehemiah said something that surprised everyone:

#### **Nehemiah 5:9-11 (NIV)**

*9 So I continued, "What you are doing is not right. Shouldn't you walk in the fear of our God to avoid the reproach of our Gentile enemies? 10 I and my brothers and my men are also lending the people money and grain. But let us stop charging interest! 11 Give back to them immediately their fields, vineyards, olive groves and houses, and also the interest you are charging them."*

Notice what he did: he included himself in the problem! "I and my brothers are also lending money, but LET US stop charging interest." He didn't just point fingers at others; he said "we all need to change."

And then he demanded something radical: "Give back everything you took, the houses, the fields, the vineyards, even the interest payments. Give it all back immediately."

---

This wasn't just "promise to be better in the future." This was "return what you extracted from people who trusted you."

---

The wealthy people agreed to do it. They gave back the property, cancelled the debts, and stopped charging interest on loans to their own community members.

---

And here's what happened: the wall-building project could continue with everyone working together again. The community became strong enough to finish the walls and defend themselves against real enemies.

---

Sometimes in our lives, we discover that people who should be on our team are actually taking advantage of us or others. Nehemiah shows us that it's okay to get angry about unfairness, but we have to channel that anger into making things right.

---

What we learn is that when people exploit others in their own community, it destroys trust and makes everyone weaker. But when we're willing to give back what we've taken unfairly and commit to treating each other as real neighbors, we can build something strong together.

---

The core truth is that God cares about fairness within communities, especially when powerful people take advantage of vulnerable people who should be able to trust them.

---

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

---

#### Question 1: The Betrayal

---

Imagine you're one of the poor families working on the wall all day, then coming home to discover that your house now belongs to your wealthy neighbor who charged you so much interest you couldn't pay it back. How would that feel, and what would it make you think about the whole wall-building project?

---

**Listen For:** "Angry," "betrayed," "like quitting", affirm: "Yes! When your own teammates exploit you, it makes you question everything you're working for together."

## Question 2: The Anger

---

Nehemiah got "very angry" when he heard about this exploitation, but he didn't just yell at people randomly. He thought carefully about what to do. When is anger helpful versus when does it just make problems worse?

**If They Say:** "Anger is always bad", respond: "What do you think made Nehemiah's anger different? He was angry about injustice, not just because he didn't get his way."

## Question 3: The Self-Inclusion

---

Why do you think Nehemiah said "I and my brothers are also lending money, but LET US stop charging interest" instead of just telling other people to change? What's different about including yourself in the correction?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Nehemiah's leadership so powerful, he wasn't just pointing fingers at others, he was willing to change too."

## Question 4: The Restoration

---

Nehemiah demanded that the wealthy people give back everything they had taken, houses, fields, even interest payments. What's the difference between giving back what you took versus just promising to be better in the future?

**If They Say:** "It's the same thing", respond: "How would you feel if someone stole your bike but only promised not to steal again versus actually giving your bike back?"

What Nehemiah discovered is that economic unfairness within a community is like a cancer, it spreads and destroys everything else you're trying to build together. But when people are willing to make real restoration, the community can become strong again.

## 4. Activity: Building Bridges (8 minutes)

---

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

## **Purpose**

---

This activity reinforces the pattern of economic extraction destroying community cooperation by having kids physically experience how taking unfair advantage breaks down team collaboration. Success looks like kids discovering that restoration requires giving back what was taken before cooperation can resume.

---

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

---

We're going to build human bridges across the room. Divide into two equal teams, this team builds from this wall, that team builds from that wall. Your goal is to connect your "bridge" to the other team's bridge in the middle of the room to create one strong structure.

---

Here's how human bridges work: you lie on your backs in a line with your feet toward the middle, then link arms to create the bridge structure. The challenge is that you need every person on both teams working together to make the bridge strong enough and long enough to connect.

---

But here's the twist: before we start, I'm going to take three people from Team B and move them to Team A. Team A now has extra people to make their bridge longer and stronger. Team B has fewer people and will struggle to reach the middle. We're doing this because it's exactly like Nehemiah's situation, some people have advantages that make it hard for others to succeed.

---

Let's see what happens when the teams aren't equal and try to build something together.

---

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

---

Watch what happens as Team A starts building their longer bridge with extra people while Team B struggles to reach the middle with fewer resources. Let this go for about 2 minutes so kids can feel the frustration of unequal starting conditions.

---

As Team B realizes they can't reach the middle, notice their reactions. Some will get frustrated, some might give up, some might complain that it's not fair. This is exactly what the poor families in Nehemiah's story experienced.

---

Coach them by saying things like: "I notice Team B is having trouble reaching the middle. I wonder if there's something Team A could do to help since you're all supposed to be building one bridge together." Guide them toward the realization that collaboration requires fairness.

---

Celebrate when someone suggests that Team A should give back some of their extra people to Team B. This is the breakthrough, restoration requires returning what was taken, not just feeling sorry about inequality.

---

Once the teams are rebalanced, have them try building the bridge again. Notice how much easier it is when both teams have what they need to contribute properly to the shared goal.

---

**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to give back resources rather than just sympathizing with the disadvantaged team, this is the physical representation of Nehemiah's demand for restoration.

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

---

What did you notice about how it felt when the teams weren't equal versus when everyone had what they needed to contribute? Team B, how did it feel to struggle while Team A had advantages? Team A, how did it feel to have extra resources while your partners struggled? And what changed when we rebalanced the teams? This is exactly what Nehemiah understood, you can't build community when some people are taking advantage of others.

---

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

---

Here's what we learned today: when people in the same community take unfair advantage of each other, especially with money and resources, it destroys trust and makes everyone weaker. Nehemiah got angry about this because he knew it would ruin everything they were trying to build together.

---

This doesn't mean everyone has to have exactly the same amount of everything. But it does mean that people shouldn't exploit others in their own community, especially when those people are vulnerable and need help.

---

The amazing result is what happened next: when the wealthy people gave back what they had taken unfairly and stopped exploiting their neighbors, the whole community became strong enough to finish building the walls and defend themselves against real enemies.

---

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

---

Pay attention to situations where someone has an unfair advantage over others in your community, school, family, neighborhood. If you notice that you're the one with advantages, ask yourself: "Am I

---

using this to help others succeed, or am I taking advantage?" If you see someone else being treated unfairly, think about what Nehemiah would do.

---

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

---

*God, thank you for caring about fairness in our communities. Help us notice when people are being taken advantage of, and give us courage like Nehemiah to speak up for what's right. Help us be the kind of people who build others up instead of tearing them down. Amen.*

---

## **Grades 1, 3**

---

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Help kids understand that God wants people to be fair with money and help each other instead of hurting each other.

---

### **Movement & Formation Plan**

---

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

### **If Kids Don't Understand**

---

Compare taking advantage of people who need help to taking toys from younger kids when they're sad, it's mean when you should be helping.

---

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

---

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about helping others or God's fairness. Suggestions: "He's Got the Whole World," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "Love One Another." Use movements: open arms wide during "whole world," point to different children during "little children," hug yourself during "love."

---

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our story horseshoe because we're going to hear about a man named Nehemiah who had to help people who were being treated unfairly.

---

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

---

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when you're poor families, sound strong when you're Nehemiah, sound mean when you're wealthy people.

Today we're going to meet a man named Nehemiah who loved God and wanted to help his people.

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Nehemiah's people had a big problem. Their city walls were broken down and their houses were not safe. So Nehemiah said, "Let's all work together to build strong walls!"

---

*[Use excited voice and big arm gestures]*

---

Everyone started working really hard! Moms and dads, kids and grandparents, rich families and poor families, everyone was building walls together.

---

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

---

But then something bad happened. The poor families ran out of food and money. They needed help!

---

*[Move to center, speak with kind voice]*

---

So the poor families went to the rich families and asked, "Can you help us? Can you give us food for our children? We'll pay you back when we can."

---

*[Move to side, sound mean and greedy]*

---

The rich families said, "Yes, but you have to give us your houses if you can't pay us back. And you have to pay us extra money too!"

---

**Nehemiah 5:5 (NIV)**

---

*5 Although we are of the same flesh and blood as our fellow Jews and though our children are as good as theirs, we have had to subject our sons and daughters to slavery.*

---

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think the poor families felt sad and scared? Yes! They needed help, but the rich people were being mean instead of being kind.

---

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

---

When Nehemiah found out about this, he got very angry! "This is not right!" he said. "Rich people should help poor people, not hurt them!"

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Nehemiah called all the rich people together and said, "What you are doing makes God sad. You should be helping each other, not taking advantage!"

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

Then Nehemiah said something surprising: "I have been lending money too. But let's ALL stop being unfair. Let's ALL start helping instead of hurting!"

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And then he said, "Give back everything you took! Give back the houses, give back the extra money. Give it all back right now!"

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

The rich people said, "Okay, Nehemiah. We'll give everything back. We'll stop being mean and start being fair."

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

And you know what happened? All the families could work together again! They finished building the strong walls because everyone was helping instead of hurting.

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we see people being unfair with money or toys or treats. When that happens, we can remember Nehemiah and ask God to help us be fair and kind to everyone.

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves it when we help each other instead of taking advantage. God wants families and friends to be kind to each other, especially when someone needs help.

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

### **Discussion Questions**

---

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

---

1. How do you think the poor families felt when the rich families were mean to them?
  2. Have you ever seen someone take advantage of someone who needed help?
  3. Why do you think Nehemiah got so angry about what was happening?
-

4. What would you have done if you were Nehemiah?

---

5. What changed when the rich families gave everything back?

---

6. How do you think God felt when the rich people were being mean?

---

7. Why was it important that everyone could work on the walls together?

---

8. Have you ever seen someone at school take advantage of someone else?

---

9. How can we help when we see someone being treated unfairly?

---

10. What does it mean to be fair with money and toys?

---

11. Why did Nehemiah say "Let US stop" instead of just telling other people to stop?

---

12. How can we be like Nehemiah when we see unfairness?

---

13. What does God want us to do when someone needs help?

---

14. How do you think the families felt when they got their houses back?

---

15. What would happen if everyone in our class helped each other instead of being mean?

---

16. What did you learn about God from this story?

---

17. How can we remember to be fair and kind?

---

18. What should we pray for after hearing this story?

---

19. What would happen if the rich families had kept being mean?

---

20. How can we be helpers instead of people who take advantage?

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

Choose songs that reinforce helping and fairness: "Love One Another," "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," or "I Will Make You Fishers of Men." Use movements: hug yourself during "love," make sun rays with arms during "sunbeam," make fishing motions during "fishers."

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time and thank God for teaching us about fairness and helping.

---

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

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for the story about Nehemiah who stood up for people who were being treated unfairly.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us be fair with our money and toys and treats. Help us help people who need help instead of taking advantage of them.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that you want us to be kind to everyone, especially when someone is sad or needs help. Make us brave like Nehemiah when we see unfairness.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for loving us and teaching us how to love others. Help us build good friendships and families where everyone helps each other. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others or being fair. Examples: "God, help me share my toys" or "God, help me be kind when someone needs help."

Remember to watch for ways to help people this week instead of taking advantage. God loves it when we're fair and kind! Have a wonderful week!

---

# Complete Mercy

---

*Kindness Beyond Life's Boundaries, How far should mercy reach?*

---

**Sirach 7:27-36**

---

## 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

---

**Sirach 7:27-36 (NRSV)**

---

*27 Honor your father with your whole heart, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. 28 Remember that it was of your parents you were born; how can you repay what they have given to you?*

*29 With all your soul fear the Lord, and revere his priests. 30 With all your might love your Maker, and do not neglect his ministers. 31 Fear the Lord and honor the priest, and give him his portion, as you have been commanded: the first fruits, the guilt offering, the gift of the shoulders, the sacrifice of sanctification, and the first fruits of the holy things.*

*32 Stretch out your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. 33 Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead. 34 Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. 35 Do not hesitate to visit the sick, for by such visits you will be loved. 36 In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.*

## Context

---

This passage comes from Sirach (also called Ecclesiasticus), a wisdom book written around 200 BCE by Jesus ben Sirach. The book provides practical guidance for living well in community, blending traditional Jewish wisdom with Hellenistic influences. Sirach addresses young men preparing for leadership roles in Jewish society under Greek rule.

---

These verses conclude a section on social obligations, moving from honoring parents to respecting religious authorities to caring for society's most vulnerable. The author presents a comprehensive vision of mercy that extends beyond conventional boundaries, challenging readers to consider how far their obligation to show kindness truly reaches.

---

## The Big Idea

---

Complete blessing requires comprehensive mercy, kindness that stretches across all social boundaries and even transcends death itself.

---

This isn't simply about being nice to people. Sirach presents a radical vision where mercy becomes the pathway to divine blessing, but only when practiced completely. The progression from poor to living to dead to mourners reveals mercy as an expanding circle that ultimately encompasses all human experience, even beyond life's end.

---

## Theological Core

---

- **Complete Blessing.** Divine blessing comes not through partial obedience but through comprehensive mercy that reaches every sphere of human need and vulnerability.
  - **Universal Generosity.** True mercy makes no distinction between deserving and undeserving recipients, extending gracious giving to all living persons regardless of social status or relationship.
  - **Transcendent Kindness.** Even death cannot limit the scope of mercy, as proper burial and remembrance demonstrate kindness that honors human dignity beyond life's boundaries.
  - **Empathetic Mourning.** Mercy requires emotional presence with those who suffer, not just material assistance but the willingness to enter into others' pain and weep alongside them.
- 

## Age Group Overview

---

# What Each Age Group Learns

---

## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

---

- Complete blessing requires comprehensive mercy that extends beyond our comfort zones and natural preferences
  - The progression from poor to all living to dead to mourners reveals increasingly challenging spheres of mercy
  - Practical mercy involves both material generosity and emotional presence with those who suffer
  - Wisdom lies in discerning how to show appropriate kindness across different contexts without burning ourselves out
- 

## Grades 4, 6

---

- Being truly kind means helping people even when it's inconvenient or uncomfortable for us
  - Our kindness should include both people we like and people we don't know well or understand
  - When people are sad or hurting, we can help by being present and caring, not just by giving things
  - Sometimes doing the right thing feels hard, but it's still the right thing to do
- 

## Grades 1, 3

---

- God wants us to be helpers who care about all people
  - When someone is sad or needs help, we can be there for them
  - Being kind makes God happy and makes us into the people God wants us to be
- 

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

---

- **Overwhelming Students with Impossible Standards.** This passage can sound like an exhausting checklist that no one could ever complete. Instead, frame it as a vision to grow toward,
-

acknowledging that comprehensive mercy is a lifelong journey, not a one-time achievement.

- **Ignoring Practical Boundaries.** Students may worry they need to help every person in need they encounter, leading to guilt or burnout. Emphasize that individual capacity matters and that comprehensive mercy is often a community effort, not a solo endeavor.
- **Romanticizing Suffering.** The call to "mourn with those who mourn" doesn't mean seeking out sadness or staying stuck in grief. Help students understand healthy emotional boundaries while still valuing empathy and presence.
- **Dismissing Cultural Context.** The reference to kindness to the dead may seem irrelevant to modern students. Explore what it means to honor dignity and memory in contemporary contexts rather than dismissing this element as outdated.

---

## Handling Hard Questions

---

### **"What if I can't help everyone? There are too many people who need help."**

---

You're absolutely right that individual people can't meet every need. This passage shows us God's heart for comprehensive mercy, but it doesn't mean you personally have to solve every problem. The "complete blessing" comes from having a heart that's open to mercy in all its forms, even when you can only act in some areas. Sometimes the most merciful thing is connecting people with others who can help better than you can.

### **"How do you show kindness to dead people? That doesn't make sense."**

---

In Sirach's time, this meant ensuring proper burial and remembering people well after they died. For us today, it might mean honoring someone's memory, supporting their family, continuing work they cared about, or treating their belongings and legacy with respect. It's about recognizing that human dignity doesn't end at death and that how we handle loss and memory matters to God.

### **"What if someone doesn't deserve help or kindness?"**

---

This is one of the hardest parts of this teaching. The passage specifically says to give graciously to "all the living", it doesn't include a worthiness test. That doesn't mean being naive about safety or enabling harmful behavior. But it does challenge our natural tendency to decide who deserves mercy. Sometimes

---

the most radical thing is offering basic human dignity even when someone hasn't "earned" it.

---

## **The One Thing to Remember**

---

**Mercy becomes complete not when it's easy, but when it stretches beyond our natural boundaries to reach everyone God loves.**

---

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

---

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

---

### **Your Main Job Today**

---

Help students wrestle honestly with how far mercy should reach and what it costs. Resist the urge to provide easy answers. Instead, create space for them to explore the tension between idealistic mercy and practical limitations.

---

### **The Tension to Frame**

---

How do we show kindness that stretches beyond life's boundaries without becoming overwhelmed or burned out by impossible expectations?

---

### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

---

- Validate their concerns about mercy being overwhelming or impractical, these are honest responses to challenging material
  - Honor the progression from poor to living to dead to mourners, each step increases the difficulty and scope
  - Let students wrestle with what "complete blessing" means rather than explaining it immediately
- 

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

---

You're scrolling through social media and see a GoFundMe for someone's medical bills. Then another for a family whose house burned down. Then a post about homelessness in your city. Then news about a

---

natural disaster halfway around the world. Your brain starts calculating: if you gave \$10 to each cause, you'd spend your whole savings account in a week.

---

The need feels endless and overwhelming. Part of you wants to help everyone, but another part knows you can't possibly respond to every request. You close the app feeling guilty for not giving, frustrated by the sheer scope of suffering, and confused about where your responsibility actually begins and ends.

---

Today we're looking at an ancient text that pushes even further than your social media feed. It asks not just how much we should give, but how far mercy should reach. The author claims that our blessing from God stays incomplete until our kindness covers everyone, even people who have died.

---

As we read, notice how the author expands the circle of who deserves mercy. Pay attention to your gut response when the expectations feel impossible. Watch for what changes when kindness is connected to "complete blessing."

---

Open your Bibles to Sirach chapter 7, verses 32-36. We'll read the surrounding context for these verses. Begin reading silently from verse 27.

---

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

---

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with any unfamiliar terms like "Sirach" or "sanctification." Watch for students who finish early, they can reread verses 32-36. Let them feel the weight of these expanding expectations.

### As You Read, Think About:

---

- What progression do you notice in verses 32-35?
  - Which of these commands feels most natural to you? Most difficult?
  - What do you think "complete blessing" means?
  - How would you feel if someone expected all this from you?
- 

**Sirach 7:27-36 (NRSV)**

---

*27 Honor your father with your whole heart, and do not forget the birth pangs of your mother. 28 Remember that it was of your parents you were born; how can you repay what they have given to you? 29 With all your soul fear the Lord, and revere his priests. 30 With all your might love your Maker, and do not neglect his ministers. 31 Fear the Lord and honor the priest, and give him his portion, as you have been commanded: the first fruits, the guilt offering, the gift of the shoulders, the sacrifice of sanctification, and the first fruits of the holy things. 32 Stretch out your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete. 33 Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead. 34 Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. 35 Do not hesitate to visit the sick, for by such visits you will be loved. 36 In all you do, remember the end of your life, and then you will never sin.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different characters or sections. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the command sections in verses 32-35.

**Reader 1:** Verses 27-31 (family and religious obligations) **Reader 2:** Verses 32-33 (poor, living, and dead) **Reader 3:** Verses 34-36 (mourners, sick, and life's end)

Listen for how the expectations build and expand. This isn't just a list, it's an escalating series of challenges to our comfort zones.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. Help stuck groups with "What confused you most?" or "What felt overwhelming?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or bothered by. Don't ask questions you already know the answers to. Think about what surprised you, what felt impossible, or what made you uncomfortable. I want to hear your real responses to this text. You have exactly 3 minutes.

## Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

---

**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the difficulty.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board. Look for themes. Start with questions about feeling overwhelmed or confused by the scope.

---

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

---

- "What do you notice about the progression from poor to all living to dead to mourners?"
  - "Why do you think the author connects helping the poor with 'complete blessing'?"
  - "What's the difference between helping people you choose to help versus 'all the living'?"
  - "How do you show kindness to dead people in today's world?"
  - "What's hard about mourning with people who mourn?"
  - "When have you seen someone give graciously versus grudgingly?"
  - "What would change if you took this literally? What would stay the same?"
  - "How do you balance this ideal with realistic limitations?"
- 

### Revealing the Pattern

---

Do you notice what's happening here? The author starts with something most people would agree with, help the poor, but then keeps expanding the circle. First it's poor people, then everyone alive, then even dead people, then people who are grieving. It's like mercy has no boundaries. The radical claim is that God's complete blessing only comes when our kindness reaches as far as God's love does.

---

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

---

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension between expanding mercy and personal limits? Think about school social dynamics, family expectations, social media activism, current events, or even just deciding who to sit with at lunch.

---

### Real Issues This Connects To

---

- Deciding which social justice causes to support when there are too many to handle
- Including lonely or unpopular classmates when your friend group resists
- Supporting family members who are struggling with addiction or mental health
- Responding to online fundraisers and awareness campaigns
- Dealing with homeless individuals or families in your community
- Choosing how to remember and honor people who have died

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

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone extend mercy beyond their comfort zone?"
- "What would help you discern when to stretch versus when to maintain boundaries?"
- "How do you tell the difference between healthy limits and selfish limits?"
- "What's the difference between comprehensive mercy and enabling?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: This text doesn't ask you to be superhuman or to help everyone perfectly. It asks you to let mercy stretch you beyond your natural comfort zone. The "complete blessing" comes not from checking off every item on this list, but from having a heart that stays open to expanding circles of care.

This week, pay attention to where you naturally draw boundaries around your mercy. Notice when you instinctively think "that's not my problem" or "they don't deserve help." You don't have to change everything immediately, but see if you can identify one place where you might stretch a little further than feels comfortable.

You've done some honest thinking today about really challenging material. Keep wrestling with these questions, the tension between idealistic mercy and practical limits is one that thoughtful people

navigate their entire lives. Trust that your willingness to engage with hard questions is already a form of growing wisdom.

---

## Grades 4, 6

---

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

### Your Main Job Today

---

Help kids understand that real kindness means helping even when it's hard, inconvenient, or involves people we don't naturally like or understand.

---

### If Kids Ask "What about people who are mean to us?"

---

Say: "The passage says to be kind to all living people, that's really hard when someone has hurt us. We can still choose safety and ask for help from adults, and we can pray for people even when we can't be around them."

---

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

---

Raise your hand if you've ever helped someone and it felt really good. Keep your hand up if you've ever helped someone and it felt hard or annoying. Now raise your hand if someone has ever needed your help but you didn't really want to give it.

---

Here's a harder question: imagine there are two people who need help. One person is your best friend who dropped their lunch money. The other person is someone you don't know very well who seems kind of weird and sits alone every day. Both of them look upset and need someone to care about them. Part of you wants to help your friend because that's easy and feels good. But another part knows the lonely person probably needs help even more.

---

It makes total sense that helping your friend feels easier. They're nice to you, you understand them, and they'll probably thank you. That's normal human thinking. But sometimes the right thing to do is harder than the thing that feels natural or comfortable.

---

This reminds me of movies like "Wonder" where Auggie needs people to be kind even when his face looks different, or "Coco" where Miguel learns to care about family members who have died. In both stories, the characters have to stretch their kindness beyond what's easy or comfortable.

---

The tricky part is figuring out how to be kind to people even when it's hard, even when we don't feel like it, even when other people think we're weird for caring. How do we know when we should stretch ourselves to help someone who's different from us?

---

Today we're going to hear about some really challenging instructions for kindness, instructions that ask us to care about all kinds of people, even people who have died. It might sound impossible at first, but let's find out what happens when we try to love as big as God loves.

---

**What to Expect:** Kids will readily admit to preferential helping. Acknowledge this as normal while building toward the challenge of expanding their circles. Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

---

About 2,200 years ago, there lived a very wise teacher named Jesus ben Sirach. He spent his days watching people and thinking about how to live well in God's world.

---

Sirach noticed that some people were kind only to their friends and family. Others helped anyone who could help them back. A few people tried to help everyone, but they got tired and overwhelmed. He wondered: what does God really want from us when it comes to caring for others?

---

One day, Sirach sat down to write wisdom for young people who wanted to follow God. He thought about all the different kinds of people who need care: rich and poor, young and old, friendly and difficult, healthy and sick.

---

Imagine being Sirach, trying to figure out how to explain God's enormous love in words that people could actually follow. His heart was full of compassion, but he knew that humans have limits. How could he show people God's way without overwhelming them?

---

Sirach decided to start with something most people already understood: helping poor people. Everyone knew this was good and right. But then he realized that if God loves everyone, shouldn't our kindness reach everyone too?

---

So he wrote these words about reaching out to help the poor. But then he kept writing, expanding the circle of who deserves care.

---

**Sirach 7:32 (NRSV)**

*32 Stretch out your hand to the poor, so that your blessing may be complete.*

This first instruction made sense to everyone. Of course we should help people who don't have enough money or food. But Sirach wasn't finished. He knew God's love was bigger than just poor people.

Sirach kept thinking about God's heart. If God loves every single person who's alive, shouldn't we try to be kind to every single person too? That's much harder than just helping poor people, because "everyone" includes people we don't like, people who are different from us, and people who might not even be grateful.

---

**Sirach 7:33 (NRSV)**

*33 Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead.*

Whoa! Now Sirach was asking for something really big. Be kind to ALL living people, not just the ones we like or understand. And then he said something that sounded impossible: be kind even to people who have died. What could that possibly mean?

In Sirach's time, being kind to dead people meant making sure they had proper funerals, taking care of their families, and remembering them with respect. It meant that our kindness should be so big that it doesn't stop even when someone's life ends.

But Sirach still wasn't done expanding the circle of care. He thought about people who are crying, people whose hearts are broken, people who are scared or lonely or grief-stricken.

---

**Sirach 7:34-35 (NRSV)**

*34 Do not avoid those who weep, but mourn with those who mourn. 35 Do not hesitate to visit the sick, for by such visits you will be loved.*

Now Sirach was asking for the hardest kind of kindness: being with people when they're sad, scared, or sick. It's one thing to give money to help someone. It's much harder to sit with someone who's crying and let yourself feel sad with them.

---

When people are grieving or sick, they often feel alone and forgotten. Sirach knew that God wants us to be brave enough to enter into other people's sadness, not because it feels good, but because that's how love works.

---

Think about what Sirach had written: help the poor, be kind to everyone alive, respect people who have died, comfort people who are sad, and visit people who are sick. That's an enormous circle of care! It covers practically everyone.

---

But here's the amazing part: Sirach promised that when we stretch our kindness this far, something wonderful happens. Our blessing from God becomes complete. Not partial, not halfway, complete.

---

Sometimes in our lives, we want to help only people we like, or only people who will thank us, or only people who are easy to help. Sirach's wisdom says that God's heart is bigger than that, and God wants our hearts to grow bigger too.

---

What we learn from Sirach is that real kindness doesn't ask whether someone deserves help. Real kindness asks how we can show God's love to everyone who needs it, even when it's hard, even when we're scared, even when other people don't understand.

---

The core truth is that God's complete blessing comes to people whose hearts are big enough to care about everyone God cares about, and God cares about everyone.

---

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

---

#### Question 1: The Growing Circle

---

Sirach started with "help poor people" and kept adding more people: all living people, people who have died, people who are crying, people who are sick. Imagine you're drawing bigger and bigger circles around groups of people. Which circle would be easiest for you to care about? Which one would be scariest or hardest?

---

**Listen For:** "Poor people," "my friends," "sick people", affirm: "That makes sense. It's easier to help when we understand what someone needs or when we care about them already."

## Question 2: The Hard Feelings

Think about a time when someone you know was really sad or upset, maybe they were crying or scared or angry about something. How did it feel to be around them? Was it easy to know what to do, or did it feel awkward and uncomfortable?

**If They Say:** "I wanted to run away" or "I didn't know what to say", respond "That's totally honest. It can be scary when we don't know how to help someone who's hurting."

## Question 3: The Complete Blessing

Sirach said that our blessing from God becomes "complete" when we stretch our kindness to all these different kinds of people. What do you think that means? What's the difference between getting some of God's blessing and getting complete blessing?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why Sirach thought expanding our kindness was so important, it changes us and connects us more deeply to God's heart."

## Question 4: The Modern Challenge

If you tried to follow Sirach's instructions at school or in your neighborhood, what would be different? What kinds of people would you pay attention to that you might usually ignore or avoid?

**If They Say:** "Kids who are weird" or "people who smell bad", honor their honesty while guiding: "It takes courage to be kind to people who make us feel uncomfortable. What do you think gives people that kind of courage?"

You're noticing something really important: Sirach wasn't asking for easy kindness. He was asking for the kind of brave love that stretches us beyond our comfort zones. That's exactly what makes it so powerful and so challenging. Let's try an activity that shows us what this expanding circle of care feels like.

## 4. Activity: Expanding Circles of Care (8 minutes)

---

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

### Purpose

---

This activity reinforces Sirach's pattern of expanding mercy by having kids physically experience moving from small, comfortable circles of care to larger, more challenging ones. Success looks like kids discovering that including more people requires more effort and coordination but creates a stronger, more complete community.

---

### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

---

We're going to do an activity called "Expanding Circles of Care." Everyone start by standing in the middle of the room. When I call out different groups of people, you'll form circles that include those people. But here's the challenge: every circle has to include all the previous circles inside it.

---

First circle: form a tight circle with just your best friends in this room. Hold hands and make your circle as small as possible. This represents helping only people you're close to and comfortable with.

---

But now we need to expand: add people you know but aren't super close to. Your original circle stays together, but now you have to make room for more people. Notice how this changes the size and feel of your circle.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like Sirach's instructions: start with people you naturally care about, then keep expanding until your care includes everyone. Each expansion requires you to stretch further and work harder to keep everyone included.

---

### During the Activity(4 minutes)

---

First phase: "Circle of best friends!" Watch how quickly and easily they form small, tight circles. Let them enjoy this comfortable phase for about 30 seconds. Notice how relaxed and happy they look.

---

Next expansion: "Now include everyone you know pretty well!" Watch as they struggle to maintain connection while including more people. Some original circles will have to break apart and reform. This gets more challenging.

---

Coach them through the difficulty: "I notice you're having to stretch further to hold hands... I wonder how you can make sure nobody gets left out... What happens when you try to include people who are far away?"

---

Final expansion: "Now include absolutely everyone in the room, every single person!" Celebrate when someone notices they need to let go of their original small circle to make room for everyone. This is the breakthrough moment.

---

Once they've formed one big circle including everyone, have them notice: "Look around at who's in your circle now. How does this feel different from your first small circle? What had to change for everyone to fit?"

---

**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize they have to let go of exclusive small groups to include everyone, this is the physical representation of Sirach's expanding mercy.

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

---

What did you notice about how it felt when you could only hold hands with your closest friends versus when you had to include everyone? The small circle felt safe and easy, but the big circle required more effort, more stretching, and more coordination. That's exactly what Sirach was teaching: God's complete blessing comes when our care stretches to include everyone, even when it's harder work.

---

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

---

Here's what we learned today: God wants our kindness to keep growing bigger and bigger until it includes all kinds of people, poor people, people we don't know well, people who are different from us, people who are sad or sick, and even people who have died. This isn't easy, but it's how we get God's complete blessing.

---

This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone or help every single person you meet. It means your heart can stay open to caring about people even when it's hard, even when you feel scared or uncomfortable, even when other people don't understand.

---

The amazing result is that when we love with this kind of big, brave love, we become more like God, and we get to experience the joy of God's complete blessing in our lives.

---

## This Week's Challenge

---

Notice someone at school or in your neighborhood who seems lonely, sad, or left out. You don't have to become their best friend, but find one small way to show them kindness, maybe a smile, sitting near them, asking how they're doing, or including them in something. Pay attention to how it feels to stretch your care beyond your usual circle.

---

## Closing Prayer (Optional)

---

*God, help us to have big hearts like you do. When we only want to help people we like, help us remember that you love everyone. Give us courage to be kind even when it's hard or scary. Help us to care about people who are sad, lonely, or different from us. Make our hearts grow bigger every day. Amen.*

---

## Grades 1, 3

---

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

## Your Main Job Today

---

Help kids understand that God wants us to be helpers who care about all people, especially those who are sad or need help.

---

## Movement & Formation Plan

---

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

## If Kids Don't Understand

---

Compare being kind to "all living people" to being a superhero helper who looks for anyone who needs help, then ask "Who do you think needs our help?"

---

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

---

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about helping and caring. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: reach out hands during lyrics about helping, make big circles with arms for "everyone," and point to hearts during words about love.

---

Wonderful singing! I heard you singing about helping and loving people. Today we're going to hear a story about someone who taught us to be helpers for all kinds of people. Sit down in our horseshoe shape so we can see each other while we learn!

---

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

---

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound wise and gentle for Sirach, sound excited about helping people, sound caring when talking about sad people.

---

Today we're going to meet a very wise teacher named Sirach who loved God and wanted to help people learn how to be good helpers!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Sirach lived a long, long time ago, and he spent his days watching people. He saw some people who were very good at helping their friends and family. He saw other people who only helped when they felt like it.

---

*[Look puzzled and thoughtful]*

---

Sirach wondered: "What does God really want? How big should our helping hearts be?" He thought and thought about this question because he wanted to teach people the right way to live.

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak with excitement]*

---

One day, Sirach had a great idea! He would write down instructions for people who wanted to have helping hearts like God's heart. He started writing, and this is what he said:

---

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

---

"Stretch out your hand to help poor people, people who don't have enough food or clothes or money. When you help them, God gives you a complete blessing!"

---

*[Move to side, speak with growing excitement]*

---

But then Sirach thought, "Wait! God loves more people than just poor people. God loves everyone!" So he kept writing: "Be kind to ALL living people, everyone who is alive!"

---

**Sirach 7:33 (NRSV)**

---

*Give graciously to all the living; do not withhold kindness even from the dead.*

---

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

---

Do you think that sounds like a lot of people? Yes! ALL living people means everyone, people we like and people we don't know, people who are nice to us and people who are grumpy, people who look like us and people who look different!

---

*[Move to center, speak with caring voice]*

---

But Sirach wasn't finished yet! He thought about people who are really sad, people who are crying because someone they love has died, or because they're scared or hurt.

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, speaking gently]*

---

Sirach wrote: "Don't run away from people who are crying. Instead, be sad with them. Sit with them. Let them know they're not alone." That's really hard to do, isn't it? Sometimes when people are crying, we don't know what to say!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

Then Sirach wrote about sick people, people who are in the hospital or who hurt or who can't get out of bed. He said: "Go visit them! Don't stay away because you're scared. When you visit sick people, they feel loved!"

---

*[Speak with excitement and big gestures]*

---

So Sirach's list kept growing: help poor people, be kind to everyone alive, comfort people who are crying, and visit people who are sick. That's a lot of helping!

---

*[Pause dramatically, then smile big]*

---

But here's the most amazing part: Sirach said that when we help ALL these people, God gives us something wonderful, a complete blessing! Not just a little blessing, but a COMPLETE blessing!

---

*[Speak directly to the children with warmth]*

---

Sometimes we only want to help people who are easy to help or people who will say thank you. But Sirach learned that God wants our hearts to be big enough to care about everyone, especially people who are sad or lonely or scared.

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When you see someone at school who looks sad, you can sit with them. When you know someone who is sick, you can draw them a picture or pray for them. When you see someone who needs help, you can be a helper!

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves it when we have big, caring hearts like Jesus did. God wants us to be the kind of people who notice when others need help and who are brave enough to be helpers!

---

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

---

**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 a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell each other what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk together.

---

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

## Discussion Questions

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

1. Who is someone you think needs a helper?
2. How do you feel when you see someone crying?
3. What would you do if you saw someone sitting alone at lunch?
4. How can kids help people who are sick?
5. What does it mean to be kind to "all living people"?
6. Why do you think God wants us to help people who are sad?
7. What's hard about helping people we don't know well?
8. How does it feel when someone helps you?
9. Who at school might need a friend?
10. What would you say to someone who is scared?
11. How can we show kindness to older people?
12. What makes someone a good helper?
13. How do you know when someone needs help?
14. What would Jesus do if he saw someone crying?
15. Why is it important to visit people who are sick?
16. How can we help people in our families?
17. What does "complete blessing" mean?

18. How can we be brave when helping feels scary?

---

19. Who has been a good helper to you?

---

20. What would happen if everyone followed Sirach's instructions?

---

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

---

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

---

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

---

Choose songs that reinforce helping and caring. Suggestions: "I Am a Helper" or "Love Your Neighbor" or "Jesus Wants Me for a Helper." Use movements: reach out to help during helper lyrics, make heart shapes with hands for love words, and point to others during lyrics about neighbors.

---

Beautiful singing about being helpers! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Find a spot on the floor and sit criss-cross with your hands folded.

---

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

---

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for Sirach who taught us to be helpers...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us to notice when people around us are sad or lonely or need a friend. Give us brave hearts to help even when we feel shy or scared...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that you want us to be kind to all people, not just our friends. Make our hearts big like your heart...*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for loving everyone and for teaching us how to be helpers. Help us to care about people who are crying or sick or lonely. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

---

**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping people. Examples: "Help me be kind to everyone" or "Help me notice when people are sad."

Remember, God wants you to be a helper with a big, caring heart! Look for people this week who might need a friend or some kindness. Have a wonderful week being God's helpers!

---