

# Justice and Compassion

*Volume 16*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Justice and Compassion

*Volume 16*

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## **About This Series**

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

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

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

## **A Note on Scripture Sources**

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

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

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

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

## **How to Use This Book**

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

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

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

### **For Individual Study**

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

### **For Families**

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

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

*The 1611 Press Team*

# Workers and Wages

*Economic Justice, Does delayed payment count as taking advantage?*

**Deuteronomy 24:10-22**

## 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 24:10-22 (NIV)**

*10 When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered as a pledge. 11 Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. 12 If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. 13 Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God.*

*14 Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. 15 Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.*

*16 Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin. 17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

*19 When you are harvesting in your field and you forget a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 22 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.*

## Context

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This passage sits within Moses's final address to Israel before they enter the Promised Land, known as the Deuteronomic Code. Moses is establishing civil and social laws that will govern their new society. He's moved from religious laws to practical matters of daily economic life, loans, employment, and harvest practices. This isn't theoretical theology; it's the nuts and bolts of how God's people should treat each other when money and survival are at stake.

The immediate context shows a pattern: laws protecting those with less power from those with more power. Just before this, Moses addressed divorce laws and military service. Just after, he'll address criminal justice. This cluster of laws about workers, loans, and gleaning rights forms the economic justice heart of Moses's vision for Israel, a society where the vulnerable are protected not by charity alone, but by built-in legal protections.

## The Big Idea

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**Economic power creates divine accountability, those who control wages, loans, and resources must use that power to protect, not exploit, the vulnerable.**

This isn't just about being nice to poor people. Moses is establishing that withholding wages from those who depend on them daily is tantamount to oppression, similar to Egyptian slavery. The "cry to the Lord" language echoes the Hebrew slaves' cries in Exodus. God hears economic distress as clearly as he hears political oppression, and delayed payment to the desperate is a sin that provokes divine response.

## Theological Core

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- **Prompt Payment as Justice.** Daily wages for the poor aren't generosity, they're justice. Delaying payment when someone needs it for survival is taking advantage of their desperation.
- **Economic Power as Stewardship.** Having the ability to hire, lend, or control resources comes with divine accountability to protect those dependent on those resources.
- **Universal Protection Standards.** The law applies equally to Israelites and foreigners, establishing that worker protection transcends ethnic boundaries.
- **Divine Accountability for Worker Treatment.** God hears the cries of unpaid workers. Withholding wages doesn't just hurt the worker, it provokes God's judgment on the employer.

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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- Economic power creates divine accountability, controlling wages or resources means responsibility to protect, not exploit
  - Delayed payment to desperate workers constitutes "taking advantage" even if payment eventually comes
  - God hears the cries of workers who aren't paid promptly, making this a matter of divine justice, not just fairness
  - Modern employment practices must be measured against this standard of immediate payment to those who depend on wages
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- When people do work and need the money right away, keeping it from them is wrong even if you plan to pay eventually
  - Having power over other people's money means you have to be extra careful to be fair
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- God cares about workers being treated fairly, not just about prayer and church things
  - Fairness means thinking about what other people need, not just what's convenient for you
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### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to pay people quickly when they work for us
  - God loves workers and wants them to get their money when they need it
  - We should be fair and helpful, especially to people who need money
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Oversimplifying Economic Complexity.** Modern employment involves payroll systems, banks, and legal frameworks ancient Israel didn't have. Don't dismiss these realities, but ask whether our systems protect or exploit workers who live paycheck to paycheck.
  - **Making This Only About Individual Charity.** This isn't about being generous, it's about justice. Moses is establishing legal protections, not suggesting voluntary kindness. The focus is systemic protection of vulnerable workers.
  - **Ignoring the "Cry to the Lord" Language.** This phrase appears in Exodus about Hebrew slavery. Moses is saying that withholding wages from desperate workers provokes the same divine response as oppression and slavery.
  - **Focusing Only on Ancient Context.** While the daily wage context was specific to agricultural day laborers, the principle applies wherever people depend on prompt payment for survival. Don't let historical differences obscure contemporary relevance.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"What about modern payroll systems that pay every two weeks or monthly?"**

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Great question. The principle isn't about daily payment specifically, it's about not taking advantage of people who depend on their wages for survival. Moses specified daily payment because day laborers needed money that day for food and shelter. The question for us is: do our payment systems protect workers or exploit their dependence? If someone lives paycheck to paycheck and we could pay them promptly but choose not to for our convenience, we're applying the same principle Moses condemned.

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**"Doesn't this passage only apply to poor workers, not everyone?"**

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Moses specifically mentions poor workers because they're the ones who can't afford to wait for payment. But the principle of economic power creating accountability applies broadly. If someone depends on money you control, you have divine responsibility to use that power fairly. The passage establishes a minimum standard: don't exploit people's desperation. That standard applies whenever there's economic dependence, though the urgency is greatest when survival is at stake.

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**"How is delayed payment actually 'taking advantage' if you eventually pay?"**

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This is the key insight. Moses says withholding wages from the poor IS taking advantage, even if payment eventually comes. When someone needs money for food and shelter today, making them wait because you can forces them to bear the cost of your cash flow management. You're using their desperation and powerlessness to benefit your financial convenience. That's exploitation even when the amount owed never changes.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God holds those who control wages accountable for protecting, not exploiting, the workers who depend on them, and delayed payment to desperate workers counts as exploitation.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with how economic power creates divine accountability, helping them see that delayed payment to desperate workers constitutes "taking advantage" even when payment eventually

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comes.

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## **The Tension to Frame**

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If you eventually pay what you owe, how can delayed payment count as "taking advantage" of workers? What's the difference between inconvenience and exploitation?

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## **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experience with part-time jobs, allowances, or payment for chores, they understand dependence on expected money
  - Honor the complexity of modern payroll systems while examining whether those systems protect or exploit vulnerable workers
  - Let them discover the principle rather than lecturing, ask questions that help them see the pattern
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## **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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You're working a summer job at a local restaurant. It's hard work, you're on your feet for hours, dealing with difficult customers, cleaning up messes. You really need this money because you're saving for a car, plus you promised your parents you'd pay for your own gas and insurance. Your boss seems nice enough, and the pay is fair.

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But here's the thing: your boss is always late with paychecks. Not by weeks, just a few days here and there. Maybe the payroll person is busy, maybe cash flow is tight, maybe it's just not a priority. You still get paid the right amount eventually, so technically you're getting what you earned. But meanwhile, you're checking your bank account, worried about whether you can afford gas to get to work.

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Your boss probably doesn't mean any harm. They're busy running a business, dealing with suppliers, managing schedules. From their perspective, a few days' delay in payroll isn't a big deal, you'll get your money soon enough. They might even think you're being impatient or unreasonable if you complain about it.

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But here's what your boss might not realize: those few days matter to you. You're living close to the edge financially, planning your expenses around when you expect to be paid. When your check is late, you might have to ask your parents for gas money or skip hanging out with friends because you're not

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sure if you can afford it. You start feeling anxious and powerless.

Today we're looking at a passage where Moses addresses exactly this situation, except the stakes are even higher, we're talking about people who need their wages to buy food and shelter for that day. Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 24, and let's read about what God thinks about delayed payment to workers who depend on it.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage contains legal language that might be unfamiliar, help with terms like "pledge" or "foreigner." Watch for students who finish early and direct them to the reflection questions. Let them feel the weight of the economic justice theme throughout this passage.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific protections does Moses establish for workers and poor people?
- Why does Moses specify daily payment "before sunset" for poor workers?
- What does it mean that workers might "cry to the Lord" against employers?
- How would you feel if you were a day laborer depending on that day's wages for food?

### Deuteronomy 24:10-22 (NIV)

*10 When you make a loan of any kind to your neighbor, do not go into their house to get what is offered as a pledge. 11 Stay outside and let the neighbor to whom you are making the loan bring the pledge out to you. 12 If the neighbor is poor, do not go to sleep with their pledge in your possession. 13 Return their cloak by sunset so that your neighbor may sleep in it. Then they will thank you, and it will be regarded as a righteous act in the sight of the Lord your God.*

*14 Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. 15 Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.*

*16 Parents are not to be put to death for their children, nor children put to death for their parents; each will die for their own sin. 17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of the widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

*19 When you are harvesting in your field and you forget a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 22 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but don't pressure anyone. Choose confident readers for the legal sections. Let them hear the rhythm and weight of these laws.

**Reader 1:** Verses 10-13 (Loan and pledge protections) **Reader 2:** Verses 14-18 (Worker wages and justice) **Reader 3:** Verses 19-22 (Harvest gleaning rights)

Listen for the pattern here, this isn't random advice. Moses is establishing a comprehensive system of economic justice. Notice how specific he gets about timing, people groups, and consequences.

#### 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 real questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen. If a group is stuck, ask "What surprised you most?" or "What seems hardest to understand?"

Get into groups of three or four. You have three minutes to come up with one or two genuine questions about what we just read, not quiz questions with obvious answers, but things you're actually curious about or confused by. For example, "Why does Moses care so much about sunset timing?" or "How is delaying payment actually 'taking advantage'?" Ask about what you really want to understand better.

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

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**Remember:** Let students drive with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper rather than lecturing. Guide them to discover the insights rather than telling them.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board, looking for themes. Start with questions most students can relate to, then move to more complex theological issues.

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

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- "What evidence do you see that Moses is concerned specifically about people who live day-to-day?"
  - "Moses says withholding wages from poor workers is 'taking advantage', how is that taking advantage if you eventually pay?"
  - "What does it mean that unpaid workers might 'cry to the Lord' against their employers?"
  - "Why do you think Moses includes both Israelites and foreigners in these worker protection laws?"
  - "How would you distinguish between inconvenience and exploitation when it comes to delayed payment?"
  - "What modern employment situations might parallel these ancient day-labor scenarios?"
  - "If someone always plans to pay eventually, what makes delayed payment a moral issue?"
  - "What does this passage suggest about the relationship between economic power and spiritual accountability?"
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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening throughout this passage? Moses isn't just giving random rules about money. He's establishing that having economic power over other people, whether as employer, lender,

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or landowner, creates divine accountability to protect, not exploit, those who depend on you. The key insight is in verse 15: withholding wages from desperate workers IS taking advantage, even if you eventually pay, because you're using their powerlessness for your convenience.

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

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Let's get real about your lives and the world around you. Most of you probably don't employ day laborers, but you live in an economy where millions of people depend on prompt payment for survival. Where do you see this same tension between convenience for those with power and desperation for those without it?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Part-time jobs where employers delay paychecks or manipulate schedules to avoid benefits
  - Parents who promise payment for chores but forget or delay when kids are saving for something specific
  - Group projects where one person controls shared resources but doesn't communicate with others who are depending on them
  - Social media influencers or content creators waiting months for payment from platforms or sponsors
  - Gig economy workers (delivery drivers, rideshare) who need daily or weekly payments but face delayed transfers
  - Small business owners who delay paying suppliers or contractors to manage their own cash flow
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to simple answers. Some situations involve genuine complexity about payment systems and business needs. Help them think through how to discern between necessary delays and exploitation of dependence.

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#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone use economic power responsibly to protect people who depended on them?"
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- "What would help you recognize the difference between inconvenience and taking advantage in payment situations?"
- "How do you discern when delayed payment is exploitation versus necessary business practice?"
- "What's the difference between caring about profit and caring about people when you have economic power?"

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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Economic power, whether it's controlling wages, allowances, shared resources, or any money other people depend on, creates divine accountability. God holds us responsible for protecting, not exploiting, people who depend on us financially. And delayed payment to desperate people counts as exploitation even when we eventually pay, because we're using their powerlessness for our convenience.

This week, pay attention to the economic power you have and how you use it. Maybe it's as simple as paying back money you borrowed promptly, or being reliable with allowances if you're a parent, or advocating for fair payment policies if you see exploitation. Notice when you have the power to make someone's financial anxiety better or worse.

You've done excellent thinking today about complex issues that many adults avoid. Keep wrestling with these questions about economic justice, our world desperately needs people who will use whatever power they have to protect rather than exploit the vulnerable.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

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### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that when people work for you, paying them quickly is about fairness, not just kindness, keeping money from people who need it right away hurts them even if you plan to pay later.

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### If Kids Ask "Why can't workers just wait a few days for their money?"

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Say: "Imagine if someone promised you lunch money but made you wait until dinner time. You'd be hungry all day! When people need money for food or shelter today, making them wait can really hurt them."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been promised money for doing chores or helping out, but then had to wait longer than you expected to get paid. Keep your hands up if it was frustrating to wait, especially when you were planning to buy something with that money.

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Now here's a trickier situation: imagine your neighbor asks you to walk their dog every day after school for a week. They promise to pay you \$20 at the end of the week. You're excited because you're saving up for a new video game, and this money will put you right over the amount you need. But when Friday comes, your neighbor says, "Oh, I forgot to go to the bank. Can you wait until next week?"

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Part of you thinks that's totally unfair, you did the work, you need the money now, and they promised to pay you today. But another part thinks maybe you're being impatient. After all, you'll still get the money eventually, and it's only a few extra days. Your neighbor seems nice, and they're not trying to cheat you out of money.

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This reminds me of the movie "A Bug's Life" where the grasshoppers keep demanding food from the ants but never actually help gather it. The ants work hard, but the grasshoppers control when and how much the ants get to keep. The grasshoppers have all the power, and they use that power to make life harder for the ants.

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The tricky part is figuring out when someone is just disorganized versus when they're actually being unfair by making you wait. Is there a difference between "I forgot to get cash" and "I don't care that you need this money now"?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when Moses gave very specific instructions about paying workers quickly. The people Moses was talking about needed their money every single day to buy food and have a place to sleep. Let's find out what Moses said about keeping people waiting for money they've already earned.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to waiting for promised money and feeling frustrated. Acknowledge their experiences briefly, "That waiting is tough!", but keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture the Israelite people camped on the edge of the Promised Land. They can see their new home ahead of them, but Moses wants to make sure they understand how to treat each other fairly when they get there.

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Moses is thinking about all the different kinds of work people will do in their new land. Some people will own farms and hire workers to help with planting and harvesting. Some people will be so poor they'll have to work every single day just to earn enough money for food and a place to sleep that night.

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Moses knows that when some people have lots of money and others have almost none, it's easy for the wealthy people to be unfair without even realizing it. They might think, "What's the big deal if I pay my workers a few days late? They'll get their money eventually."

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Imagine you're one of those workers. You get up early every morning and work hard all day in the hot sun, digging and planting and harvesting. Your back hurts, your hands are dirty, and you're tired. But you keep working because you know that at the end of the day, you'll get paid enough money to buy food for your family.

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The sun is starting to set, and you're getting ready to go home. Your stomach is growling because you haven't eaten much today, you're waiting to get paid so you can buy dinner. Your family is waiting at home, and they're hungry too.

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But then your boss says, "Oh, I'll pay you tomorrow. I don't have the money with me right now." Your heart sinks. You need that money today, not tomorrow, not next week. Today. What will you feed your family tonight? Where will you sleep if you can't afford a place to stay?

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Your boss might not understand why you look so worried. From his perspective, it's just one day. He has plenty of food in his house and a comfortable bed to sleep in. He's planning to pay you eventually, so what's the problem?

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But here's what your boss doesn't realize: when you're poor and you need money today, waiting even one day can be really scary. You might have to go hungry, or borrow money from someone else, or worry all night about how you'll survive.

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Moses understood this problem, and he cared deeply about workers being treated fairly. So he gave the Israelites a very clear rule. Let's read what he said:

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## Deuteronomy 24:14-15 (NIV)

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*14 Do not take advantage of a hired worker who is poor and needy, whether that worker is a fellow Israelite or a foreigner residing in one of your towns. 15 Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it. Otherwise they may cry to the Lord against you, and you will be guilty of sin.*

Moses said that keeping wages from poor workers is "taking advantage" of them, even if you plan to pay them eventually! This wasn't just a suggestion about being nice. This was a law about being fair.

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Notice that Moses didn't just care about Israelite workers, he included foreigners too. Anyone who was working hard and needed money right away deserved to be paid quickly, no matter where they came from.

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Moses said workers should be paid "before sunset." Why sunset? Because poor workers needed to use that money the same day they earned it, to buy food for dinner and pay for a place to sleep that night.

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## Deuteronomy 24:18 (NIV)

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*18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

Moses reminded the Israelites that they used to be slaves in Egypt. They knew what it felt like to work hard and not have control over their own lives. They knew what it was like when other people had power over them and didn't use that power fairly.

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God had rescued them from slavery, and now God wanted them to use their freedom and wealth to protect other people, not to make life harder for them.

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The most serious part of Moses's law was this: if employers didn't pay workers promptly, those workers might "cry to the Lord" against their bosses. That means God would hear about it when workers weren't being treated fairly, and God would hold the bosses responsible.

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When you have the power to pay someone and they really need that money, keeping it from them, even for just a day, can cause them real pain and worry. God considers that taking advantage of people, and God cares about that.

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This law wasn't just about being nice or generous. It was about being fair. When someone works for you and needs the money right away, paying them quickly isn't a favor, it's justice. It's treating them the way God wants all people to be treated.

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Sometimes in our lives, we have money or resources that other people are depending on. Maybe we borrowed money from a friend, or maybe our parents promised to pay us for chores, or maybe someone did work for our family and is waiting to be paid.

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What we learn from Moses is that fairness means thinking about what other people need, not just what's convenient for us. When someone is counting on money from us, keeping them waiting can really hurt them, even if we don't mean any harm.

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God wants us to use whatever power we have, whether it's money, promises, or resources, to help people, not to make their lives harder. And God especially wants us to be fair to people who don't have as much power as we do.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Waiting Game

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Imagine you just finished mowing your neighbor's lawn, and they promised to pay you today because you're planning to go to the movies with friends tonight. But when you finish, they say, "Oh, I'll pay you next week when I get to the bank." How would you feel, and why would waiting be hard even though you'll still get the same amount of money eventually?

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**Listen For:** "Disappointed," "frustrated," "worried about the movies", affirm: "Yes! Even when the amount doesn't change, waiting can really mess up your plans and make you feel powerless."

#### Question 2: The Boss's Perspective

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Why do you think some employers in Moses's time might have delayed paying workers? They weren't necessarily trying to be mean, what reasons might they have had that seemed reasonable to them?

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**If They Say:** "They were busy," "They forgot," "They didn't have cash", respond "Those reasons might make sense to the boss, but what about from the worker's perspective?"

### Question 3: The Fairness Test

Moses said that delaying payment to poor workers was "taking advantage" of them. How can you tell the difference between someone who's just disorganized and someone who's actually being unfair by making people wait for money they need?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why Moses made it a law, sometimes people don't realize they're causing real harm when they delay payment."

### Question 4: Modern Day Moses

If Moses were making rules for kids today, what situations would he want us to be careful about when we have money or resources that other people are depending on?

**If They Say:** "Paying back lunch money," "Sharing allowance," "Group project supplies", affirm "Yes! Whenever people are counting on us, we need to think about their needs, not just our convenience."

Moses understood that having power over other people's money is a big responsibility. Even when we don't mean to hurt anyone, keeping people waiting for money they need can cause real problems for them. The key is thinking about what others need, not just what's easy for us.

## 4. Activity: Trust and Depend (8 minutes)

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces that when people depend on us for something they need, delays aren't just inconvenient, they can cause real stress and harm. Success looks like kids discovering that having power over what others need requires immediate responsiveness, not eventual helpfulness.

### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Trust and Depend." Everyone partner up, one person will be the Worker and one will be the Boss. Workers, you're going to do a job, and Bosses, you control the "payment" that Workers need to complete their mission.

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Here's the challenge: Workers, you have to hop on one foot across the room and back, but you can only put your other foot down at special Rest Stations that your Boss creates. Bosses, you create Rest Stations by holding your hands low to the ground like a platform. Workers absolutely need these stations, they can't complete their job without them.

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But here's the twist that connects to our lesson: Bosses, I'm going to ask you to sometimes delay creating Rest Stations when Workers need them. You'll see how this feels for Workers who are depending on you, just like workers in Moses's time depended on getting paid promptly to meet their needs.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like the situation Moses described, Workers are doing hard work and depending on Bosses to provide what they need exactly when they need it, not just eventually.

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

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Round 1: Bosses, create Rest Stations immediately when your Worker needs them. Notice how smoothly this works when Workers can depend on you responding right away to their needs.

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Round 2: Now I want Bosses to delay creating Rest Stations, wait 5-10 seconds after your Worker clearly needs a rest. You're still providing the stations eventually, but not immediately. Watch what happens to your Workers when they're depending on you but have to wait.

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Workers, I can see some of you getting tired, frustrated, or worried about falling. Bosses, notice what your delay is doing to people who are depending on you, even though you're planning to help eventually.

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Round 3: Bosses, back to immediate response. Workers, notice how different it feels when help comes right when you need it versus when you have to wait and worry.

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Perfect! Switch roles now so everyone experiences both depending on someone else and having others depend on you. Notice the difference between being reliable and being eventually helpful.

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**Watch For:** The moment when Workers start to struggle or worry during delays, this is the physical representation of what poor workers experienced when payment was delayed.

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

What did you notice about how it felt to be a Worker when Bosses delayed helping versus when they helped immediately? Even though the Bosses eventually provided Rest Stations in both rounds, was there a difference in how it felt? This is exactly what Moses understood, when people are depending on you for something they need right now, making them wait can cause real stress and harm, even if you eventually come through.

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

Here's what we learned today: When people work for us or do something helpful, paying them or helping them back quickly isn't just being nice, it's being fair. Keeping money or help from people who need it right away hurts them, even if we plan to follow through eventually.

This doesn't mean you have to give away all your money or help with everything immediately. But it does mean that when someone is counting on you, whether it's money you borrowed, allowance you promised, or help you said you'd give, think about what they need, not just what's convenient for you.

The amazing result is that when we're reliable with what people depend on us for, we help create a world where everyone can trust each other. And that's the kind of world God wants us to build together.

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

Pay attention to times when people are depending on you for something, money you borrowed, help you promised, or sharing something they need. Practice thinking, "They need this now, not later" and see how quickly you can respond. Notice how it feels different to be reliable versus just eventually helpful.

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

*Dear God, thank you for caring about workers and people who need help. Help us remember that when people depend on us for money, help, or promises, their needs matter right now, not just eventually. Show us how to be fair and reliable like you want us to be. 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 pay people quickly when they work for us, especially people who really need the money.

## 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 delayed payment to someone promising you lunch but making you wait until dinner time when you're hungry now.

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

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about fairness and helping others. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love Your Neighbor," or "God Loves Everyone." Use movements: clap hands during verses about helping, open arms wide during verses about God's love, march in place during verses about doing what's right.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our special story shape because I have an important story to tell you about being fair to people who work for us. Find a spot on the floor where you can see me clearly!

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound caring when you're Moses, sound worried when you're the worker, sound happy when you talk about fairness.

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Today we're going to meet a man named Moses who cared a lot about people being fair to each other!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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Moses was talking to God's people about how to treat workers. Some people had lots of money, and some people were very poor. The poor people had to work every single day to get money for food.

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*[Use worried expression and voice]*

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Imagine you worked really hard all day, and you were very hungry. You needed money to buy food for dinner. But your boss said, "I'll pay you tomorrow!" How would you feel?

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

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You'd be hungry all night! You'd worry about your family! That would not be fair, even if you got paid the next day.

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*[Move to center, speak with authority and love like Moses]*

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Moses said, "This is not okay! If someone works for you and needs money today, you must pay them today!"

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*[Walk around the horseshoe, speaking firmly]*

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Moses made a rule. He said, "Pay workers before the sun goes down! Don't make them wait when they need money for food!"

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**Deuteronomy 24:15 (NIV)**

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*15 Pay them their wages each day before sunset, because they are poor and are counting on it.*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you think Moses was right to care about hungry workers? Yes! Everyone deserves to get paid when they need it!

*[Move to center, speak with warmth]*

But Moses said something else important. He said, "Remember when you were slaves in Egypt and nobody treated you fairly!"

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

God had saved his people from being slaves. Now God wanted them to be fair to other people who worked for them.

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

Moses said keeping money from workers who need it is wrong! Even if you plan to pay them later, making them wait when they're hungry is not fair.

*[Speak with excitement]*

God loves workers! God wants everyone to be treated fairly! When people work hard, they should get their money right away!

*[Pause dramatically]*

God can hear when workers are sad because they didn't get paid. God cares about fairness!

*[Speak directly to the children]*

Sometimes in our lives, people do work for us or help us. Maybe someone helps with yard work, or someone helps your parents, or you do chores to earn money.

*[Move closer to the children]*

When someone works and needs money, God wants us to pay them quickly! Don't make them wait and worry!

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

God loves it when we're fair and kind. God wants us to take care of people who work hard, just like Moses taught!

### 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 where you have space to talk! I'll give each pair one question to discuss. 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 workers felt when they had to wait for their money?
2. What would you do if someone promised to pay you but then said "wait until tomorrow"?
3. Why did Moses care so much about workers getting paid quickly?
4. What would you tell a boss who always made workers wait for their money?
5. How do you think God feels when workers don't get paid on time?
6. What jobs do people do to help your family?
7. Why is it important to pay people right away when they need money?
8. How can kids be fair about money and helping?
9. What would happen if everyone always paid workers quickly?

10. How is waiting for money you earned different from waiting for a birthday present?

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11. What does it mean to "count on" money you've earned?

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12. Why did Moses make this a rule instead of just a suggestion?

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13. How does God help workers who aren't treated fairly?

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14. What would you do if you saw someone not paying a worker?

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15. How can we remember to be fair to people who work?

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16. What makes someone a good boss or employer?

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17. How is being fair different from being nice?

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18. What can kids do to help workers be treated fairly?

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19. How would you feel if you worked hard but didn't get paid?

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20. What did Moses teach us about treating workers?

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

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

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

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Select songs about fairness, helping others, or God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "If You're Happy and You Know It" (with verses about being fair), or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: clap hands for fairness, hug yourself when singing about God's love, march in place for action verses.

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

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Moses who taught people to be fair to workers.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to pay people quickly when they work for us. Help us be fair and kind to everyone who helps our families.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving workers and caring about fairness. Help us be like Moses and stand up for what's right.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for teaching us to care about other people. Help us remember that you want everyone to be treated fairly. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about fairness or helping workers. Examples: "God, help people get paid when they work" or "Thank you for people who help us."

Remember, God wants us to be fair to people who work and help us. When people need money they earned, we should help them get it quickly. Have a wonderful week being fair and kind like God wants!

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# Standing for Justice

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*Protecting the Powerless, How do we recognize when our systems exploit the vulnerable?*

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**Deuteronomy 24:17-22**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (NIV)**

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*17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

*19 When you are harvesting in your field and you forget a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 22 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.*

## Context

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These commands come from the heart of Moses's farewell speeches to Israel as they prepare to enter the Promised Land. Deuteronomy records God's blueprint for a just society, laws that would govern how Israel treats the most vulnerable people in their midst. Moses is laying out the moral foundation that will

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distinguish Israel from the surrounding nations and reflect God's character.

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Immediately before these verses, Moses has been addressing various aspects of family law, economic transactions, and social responsibility. Now he turns to three specific groups who have no social safety net: foreigners (immigrants without citizenship rights), orphans (children without family protection), and widows (women without economic support). These are the people most likely to be overlooked, exploited, or denied justice when society fails to protect them.

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## The Big Idea

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God's people must actively ensure that vulnerable populations receive justice and economic protection, because experiencing God's redemption creates a moral obligation to prevent others from being exploited or oppressed.

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This isn't simply about charity or kindness, it's about structural justice and recognizing exploitation even when it's technically legal. God is concerned not just with individual acts of kindness but with systems that either protect or exploit the powerless. The complexity lies in discerning when our economic practices, however normal they seem to us, actually endanger the survival and dignity of vulnerable people.

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## Theological Core

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- **Justice protection for the powerless.** God requires his people to actively ensure that foreigners, orphans, and widows receive fair treatment in legal and economic systems, not just avoid harming them directly.
  - **Economic exploitation prohibition.** Practices that endanger vulnerable people's survival, like taking a widow's cloak as collateral, are forbidden even if they're standard business practice, because they prioritize profit over human dignity.
  - **Redemption memory shapes ethics.** Israel's identity as people rescued from slavery must transform how they treat others who lack power, creating a cycle of liberation rather than oppression.
  - **Systemic responsibility beyond individual acts.** God calls his people to examine and change systems that deprive vulnerable populations of basic needs, not just practice personal kindness while ignoring structural injustice.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- How to identify contemporary practices that exploit economically vulnerable people, particularly in lending, housing, and legal systems
  - Why seemingly normal business practices can be deeply unjust when they endanger people's survival and dignity
  - How experiencing God's grace creates moral responsibility to work for others' justice, not just personal gratitude
  - The difference between charity that maintains unjust systems and justice that changes them to protect the powerless
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- That God cares about people who don't have families, money, or safe places to live, and wants us to care too
  - How to notice when someone is being left out or treated unfairly and choose to include or defend them
  - Why sharing our resources with people who need them isn't just nice but reflects God's heart for justice
  - That it's okay to feel sad about unfairness and still choose to do what's right to help others
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#### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to be extra kind to people who don't have families or homes
  - God loves everyone and wants everyone to have what they need to live
  - We can share our food and belongings with people who need them
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Reducing justice to individual charity.** This passage isn't just about being personally generous, it's about examining systems that exploit vulnerable people. Avoid teaching that individual kindness is sufficient when structural change is needed to protect the powerless.
  - **Minimizing economic exploitation concerns.** The cloak prohibition isn't arbitrary, taking someone's essential survival item as collateral could literally endanger their life. Don't soften this to mere "be nice" when God is addressing life-threatening economic practices.
  - **Treating justice as optional for Christians.** These aren't suggestions for extra-spiritual people but commands rooted in Israel's identity as redeemed people. Avoid presenting justice work as a special calling rather than a basic response to experiencing God's grace.
  - **Ignoring contemporary parallels.** Don't leave this in ancient Israel without helping students recognize modern equivalents of taking widows' cloaks or depriving foreigners of justice. The principles apply directly to current economic and legal systems.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"How can we tell if something that seems normal is actually exploiting people?"**

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Great question, even things that are legal or common can be unjust. Ask these questions: Does this practice endanger someone's survival or dignity? Does it take advantage of someone who has fewer choices or less power? Would you want to be treated this way if you were in their situation? God calls us to look beyond what's technically allowed to what protects human dignity. Sometimes we need to research and listen to people who are affected by these systems to understand their impact.

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### **"Why should people today care about something God told ancient Israel?"**

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Because God's character hasn't changed, he still cares about justice for vulnerable people. These commands show us what God values and how he wants human societies to function. The specific situations might be different now, but the principles about protecting the powerless from exploitation

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apply to every generation. As people who've experienced God's grace, we're called to reflect his heart for justice in our own time and culture.

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### **"What if helping others requires us to sacrifice things we've worked hard for?"**

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This passage actually addresses that concern, God reminds Israel that they were once powerless slaves who needed liberation. None of what they have was earned independently of God's grace. That doesn't mean God wants us to be irresponsible, but it does mean recognizing that our resources come with responsibility to ensure others have access to basic needs. The goal isn't impoverishing ourselves but creating systems where everyone's dignity is protected.

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

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**Experiencing God's grace must transform us into people who actively protect the vulnerable from exploitation, even when that means challenging systems that seem normal to us.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to recognize how God's commands about economic justice apply to modern systems that exploit vulnerable people. Help them wrestle with the tension between practices that seem normal in our culture and God's call to protect the powerless from being deprived of justice or having their survival endangered for others' profit.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we recognize when our normal economic and legal systems are actually exploiting vulnerable people? What modern practices might be equivalent to "taking a widow's cloak as a pledge"?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate that these issues are complex and that students may not have considered economic practices from this angle before
- Help students see patterns rather than getting lost in details, the principle is protecting vulnerable people from exploitation
- Let students discover contemporary applications rather than lecturing about specific issues, guide their thinking process

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

Imagine you're scrolling through social media and see an ad that says: "Need cash fast? Get a loan in 15 minutes! No credit check required!" It sounds helpful, right? Someone needs money quickly, and this company can provide it immediately. But then you find out the interest rate is 400% annually, meaning someone who borrows \$300 would owe \$1,500 after a year. Suddenly what seemed helpful looks different.

You think, "Well, that's their choice, nobody forced them to take the loan." And that's true. But then you learn that these loans specifically target people in desperate situations, single mothers whose kids need medicine, elderly people facing utility shutoffs, families who lost jobs and can't make rent. The companies set up shops in low-income neighborhoods because they know people there have fewer options.

Now you're facing a harder question: Is this just business, or is it exploitation? The company isn't technically breaking the law. The borrowers are making their own decisions. But something about the whole situation feels wrong, like someone's desperation is being turned into someone else's profit, and the most vulnerable people are the ones who suffer.

This is exactly the kind of ethical tension that ancient Israel faced with economic practices that seemed normal but actually endangered vulnerable people's survival. Today we're looking at some of God's most direct commands about protecting the powerless from exploitation. As we read, pay attention to what makes certain economic practices unacceptable to God, even if they're standard business practice.

Open your Bibles to Deuteronomy 24, starting with verse 17. We'll read silently first, then discuss what catches your attention.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Watch for students who finish early and invite them to reread looking for details they missed. Some may need help understanding "taking the cloak of a widow as a pledge", explain quietly that this means taking someone's coat as collateral for a loan. Let them sit with the weight of what God is commanding here.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What specific groups does God mention, and what do they have in common?
  - Why would taking a widow's cloak as a pledge be particularly problematic?
  - What reason does God give for these commands, and how does it connect to Israel's history?
  - How do you imagine you would respond if you were part of one of these vulnerable groups?
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### Deuteronomy 24:17-22 (NIV)

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*17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

*19 When you are harvesting in your field and you forget a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 22 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this.*

## 3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

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### Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read with expression. Choose confident readers for verses 17-18 since these contain the core commands. Let readers pass if they're not comfortable.

**Reader 1:** Verses 17-18 (The justice commands and redemption reason) **Reader 2:** Verses 19-21 (The harvest provisions) **Reader 3:** Verse 22 (The repeated reminder of Egypt)

Listen for the emotion behind these commands, this isn't just policy, it's personal. God cares deeply about how vulnerable people are treated.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to brainstorm questions. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What seems hardest to understand?"

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 confused by. Don't worry about whether they're "good" questions. What made you think "Why..." or "How..." or "What does it mean when..."? You have 3 minutes. Go.

### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

**Remember:** Let students drive the discussion with their questions. Your job is to facilitate and probe deeper, not to lecture. Guide them to discover insights rather than telling them what to think.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions. (Write them on board as students share. Look for themes and start with questions most students will connect with.)

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that God cares about more than individual kindness, that he's concerned with systems and structures?"
- "Why would God specifically prohibit taking a widow's cloak as collateral? What does that tell us about his priorities?"
- "How does remembering their slavery in Egypt connect to these justice commands? What's the logic there?"

- "What's the difference between charity and justice in this passage? Are they the same thing?"
- "What would be modern equivalents of 'depriving foreigners of justice' or 'taking a widow's cloak'?"
- "How might someone justify practices that God calls exploitative? What would their reasoning sound like?"
- "If you were advising someone who had experienced these commands, what would be hardest for them to accept?"
- "Why does this matter for people today who aren't ancient Israelites?"

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### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? God isn't just saying "be nice to poor people." He's saying "examine your economic systems and make sure they don't exploit people who have fewer options." The cloak prohibition is key, taking someone's coat as collateral could literally endanger their survival, even if it was standard business practice. God prioritizes human dignity and survival over profit, even when the profit seems legitimate.

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

Let's get real about your lives and our world. Where do you see this same pattern playing out today, practices that seem normal or legal but actually exploit people who have fewer choices? Think about economics, legal systems, education, healthcare, housing. What would be today's equivalent of taking someone's cloak as collateral?

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### Real Issues This Connects To

- Payday loans and predatory lending that target desperate people with impossible interest rates
  - Immigration policies that make it easy for employers to exploit undocumented workers
  - Rent-to-own stores that charge poor families much more for basic appliances and furniture
  - School discipline policies that disproportionately punish students without family advocates
  - Healthcare systems that bankrupt families facing medical emergencies
  - Criminal justice systems where wealth determines access to adequate legal representation
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations are more complex than others. Help them think through what makes something exploitative versus challenging but fair.

### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone stand up for a person who was being treated unfairly?"
  - "What would help you recognize when something that seems normal is actually exploitative?"
  - "How do you balance your own needs with responsibility to protect others from exploitation?"
  - "What's the difference between helping someone in a tough situation and changing systems that create tough situations?"
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### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Experiencing God's grace must change how we see our responsibility to others, especially people who have fewer choices and less power than we do. It's not enough to avoid directly hurting people, God calls us to actively examine whether our normal systems exploit vulnerable people and to work for their protection. This isn't easy or comfortable, because it means questioning things that seem normal to us.

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This week, pay attention to news stories, conversations, and situations where you notice someone being treated differently because they have less power, money, or legal protection. Notice what you feel when you see inequality or exploitation. That feeling might be God's Spirit nudging you toward justice. You don't have to solve everything, but start by seeing and caring.

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You asked really thoughtful questions today and wrestled honestly with difficult issues. Keep asking those questions. God honors people who care enough about justice to think deeply about it, even when it's complicated. The world needs people who will stand up for others who can't stand up for themselves.

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### Grades 4, 6

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## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God wants us to protect and include people who don't have families, homes, or money to take care of themselves. Show them how sharing what we have isn't just nice but reflects God's heart for fairness and justice.

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## If Kids Ask "Why doesn't God just give everyone what they need?"

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Say: "God does want everyone to have what they need, and he asks us to help make that happen. We get to be part of God's plan to take care of people who need help."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been the new kid at school or in a group where you didn't know anyone. Keep it up if it felt scary or lonely at first. I see a lot of hands, that feeling of being on the outside is something almost everyone has experienced at some point.

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Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever seen someone being left out or treated unfairly, and part of you wanted to help them, but another part of you worried that standing up for them might make things harder for you. Maybe you worried the mean kids would target you next, or that you'd lose friends by defending someone else.

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Those feelings are totally normal and they make sense. Your brain is trying to keep you safe, and speaking up for others can sometimes feel risky. But it's also frustrating when you see someone being hurt and you're not sure what to do about it. Sometimes you might think, "Someone else will help them" or "It's not really my problem."

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This situation is a lot like what happens in movies when the main character has to choose between staying safe and helping someone who's in trouble. Think about stories like Moana choosing to help her island even though it's dangerous, or Miguel in Coco standing up for music even when his family disapproves. The heroes always have that moment where they could walk away, but something inside them says "This isn't right, and I need to do something."

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The tricky part is figuring out when it's our job to help someone else, especially when helping them might cost us something or when it seems like other people should be the ones taking care of it.

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Today we're going to hear about some commands God gave his people about taking care of people who didn't have families or money to protect them. God had very strong feelings about how these vulnerable people should be treated. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share about times they felt left out or saw others excluded. Acknowledge their experiences briefly with "That sounds hard" or "You showed courage," then keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture this: thousands and thousands of people are gathered together in the wilderness, like the biggest outdoor assembly you can imagine. Moses, their leader for forty years, is getting ready to say goodbye because God is calling him home.

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These people, the Israelites, are about to enter a brand new land where they'll build homes, plant crops, and create a new society. They're excited but also nervous. How should they treat each other? What kind of community should they become?

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Moses knows this is his last chance to teach them the most important things God wants them to remember. So he stands up in front of all those people and begins sharing God's heart about something very close to God's care: how to treat people who don't have anyone to protect them.

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Imagine you're there, sitting on the ground, listening as Moses speaks with passion in his voice. He's not just giving rules, he's sharing God's heart.

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Moses looks out at the crowd and says, "Listen carefully. There are going to be people in your new land who don't have what you have. Some will be foreigners, people from other countries who don't have citizenship or family connections. Some will be children whose parents have died, orphans with no one to take care of them. Some will be widows, women whose husbands have died and who have no way to make money or protect themselves."

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The crowd is listening intently. These are situations they know about. In their time, if you didn't have family or money, life was extremely dangerous. There were no government programs, no social workers, no safety nets. If your family couldn't help you, you might starve or freeze to death.

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Moses's voice gets stronger as he continues: "Here's what God commands: Do not deprive these people of justice. Don't let them be treated unfairly in court just because they don't have money for good lawyers or powerful friends to speak for them."

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Then Moses says something that catches everyone's attention: "And here's something very specific, never, ever take a widow's cloak as a pledge for a loan."

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People start looking at each other. A cloak was like someone's winter coat, blanket, and sleeping bag all rolled into one. It's what kept you warm at night when temperatures dropped. Taking someone's cloak as collateral for a loan was like taking their only protection against freezing to death.

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### **Deuteronomy 24:17-18 (NIV)**

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*17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge. 18 Remember that you were slaves in Egypt and the Lord your God redeemed you from there. That is why I command you to do this.*

Moses pauses to let that sink in, then he explains why this matters so much to God. "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt," he says. "You know what it feels like to be powerless. You know what it's like when people with more power treat you unfairly. God rescued you from that situation, he set you free and gave you a new life."

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The people nod. They remember the stories their parents told them about slavery in Egypt, about making bricks without straw, about crying out to God for help when their situation seemed hopeless.

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Moses continues, "Because God rescued you when you were powerless, now you must rescue others who are powerless. Because God protected you when no one else would, now you must protect people who have no one else to protect them."

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But Moses isn't finished. He has more to say about how they should share what they have. "When you're harvesting your fields," he tells them, "and you accidentally drop some grain or forget to pick up a bundle, don't go back and get it. Leave it there for the foreigners, orphans, and widows to find."

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Some people might think, "But we worked hard for that grain! Why should we leave it for others?" Moses anticipates this reaction.

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"When you're gathering olives from your trees," Moses continues, "don't go over the branches a second time trying to get every single olive. Leave some for people who need them."

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"When you're picking grapes in your vineyard, don't go through the vines again looking for grapes you missed. Leave those for the foreigners, the orphans, and the widows."

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**Deuteronomy 24:19-21 (NIV)**

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*19 When you are harvesting in your field and you forget a sheaf, do not go back to get it. Leave it for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow, so that the Lord your God may bless you in all the work of your hands. 20 When you beat the olives from your trees, do not go over the branches a second time. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow. 21 When you harvest the grapes in your vineyard, do not go over the vines again. Leave what remains for the foreigner, the fatherless and the widow.*

Then Moses says it again, because it's so important: "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt. That is why I command you to do this."

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This isn't just about being nice or generous. God is telling his people that their entire society should be organized around protecting people who can't protect themselves. He's saying that making sure vulnerable people have food, fair treatment, and dignity is not optional, it's central to being God's people.

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Moses is showing them that experiencing God's rescue should change everything about how they treat others. They're not just individuals trying to get ahead, they're a community responsible for each other's wellbeing, especially the wellbeing of those who are most at risk.

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The crowd sits in thoughtful silence as Moses's words sink in. They're beginning to understand that God doesn't just care about how they worship him, he cares deeply about how they treat each other, especially people who have the least power and the fewest options.

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God's message is clear: a society that lets vulnerable people suffer while others prosper is not reflecting God's heart. But a society that makes sure everyone has what they need to survive and thrive, that's the kind of community God wants to see.

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Sometimes in our lives today, we see people who don't have families to help them, or enough money for what they need, or anyone to stand up for them when they're treated unfairly. God wants us to notice these people and find ways to help them, just like he commanded the Israelites.

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What we learn from this is that God doesn't want anyone to be forgotten or left behind. He wants communities where people look out for each other, especially those who need extra help and protection.

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The amazing thing is that when we share what we have and protect people who need protection, we're reflecting God's own heart. We become part of his plan to make sure everyone is cared for and treated with dignity.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Scary Feelings

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Imagine you're a widow in Moses's time, your husband has died, you have no way to make money, and you need to borrow some grain to feed your children. Someone offers to lend it to you, but they want your winter coat as a promise that you'll pay them back. You know that without your coat, you might freeze at night, but without the grain, your children might go hungry. What would you be feeling in that situation?

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**Listen For:** "Scared," "trapped," "angry," "helpless", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. This person has no good choices, which is why God was so concerned about protecting people in situations like this."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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Now imagine you're an Israelite farmer who has worked really hard all season to grow grain for your family. You notice that you dropped some grain bundles during harvest, and you know some hungry people might come looking for food. Part of you thinks, "I worked hard for this, I should go back and get it." But you remember God's command to leave it for people who need it. What makes this choice difficult?

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**If They Say:** "I'd want to keep it for my family", respond "That makes sense. It's natural to want to take care of the people you love. What do you think God understood about those feelings when he gave this command?"

### Question 3: The Pattern

God keeps reminding the Israelites, "Remember that you were slaves in Egypt." Why do you think he connects their experience of being rescued with how they should treat foreigners, orphans, and widows? What's the connection between being helped when you needed it and helping others who need it?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why God wanted them to remember, experiencing God's help should change how we see our responsibility to help others."

### Question 4: The Result

What do you think would happen to a community that followed these commands? How would it be different from a community where people only looked out for themselves and their own families? What kind of place would it be to live in?

**If They Say:** "Everyone would be happier" or "safer", respond "What would make it safer for people who don't have families or money to protect them?"

You're all thinking deeply about this. What I hear in your responses is that God cares about creating communities where vulnerable people are protected, not just where strong people get stronger. That's still God's heart today, he wants us to notice people who need help and find ways to include and protect them.

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

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of moving from exclusion to inclusion by having kids physically experience what it feels like to be left out and then intentionally included. Success looks like kids

discovering that including others makes the whole group stronger and more complete, just like God's commands about caring for vulnerable people.

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

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We're going to do an activity called "The Inclusion Circle." I need six volunteers to start by forming a tight circle in the center of the room, linking arms and facing inward. Everyone else, spread out around the edges of the room, you're going to be the "outsiders" for the first part.

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Here's the challenge: the people in the circle are trying to stay together as a tight group. The people on the outside want to join the circle, but they can only get in if someone in the circle intentionally makes space for them and invites them in. No pushing or forcing your way in, you can only join if someone chooses to include you.

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The twist is this: the circle can only stay strong if it keeps growing. If it stays small and exclusive, it will eventually weaken and break apart. But if it keeps including new people, it becomes more stable and powerful than before.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like Moses's commands to the Israelites, they had to choose between keeping what they had for themselves or including vulnerable people in their community. Let's see what happens when we practice inclusion.

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

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Start with the circle staying closed for about 30 seconds. Outsiders, try to make eye contact and ask to join, but respect that you can't force your way in. Circle members, notice how it feels to have people wanting in but being unable to help them.

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Now I'm going to start coaching the circle: "I notice you're trying to stay strong by staying small, but what happens when you exclude people who want to belong? I wonder if there's another way to be strong..." Watch how the circle members respond to the tension.

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When someone in the circle starts to open up and invite outsiders in, immediately celebrate: "Look what's happening! The circle is growing stronger by including people, not by keeping them out!" Help others see the success of inclusion.

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Keep encouraging more inclusion: "Who else can be invited in? How many people can this circle include and still stay strong?" Push them to discover that including everyone actually makes the group

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most powerful.

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Once everyone is included, have them feel the strength of the full circle: "Notice how much stronger this circle is now that everyone is included. This is what Moses was teaching, communities are strongest when everyone belongs."

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**Watch For:** The moment when circle members start choosing to include others, this is the physical representation of moving from self-protection to community care, just like God's commands to Israel.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt to be outside the circle versus being included? And for those in the circle, what changed when you started including others instead of keeping them out? This is exactly what God was teaching the Israelites, true strength comes from including vulnerable people, not from protecting what you have from them. When everyone belongs and everyone is cared for, the whole community becomes stronger.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God wants us to protect and include people who don't have families, money, or power to take care of themselves. This doesn't mean being foolish or unsafe, but it does mean actively looking for ways to share what we have and stand up for people who are being left out or treated unfairly.

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This doesn't mean you have to give away everything you own or fix every problem you see. But it does mean paying attention when someone is being excluded or needs help, and asking God to show you what you can do about it.

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The amazing result is that when we follow God's heart for justice and inclusion, our communities become places where everyone can thrive, not just the people who already have advantages. That's the kind of world God wants to see.

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

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This week, notice if there's someone at school, in your neighborhood, or in your family who seems left out or like they need help. It might be a new student who doesn't know anyone, a classmate who gets

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teased, or an elderly neighbor who lives alone. Ask God to show you one small way you can include them or help them feel less alone.

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

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*God, thank you for caring about people who don't have families or money to protect them. Help us notice when someone needs help or feels left out. Give us courage to share what we have and include people who need friends. Help us remember that you rescued us so that we can help rescue others. Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to be extra kind to people who don't have families or homes, and that sharing with people who need help makes God happy.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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Compare taking someone's coat for a loan to taking away their favorite stuffed animal, then ask "Would that be fair?"

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's love and kindness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God Is So Good," or "Love, Love, Love." Use movements: point up to God on "God" lyrics, hug yourself on "love" lyrics, reach out to friends on "everyone" lyrics.

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Great singing! Now let's sit in our listening shape on the floor. Today we're going to hear about how much God loves people who don't have families to take care of them, and how he wants us to share with people who need help.

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

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

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

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Today we're going to meet a man named Moses who loved God very much.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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Moses had been taking care of God's people for a long, long time. Now he was getting very old, and God had a special message for him to tell everyone.

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*[Use a caring, gentle voice]*

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God said, "Moses, I want you to tell my people something very important. Tell them about people who don't have families or homes."

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

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You see, there were some people who didn't have moms and dads to take care of them. There were people from other places who didn't have homes. There were women whose husbands had died and they felt very alone.

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*[Move to center, speak with love]*

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God loves these people very much! He didn't want anyone to be mean to them or forget about them.

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*[Move to side, sound like Moses teaching]*

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So Moses stood up in front of all the people and said, "Listen! God wants us to be extra kind to people who don't have families to help them."

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**Deuteronomy 24:17 (NIV)**

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*17 Do not deprive the foreigner or the fatherless of justice, or take the cloak of a widow as a pledge.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you know what a cloak is? It's like a big warm coat that keeps you cozy at night! Moses said, "Never take away someone's warm coat, even if they owe you money. That's not fair!"

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*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

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But Moses wasn't finished! He had more to tell them about sharing. God said, "When you're picking food from your garden, don't pick up every single thing."

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, pretending to pick fruit]*

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"If you drop some food, leave it there. If you forget to pick some fruit, don't go back and get it. Let people who are hungry come and take it!"

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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The people asked, "Why should we give away our food?" Moses smiled and told them something wonderful.

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*[Speak with warmth]*

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Moses said, "Remember when you were sad and needed help? God helped you! Now God wants you to help other people when they're sad and need help."

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God doesn't want anyone to be hungry or cold or lonely. He wants everyone to have what they need!

*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes today we see kids who don't have anyone to play with, or people who don't have enough food, or families who need help. God wants us to be kind to them and share what we have.

*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone is sad or lonely or hungry, you can share your snack, invite them to play, or ask a grown-up to help them. That makes God very happy!

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves everyone, and he wants everyone to feel loved and cared for. When we help people who need help, we're showing them God's love!

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

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

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

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

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#### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How would you feel if you were cold and someone took away your coat?

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2. When have you shared something with someone who needed it?

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3. Why do you think Moses cared so much about people who were alone?

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4. What would you do if you saw someone who looked hungry?

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5. How did the people feel when God helped them?

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6. Why does God want us to help people who are sad?

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7. What happened when people shared their food?

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8. Have you ever seen someone at school who looked lonely?

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9. How can we help people in our families who are sad?

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10. Who do you know that is really good at sharing?

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11. Why did Moses tell people to leave food for hungry people?

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12. How can we show kindness to new kids at school?

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13. What does it mean that God loves everyone?

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14. When is it hard to share with others?

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15. How do you feel when someone shares with you?

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16. What did you learn about God today?

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17. How can we remember to help people who need help?

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18. What would you pray for people who don't have homes?

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19. What would happen if everyone shared with people who needed help?

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20. How can we be like Moses and tell others about God's love?

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

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

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

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Select a song about sharing and caring. Suggestions: "Share God's Love," "Love One Another," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: hug yourself on "love" words, reach out to others on "share" words, point up on "God" words.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Fold your hands and close your eyes so we can talk to God.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for loving everyone, especially people who don't have families to take care of them.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to share our toys and snacks with friends who need them. Help us be kind to kids who feel lonely or sad.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for taking care of us every day. Help us take care of others the way you take care of us. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "God, help me share my lunch" or "Help people who don't have homes."

Remember, God loves it when we help people who need help. Look for ways to be kind this week, and remember that God loves everyone very much!

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# Love Without Borders

*God's Heart for Foreigners, How Do We Balance National Boundaries with Foreigner-Love?*

**Leviticus 19:26-37**

## Instructor Preparation

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

## The Passage

**Leviticus 19:26-37 (NIV)**

*26 Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it. Do not practice divination or seek omens. 27 Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. 28 Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord.*

*29 Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness. 30 Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.*

*31 Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God. 32 Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.*

*33 When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

*35 Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. 36 Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. 37 Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord.*

## Context

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Leviticus 19 contains the Holiness Code, a series of practical commands for Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land. This chapter comes after God's instructions for worship and sacrifice, turning to daily ethics and community life. The repeated phrase "I am the Lord" appears throughout, anchoring every command in God's character and authority. These aren't arbitrary rules but reflections of God's own nature.

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The command about foreigners appears in a string of seemingly unrelated laws, about hair cutting, honest business practices, and respect for elders. This placement is intentional: treating foreigners well isn't a separate "social justice" category but part of comprehensive holiness. The immediate context contrasts authentic worship (Sabbath observance, sanctuary reverence) with false spirituality (mediums, spiritists), suggesting that how we treat vulnerable outsiders reveals the authenticity of our faith.

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## The Big Idea

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**Foreigners in our communities deserve the same treatment and love we give fellow citizens, because God's love transcends ethnic boundaries and our own histories of displacement should shape how we welcome others.**

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This isn't simply about being nice to outsiders, it's about extending the radical neighbor-love command across ethnic and national lines. The text intensifies from "don't mistreat" to "treat as native-born" to "love as yourself," revealing God's progressive heart for inclusion. The appeal to Egypt reminds Israel that they understand vulnerability and displacement firsthand, creating empathy as the foundation for ethics.

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## Theological Core

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- **Love transcends ethnic boundaries.** The neighbor-love command ("love as yourself") applies equally to foreigners, demolishing any notion that God's care is limited by nationality or ethnicity.
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- **Memory shapes ethics.** Remembering our own or our ancestors' experiences of displacement, vulnerability, or being outsiders should fundamentally shape how we treat those in similar positions today.
- **Community membership is expandable.** Foreigners can be treated "as native-born," suggesting that belonging isn't fixed by birth but can be extended through intentional inclusion and welcome.
- **Holiness includes hospitality.** Right relationship with God necessarily involves right relationship with foreigners, authentic spirituality cannot coexist with mistreatment of vulnerable outsiders.

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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- The neighbor-love command extends across ethnic and national lines without exception
  - Authentic faith requires wrestling with the tension between national loyalty and universal love
  - Our own family histories of displacement or vulnerability should shape our response to current immigrants and refugees
  - God's holiness includes radical hospitality, mistreating foreigners contradicts authentic spirituality
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- People who are new or from different places deserve the same kindness we want for ourselves
  - Remembering times we felt left out helps us understand how to include others
  - Making someone feel welcome can change their whole experience of being different
  - Fear of different people is normal, but choosing kindness anyway is what God wants
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God loves all people no matter where they come from or what they look like
  - God wants us to be extra kind to people who are new or different
  - We can help new people feel welcome and loved
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Oversimplifying immigration policy.** This passage addresses heart attitudes and community treatment, not comprehensive immigration law. Avoid suggesting that biblical hospitality alone resolves complex policy questions, while maintaining that Scripture speaks powerfully to how we treat those who are already among us.
  - **Ignoring the "among you" qualifier.** The text specifically addresses foreigners already residing in the community. Don't bypass the complexity of how this applies to border policies or entry requirements, but focus on the clear command regarding those already present.
  - **Spiritualizing away practical implications.** This isn't merely about being inwardly loving while maintaining systemic exclusion. The text demands concrete equal treatment in practical matters like legal protection, economic opportunity, and social inclusion.
  - **Assuming universal application without discernment.** The repeated nature of this command in Torah suggests it was difficult and required ongoing attention. Acknowledge that extending radical welcome across ethnic lines challenges natural human tendencies and requires spiritual transformation.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### "Does this mean we can't have any border controls or immigration laws?"

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This passage focuses on how we treat foreigners who are already living among us, not on entry policies. Nations have historically maintained borders while practicing radical hospitality to residents. The text calls us to examine whether our treatment of immigrants, in our schools, neighborhoods, workplaces,

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and churches, reflects the love-as-yourself standard. We can disagree on policy while agreeing on the call to practical love for those already in our communities.

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### **"What if immigrants don't follow our laws or respect our culture?"**

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The text places the obligation on the host community first, "you must treat them as native-born", before addressing immigrant behavior. Israel's history in Egypt reminds them that foreigners often struggle to adapt while facing systemic disadvantages. This doesn't excuse lawbreaking, but it calls us to examine whether we've created environments where immigrants can thrive and contribute. Equal treatment under law cuts both ways: equal expectations alongside equal opportunities and protections.

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### **"How do we balance love for foreigners with responsibility to our own citizens?"**

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The genius of "love as yourself" is that it assumes appropriate self-care while extending that same care to others. We're not called to harm ourselves or neglect legitimate responsibilities, but to extend our circle of concern. Often, caring for foreigners actually strengthens communities through increased economic activity, cultural enrichment, and expanded social networks. The false choice between "us" and "them" dissolves when we recognize that flourishing communities include all residents.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God's love has no borders, and our own experiences of being outsiders should teach us to welcome others with the same love we want for ourselves.**

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

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle honestly with the tension between natural human preferences for "our own people" and God's radical command to love foreigners as ourselves. Help them discover how their own family stories of displacement or being outsiders can shape their ethics toward current immigrants and refugees.

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## The Tension to Frame

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How do we balance legitimate concern for our communities and nation with God's clear command to love foreigners as ourselves? Where's the line between wise boundaries and ethnic favoritism?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate that this feels complicated, it challenged ancient Israel too, which is why the command appears multiple times in different forms
  - Honor students' family backgrounds and political perspectives while exploring what Scripture specifically demands
  - Let them wrestle with apparent contradictions rather than offering quick resolutions, spiritual growth happens in the tension
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Imagine you're at a new school where you don't know anyone, don't fully understand all the unwritten social rules, maybe your family has less money than most families there, and your accent or background makes you obviously different. You sit in the cafeteria alone, you misunderstand assignments, and you can tell people are talking about you. Now imagine that instead of anyone reaching out, most students just ignore you or make comments about how you don't belong there.

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That feeling in your stomach, that mixture of loneliness, frustration, and hurt, makes perfect sense. Most of us have experienced some version of being the outsider, and we remember how much we wanted someone, anyone, to be genuinely kind to us. We wanted to be treated like we belonged, like we mattered, like we were worth knowing.

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Now flip it: think about a time when you saw someone new at your school, in your neighborhood, or in your friend group. If you're honest, your first instinct probably wasn't to immediately include them. Maybe you felt a little threatened, or you just didn't want the social complications. Maybe you stayed in your comfortable group and let someone else deal with the new person. That reaction is totally human and understandable.

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Today we're looking at a command from God that cuts right through that natural human tendency. God told ancient Israel, and tells us, to love foreigners the same way we love ourselves. Not just be polite to

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them, not just avoid being mean, but actually love them like we love ourselves. And notice what we should pay attention to: how God builds this argument and what memory he appeals to in order to motivate this radical love.

Open your Bibles to Leviticus 19, starting at verse 26. We'll read silently first, then talk about what makes this both beautiful and really difficult.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students. Help with any difficult words like "ephah" or "hin." Watch for early finishers and let slower readers take their time. The contrast between these practical laws and the radical foreigner-love command should feel striking.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What kinds of laws surround the foreigner command? How does the context make you think differently about it?
- Notice the progression: "don't mistreat" to "treat as native-born" to "love as yourself", what's happening there?
- What's the reasoning God gives? Why should Israel care about foreigners?
- What would this have felt like for ancient Israel? What would it feel like for you?

### Leviticus 19:26-37 (NIV)

*26 Do not eat any meat with the blood still in it. Do not practice divination or seek omens. 27 Do not cut the hair at the sides of your head or clip off the edges of your beard. 28 Do not cut your bodies for the dead or put tattoo marks on yourselves. I am the Lord.*

*29 Do not degrade your daughter by making her a prostitute, or the land will turn to prostitution and be filled with wickedness. 30 Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.*

*31 Do not turn to mediums or seek out spiritists, for you will be defiled by them. I am the Lord your God. 32 Stand up in the presence of the aged, show respect for the elderly and revere your God. I am the Lord.*

*33 When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

*35 Do not use dishonest standards when measuring length, weight or quantity. 36 Use honest scales and honest weights, an honest ephah and an honest hin. I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of Egypt. 37 Keep all my decrees and all my laws and follow them. I am the Lord.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Choose confident readers for the foreigner passage (verses 33-34) since it's the focus. Let students pass if they're uncomfortable reading aloud.

**Reader 1:** Verses 26-30 (Various laws and Sabbath observance) **Reader 2:** Verses 31-32 (Mediums and respecting elders) **Reader 3:** Verses 33-37 (Foreigner love and honest business)

Listen for the different kinds of laws here, some seem practical, some spiritual, some social. Notice how the foreigner command fits into this mix of instructions.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. If a group is stuck, ask "What surprised you most about how God talks about foreigners?" or "What feels challenging about these verses?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1 or 2 genuine questions about what you just read, not questions you think I want to hear, but things you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How do you..." or "What if..." You've got three minutes to talk and come up with questions that represent what your group is really thinking.

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

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**Remember:** Let students drive with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Help them wrestle with complexity rather than settling for easy answers.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board, look for themes, start with questions most students will relate to

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

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- "What do you notice about the progression from 'don't mistreat' to 'treat as native-born' to 'love as yourself'?"
  - "Why do you think God appeals to Israel's memory of being foreigners in Egypt rather than just commanding obedience?"
  - "What's the difference between being nice to outsiders and actually treating them 'as native-born'?"
  - "How do you think ancient Israelites would have responded to this command? What would have made it difficult?"
  - "Where do we see the tension between group loyalty and universal love playing out today?"
  - "How might someone's family immigration story, whether recent or generations ago, shape how they read this passage?"
  - "What if Israel had ignored this command? How would that have changed their community?"
  - "What would change in our communities if we actually treated immigrants and foreigners 'as native-born'?"
- 

### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? God isn't just asking for tolerance or basic politeness. He's demanding that the circle of "love as yourself", the same love you give to neighbors, be extended across ethnic and national lines. And he's not just commanding it from authority; he's appealing to their own experience of vulnerability. "Remember when you were the foreigners," he says. "Remember how you needed welcome, protection, and love." God is using their own story of displacement to create empathy as the foundation for ethics.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. You probably don't make immigration policy, but you definitely encounter people who are different from you, new students, families who speak different languages at home, people whose culture or economic background is different from yours. You see how they get treated in your school hallways, in your community, maybe even in your church. The question is: are you extending the "love as yourself" standard across those lines of difference?

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

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- How new students are welcomed (or ignored) in your school, especially those from different cultural backgrounds
  - Family conversations about immigration, refugees, or people from different countries
  - Social media posts or comments about immigrants or foreigners, what you say and what you let slide
  - How your friend group responds to cultural differences in food, clothing, accents, or traditions
  - Economic divisions in your community, how families with less money or different work are treated
  - Church responses to refugee resettlement or immigrant families in your area
- 

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

#### **Discussion Prompts**

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- "When have you seen someone go out of their way to make a 'foreigner' feel truly welcome? What did that look like?"
- "What would help you personally choose inclusion when your instinct is to stick with your own group?"
- "How do you discern the difference between wise caution and ethnic favoritism in your own heart?"
- "What's the difference between loving welcome and naive trust? How do you love someone while still being discerning?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God's love has no ethnic boundaries, and neither should yours. This isn't about having no discernment or ignoring real differences, but it is about extending the circle of "love as yourself" to include people who don't look like you, sound like you, or come from where you come from. And here's the key, your own experiences of being excluded, overlooked, or treated as less-than should teach you to do better for others in that same position.

This week, pay attention to your gut reactions when you encounter someone who seems foreign or different. Notice your first instinct, is it curiosity or defensiveness? Welcome or withdrawal? Then ask yourself: what would I want if I were in their position? That question might just change how you see the people around you and how you understand what God is asking of you.

You wrestled with some really hard questions today, and that's exactly where spiritual growth happens. Don't settle for easy answers on this, keep thinking, keep asking, keep letting this command challenge you. God believes you're capable of this kind of love, even when it doesn't feel natural.

## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that people who are new or from different places deserve the same kindness they want for themselves, and help them remember times when they needed welcome so they can offer it to others.

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### **If Kids Ask "What if someone is here illegally?"**

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Say: "Today we're focusing on how God wants us to treat people who are already here, no matter how they got here. God cares most about kindness and love."

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

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Raise your hand if you've ever been the new kid at school, or moved to a new neighborhood, or walked into a room where you didn't know anyone. Keep your hand up if you remember feeling a little nervous or scared about whether people would be nice to you. Most of us remember that feeling, hoping someone would notice you, invite you to sit with them, or just smile at you in a friendly way.

---

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever seen someone new at your school but didn't go up and introduce yourself. Maybe you were busy with your own friends, or maybe you felt a little shy, or maybe the new person seemed really different from you, different clothes, different accent, different family situation. Part of you thought "I should probably say hi," but another part of you thought "They'll be fine" or "Someone else will talk to them." That's honestly how most of us react sometimes.

---

It makes total sense that we feel more comfortable with people who are like us, same interests, same background, same way of talking. That's normal human stuff. But sometimes we can get so comfortable in our own groups that we forget what it feels like to need someone to be kind to us. We might even start thinking that people who are different somehow deserve to feel left out or don't belong as much as we do.

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This reminds me of movies where the main character has to start over somewhere new, like in "Coco" when Miguel gets stuck in the Land of the Dead and doesn't understand the rules, or in "Inside Out" when Riley moves to San Francisco and everything feels wrong. The character desperately wants someone to help them figure out how to belong, how to fit in, how to feel safe and welcome.

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The tricky part is figuring out when to reach out to someone who seems different and when we're just making excuses to stay in our comfortable groups. How do we know if we're being normally cautious or if we're being unfair to someone who really needs a friend?

---

Today we're going to hear about what God told his people about welcoming foreigners, people from different countries who came to live among them. God had some pretty specific ideas about how they should be treated, and I think you're going to be surprised by how much God cares about this. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to being new or seeing new kids. Some may share stories about moving or changing schools. Acknowledge briefly and keep momentum toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture the Israelite people camped in the wilderness, getting ready to enter the Promised Land after 40 years of wandering. They're excited but also nervous, they're about to settle down and build real communities for the first time in decades.

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God knows that when people build new communities, they often want to keep them safe and comfortable by only including people who are exactly like them. So God calls Moses aside to give the people some important instructions about how to live in the land he's giving them.

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These aren't just suggestions, these are commands from the God who rescued them from Egypt, who fed them in the wilderness, who promised to give them a home. God is about to tell them how to create the kind of community that reflects his own heart.

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Imagine being in that crowd, sitting around campfires in your family tents, listening as Moses shares God's instructions. Some of these laws make perfect sense, don't cheat in business, respect your elders, worship God instead of fake spirits. But then Moses says something that probably made some people shift uncomfortably.

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God said: "When a foreigner comes to live among you in your land, do not mistreat them." Okay, that seems reasonable. Don't be mean to people from other countries. But then God said something much stronger.

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"The foreigner living among you must be treated as your native-born." Wait, what? That means treating immigrants and people from other countries exactly the same as people who were born in Israel. Same opportunities, same protection, same respect.

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But God wasn't done. He said something even more radical: "Love them as yourself."

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## Leviticus 19:33-34 (NIV)

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*33 When a foreigner resides among you in your land, do not mistreat them. 34 The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt. I am the Lord your God.*

Love them as yourself. Not just be polite. Not just avoid being rude. Love foreigners the same way you love yourself, with care, protection, kindness, and genuine concern for their well-being. Some of the Israelites probably thought, "But God, they're different from us. They don't understand our customs. They might change our community."

And that's when God gave them the reason that changes everything. He said, "Remember, you were foreigners in Egypt."

Suddenly the Israelites remembered what it felt like to be outsiders in someone else's land. They remembered being slaves in Egypt, being treated as less than human, having no rights, no protection, no voice. They remembered the fear of being powerless in a place where they didn't belong.

They remembered crying out to God for someone to care about them, to rescue them, to treat them with dignity and love. And God had heard them. God had seen their suffering and brought them out of slavery with mighty power.

Now God was saying, "Since you know what it feels like to be foreigners, since you know what it feels like to need someone to care about you, that's exactly how you should treat foreigners in your land. Don't just remember your own pain, let it teach you to love others in the same situation."

This wasn't just a nice suggestion. God was saying that how they treated foreigners would show whether they really understood God's heart. If they had truly experienced God's love and rescue, they would naturally extend that same love to others who needed welcome and protection.

Some Israelites probably wanted to argue: "But what if these foreigners don't follow all our rules? What if they're different from us?" But God's command was clear: love them as yourself. Period.

God was teaching them that real love doesn't have borders. Real love doesn't ask someone to earn belonging. Real love sees someone who needs welcome and says, "You matter as much as I do."

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When the Israelites finally entered the Promised Land and started building their communities, they had to decide: would they create places where only certain types of people were truly welcome? Or would they create communities that reflected God's heart for everyone?

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The choices they made would show the whole world what God was like. If they loved foreigners well, people would see that Israel's God was a God who cared about everyone. If they excluded foreigners or treated them as second-class, they would misrepresent God's character to the world.

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Sometimes in our lives, we get to make the same choice. When we meet someone who's new, different, or from somewhere else, we get to decide: will we show them God's heart of welcome and love? Or will we show them that belonging has to be earned and that being different makes you less important?

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What we learn from this story is that God's love doesn't have favorites based on where you're from. God doesn't love Americans more than people from other countries, or people who speak English more than people who speak Spanish or Arabic or Chinese.

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The core truth is this: God wants us to remember times when we needed someone to be kind to us, and then be that person for others who need kindness now.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Think about the Israelites when God first told them to love foreigners as themselves. They probably had some mixed feelings. Part of them might have thought "That's a good idea" but part of them might have felt worried or uncomfortable. If you were an Israelite hearing this command, what feelings do you think you might have had? What would make this easy or hard to do?

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**Listen For:** "Scared," "worried about strangers," "confused", affirm: "Those feelings make sense. It's normal to feel uncertain about people who are different."

#### Question 2: The Memory

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God told the Israelites to remember being foreigners in Egypt. Think about a time when you were new somewhere, new school, new neighborhood, new team, and you really wanted people to be kind to you. What did you hope would happen? How did you want to be treated? What would have made the biggest difference to you?

**If They Say:** "I wanted someone to talk to me" or "I wanted to fit in", respond "That's exactly what God wants us to remember when we meet someone new."

### Question 3: The Choice

God didn't just say "be nice to foreigners." He said "love them as yourself." What do you think is the difference between being nice to someone and actually loving them as yourself? What would change if you really treated a new person the same way you treat yourself or your best friend?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made God's command so challenging and so powerful, it's not just about politeness, it's about genuine care."

### Question 4: The Result

Imagine if the Israelites had actually followed this command perfectly, if every foreigner who came to live among them was treated with the same love and respect as native-born Israelites. How do you think that would have changed their community? What would have been different about a place like that?

**If They Say:** "Everyone would feel welcome" or "It would be peaceful", affirm: "That's the kind of community God wants us to help create."

You're noticing something really important: when we choose to welcome people who are different or new, it doesn't just help them, it makes our whole community better. It shows everyone what God's love actually looks like in action.

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

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

## **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces the pattern of moving from isolation to inclusion by having kids physically experience what it feels like to be left out and then genuinely welcomed. Success looks like kids discovering that including others actually strengthens the whole group and that everyone has something valuable to offer.

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

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We're going to do an activity called "The Welcome Bridge." I need you to count off by twos, ones over here, twos over there. The ones are going to form a tight circle holding hands, facing inward. The twos will spread out around the room, standing alone, not touching anyone.

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Here's the challenge: the circle group, your job is to stay connected and move together to reach each person standing alone and invite them to join your circle. But here's the twist, you can only invite someone if your whole group agrees to include them, and once you invite them, they become part of your circle for reaching the next person.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what God was asking the Israelites to do, they had a tight community, and God wanted them to intentionally reach out to include foreigners, making them full members instead of leaving them on the outside.

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

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Let the circle figure out how to move together first. They'll need to shuffle or slide while staying connected. Watch how the isolated individuals feel, some may try to approach the circle, others may hang back feeling forgotten.

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As they reach the first isolated person, watch for hesitation or disagreement about including them. This represents the natural human tendency to want to keep community small and manageable.

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Coach with phrases like: "I notice some people are still standing alone. How does your circle need to adapt to include everyone? What happens to your strength when you add new people?" Guide them toward realizing they need everyone to succeed.

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Celebrate the moment when they reach the last person, everyone is now connected. Have them notice how much larger, stronger, and more creative their circle became by including everyone instead of leaving people out.

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Once everyone is included, let them feel the difference between the beginning (some people connected, others isolated) and the end (everyone connected). This shows how community works when it follows God's heart.

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**Watch For:** The moment when the circle realizes they need to include everyone to truly succeed. This is the physical representation of what God was asking Israel to do.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when some people were outside the circle versus when everyone was connected? The circle became stronger and bigger with each person you included, didn't it? That's exactly what God was teaching Israel, including foreigners doesn't weaken your community, it actually makes it stronger, more creative, and more beautiful. When everyone belongs, everyone wins.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God wants us to treat people who are new or from different places exactly the same way we want to be treated when we're the new ones. Not just be polite to them, but actually love them and help them feel like they truly belong. God told Israel to remember what it felt like to be foreigners so they would know how to love other foreigners.

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This doesn't mean we trust everyone immediately or ignore real dangers. But it does mean that being different or new doesn't make someone less important or less deserving of kindness. Fear of different people is normal, but God wants us to choose love anyway because that's what God would do.

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The amazing result is that when we choose to include people instead of leaving them out, our communities become stronger, more interesting, and more beautiful. Everyone has gifts to offer, and we miss out when we don't welcome them.

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

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Look for someone at school or in your neighborhood who seems new, left out, or different from your usual friend group. Make it your goal to learn their name and one thing they're interested in. You don't have to become best friends immediately, but practice treating them like someone who belongs and matters.

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## Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*God, thank you for showing us how much you love everyone, no matter where they come from. Help us remember times when we needed someone to be kind to us, and help us be that person for others who need kindness now. Give us courage to include people instead of leaving them out. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God loves everyone no matter where they come from, and God wants us to be especially kind to people who are new or different.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare being a foreigner to being new at school, everyone knows how it feels to want friends to be nice to you.

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's love for everyone. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "God's Love Is So Wonderful," or "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." Use movements: spread arms wide during lyrics about "everyone," point to different children during lyrics about "you," and hug yourself during lyrics about "love."

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Great singing! God loves hearing you sing about his love for everyone. Now let's sit down in our story shape so we can hear about a very special message God gave his people about being kind to everyone.

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound caring when you're God, excited when you talk about love, and gentle when you talk about helping others.

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Today we're going to meet God's people, the Israelites, when they were camping in the desert!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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The Israelites had been walking in the desert for a very long time, and soon they were going to have their own land where they could build houses and have neighbors. They were so excited!

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*[Use excited voice and gestures]*

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But God knew something important. He knew that when people get comfortable in their new homes, sometimes they forget to be kind to people who are different from them.

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak with concern]*

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So God had a very special message for his people about how to treat visitors and people from other places who might come to live near them.

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

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God said, "When someone from another country comes to live with you, don't be mean to them. Instead, treat them just like your own family!"

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*[Move to side, sound surprised]*

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Some of the Israelites probably thought, "But God, what if they're different from us? What if they look different or talk differently?"

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**Leviticus 19:34 (NIV)**

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*The foreigner residing among you must be treated as your native-born. Love them as yourself, for you were foreigners in Egypt.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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God said something very important: "Love them as yourself!" That means love them just as much as you love yourself! Do you think that's easy or hard to do? It can be hard sometimes, right?

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*[Move to center, speak warmly]*

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But then God reminded them of something very important. He said, "Remember when you were the visitors in Egypt? Remember when you were the different ones?"

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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The Israelites remembered! They remembered what it felt like to be in a place where they didn't belong. They remembered wanting people to be nice to them. They remembered feeling scared and lonely sometimes.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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God said, "Since you know how it feels to need someone to be kind to you, that's exactly how you should treat other people who need kindness!"

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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This was God's way of teaching them that everyone deserves to be loved and welcomed, no matter where they come from or what they look like!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God loves everyone in the whole world, people from every country, with every color skin, who speak every language. God doesn't love some people more than others because of where they were born!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who are new at our school, or who moved here from another country, or whose family is different from ours. God wants us to be extra kind to them because we know how good it feels when someone is kind to us!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When you see someone who looks lonely or left out or different, you can remember this story and think, "God loves that person just as much as he loves me. I can help them feel welcome!"

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God gives us the power to make people feel loved and welcome, and that makes God very happy!

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

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

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Find a partner and stand facing each other! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, and you'll have about one minute to share your ideas with each other.

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

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### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think it feels to be new somewhere and not know anyone?
  2. What would make a new person at your school feel welcome and happy?
  3. Why do you think God cares so much about being kind to people from other countries?
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4. What would you want someone to do if you were the new kid?

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5. How can you tell if someone feels left out or lonely?

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6. What makes it sometimes hard to be friends with someone who is different?

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7. Why did God remind the Israelites about being in Egypt?

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8. What's one way you can help a new person feel welcome at school?

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9. How does it feel when someone is extra nice to you?

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10. What would happen if everyone followed God's rule about loving foreigners?

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11. Who is someone you know who is really good at making new people feel welcome?

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12. What would you say to someone who feels scared of people who are different?

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13. How do you think God feels when we're kind to new people?

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14. What's the difference between being a little nervous and being mean?

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15. Why does God love everyone the same amount?

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16. What can you learn from someone who comes from a different place?

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17. How can you be brave when you want to help someone but feel shy?

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18. What would you pray for someone who just moved to your town?

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19. What would change at your school if everyone was kind to new kids?

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20. How can you show someone that God loves them?

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

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness or love. Suggestions: "Love Your Neighbor," "Be Kind to One Another," or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: point to others during "neighbor" lyrics, hug motions during "love" lyrics, and big gestures during "kindness" lyrics.

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

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for loving everyone in the whole world no matter what they look like or where they come from.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us remember to be extra kind to people who are new or different, just like we want people to be kind to us when we're new somewhere.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you love everyone the same amount, and help us show your love to others by being welcoming and friendly. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind to new people. Examples: "God, help me be nice to new kids" or "God, help me remember you love everyone."

Remember this week that God loves everyone, and you can help people feel God's love by being kind and welcoming to them. Have a wonderful week showing God's love to others!

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# What God Really Wants

*True Worship Revealed, What happens when justice and mercy seem to conflict?*

**Micah 6:1-8**

## 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

**Micah 6:1-8 (NIV)**

*1 Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. 2 "Hear, you mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he lodges a charge against Israel.*

*3 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. 4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. 5 My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Bekor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."*

*6 With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

*8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

## Context

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The prophet Micah speaks during a time when Israel's worship has become elaborate and costly but has lost its moral foundation. The people offer expensive sacrifices while practicing injustice in daily life. God calls the mountains and hills as witnesses in a cosmic courtroom scene, bringing formal charges against His people for their empty religious rituals paired with ethical failure.

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This passage comes after Micah has detailed specific sins: corrupt leaders, dishonest merchants, violence, and exploitation of the poor. The people seem confused about what God actually wants from them, responding with increasingly extravagant religious offerings while missing the heart of true worship entirely.

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## The Big Idea

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**God's requirements for worship are not complex rituals but three comprehensive life practices: acting justly, loving mercy, and walking humbly with God.**

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These aren't separate compartments of life but integrated dimensions of transformed living. The active verbs, act, love, walk, show these are lived practices, not abstract ideals. They encompass the entire scope of human relationship: with society (justice), with individuals (mercy), and with God (humility).

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## Theological Core

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- **Comprehensive Morality.** Justice, mercy, and humility together address every dimension of human life and relationship, leaving no area uncovered by God's moral requirement.
  - **Active Worship.** True worship is expressed through action (justice), disposition (mercy), and relationship (humility), not through elaborate religious performances.
  - **Divine Simplicity.** What seems complex about pleasing God reduces to three clear, observable practices that anyone can understand and pursue.
  - **Integrated Living.** These three requirements work together as one unified way of life, where each element informs and shapes the others in practical decisions.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- Justice, mercy, and humility form an integrated approach to moral decision-making that applies to every life situation
  - When these three principles seem to conflict, deeper wisdom involves finding ways to honor all three rather than choosing one
  - True worship is measured by transformed living, not religious performance or emotional experiences
  - Self-examination through three questions, "Am I acting justly? Loving mercy? Walking humbly with God?", provides comprehensive moral evaluation
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- God cares more about how we treat people than about perfect religious behavior or rule-following
  - Being fair (justice), being kind (mercy), and listening to God (humility) are more important than impressive actions
  - When we make mistakes, God wants us to focus on doing better with fairness and kindness, not just feeling bad
  - Sometimes doing the right thing feels hard or different from what everyone else does, but God helps us choose well
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#### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to be fair, kind, and listen to Him
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- God likes it better when we're nice to people than when we just do church things perfectly
  - We can ask God to help us be fair and kind every day
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Oversimplifying the tensions.** Justice and mercy can genuinely conflict in complex situations. Don't suggest these three requirements are always easy to apply or that there's always an obvious answer.
  - **Making it about earning God's love.** These are requirements for those already in relationship with God, not prerequisites for acceptance. Frame as grateful response, not performance for approval.
  - **Dismissing all ritual or ceremony.** The passage critiques empty ritual, not meaningful worship practices. Help students distinguish between authentic and performative religious expression.
  - **Creating new legalism.** Avoid turning justice, mercy, and humility into rigid rules to follow. These are life orientations that guide decision-making, not checklist items to complete.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What if being just means someone gets hurt?"**

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This is exactly the tension Micah's three requirements address together. Justice without mercy becomes harsh; mercy without justice enables harm. The goal isn't to avoid all hurt but to ensure that any necessary consequences serve restoration rather than revenge. Humility before God helps us discern when firmness serves love and when grace serves truth. Sometimes protecting one person requires setting boundaries with another.

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### **"Does this mean all religious practices are fake?"**

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Micah isn't condemning worship practices themselves but the disconnect between elaborate religious performance and moral failure. Meaningful worship, singing, prayer, communion, giving, flows from and strengthens our commitment to justice, mercy, and humility. The test isn't whether we do religious

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things, but whether our religious practices shape us to live like Jesus in our everyday relationships.

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### **"How do we know if we're being humble enough?"**

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True humility focuses outward rather than inward. Instead of constantly evaluating your humility level, pay attention to whether you're genuinely listening to God through Scripture, prayer, and wise counsel, and whether you're considering others' needs alongside your own. Humility grows through practicing justice and mercy, not through trying to feel humble. If you're concerned about pride, that awareness itself often indicates a humble heart.

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

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**God's requirement for authentic worship is surprisingly simple yet comprehensively demanding: act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with God.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to explore how justice, mercy, and humility work together in real-life moral decisions. Help them wrestle with the genuine tensions that arise when these three requirements seem to conflict, discovering how integrated wisdom honors all three.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When justice demands consequences and mercy calls for forgiveness, when humility suggests stepping back and justice requires speaking up, how do we navigate the spaces where these values seem to pull in different directions?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate that moral decision-making is genuinely complex and that students' struggles with competing values reflect mature thinking
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- Honor the real tensions between justice and mercy rather than offering quick fixes or suggesting these conflicts are easily resolved
- Let students explore their own examples and work toward insights rather than lecturing about the "right" answers

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

Think about the last time you had to decide whether to speak up about something unfair happening to someone else. Maybe you watched someone get bullied, or saw a friend make a choice that was hurting them, or noticed favoritism in a classroom or workplace. Part of you knew someone should say something, justice demanded it.

But another part of you felt the weight of relationships, the complexity of the situation, the potential for making things worse. Mercy whispered about understanding, about giving grace, about not being the person who causes drama. And underneath it all, you wondered: what's really my place here? How do I know if speaking up comes from courage or from pride?

These moments reveal something profound about moral decision-making: the things we value most, fairness, kindness, humility, can seem to pull us in different directions. Today we're looking at someone who faced a nation caught in this same tension, except the stakes were their relationship with God and the foundation of their entire society.

As we read this passage, pay attention to how the prophet addresses this complexity. Notice what he suggests about navigating the space between justice and mercy, between action and humility. Watch for whether he offers a simple answer or something more nuanced.

Let's open to Micah 6 and read this together silently first. Take your time with it.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students. This passage contains a dramatic courtroom scene that students need time to visualize. Help with pronunciation of "Balak" and "Balaam" if needed. Watch for students finishing early and guide them to reread verse 8 specifically.

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**As You Read, Think About:**

- What is God's specific complaint against the people?

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- Why do the people respond with offers of greater sacrifices?

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- What's surprising about God's actual requirements in verse 8?

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- How might these three requirements interact with each other in practice?

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### **Micah 6:1-8 (NIV)**

*1 Listen to what the Lord says: "Stand up, plead my case before the mountains; let the hills hear what you have to say. 2 "Hear, you mountains, the Lord's accusation; listen, you everlasting foundations of the earth. For the Lord has a case against his people; he lodges a charge against Israel.*

*3 "My people, what have I done to you? How have I burdened you? Answer me. 4 I brought you up out of Egypt and redeemed you from the land of slavery. I sent Moses to lead you, also Aaron and Miriam. 5 My people, remember what Balak king of Moab plotted and what Balaam son of Bekor answered. Remember your journey from Shittim to Gilgal, that you may know the righteous acts of the Lord."*

*6 With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

*8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Choose confident readers for the dramatic elements. The passage has distinct voices and emotional shifts that benefit from expressive reading.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-2 (God calling for cosmic courtroom) **Reader 2:** Verses 3-5 (God's defense of His faithfulness) **Reader 3:** Verses 6-7 (People's frantic offering escalation) **Reader 4:** Verse 8 (Micah's answer)

Listen for the drama here, this isn't just instruction, it's a courtroom scene with real emotion, confusion, and ultimately a stunning revelation about what God actually wants.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups listening to their questions. If a group is stuck, prompt with "What surprised you most?" or "What seems hardest to apply?"

Get into groups of 3-4. You have three minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Don't ask questions you think I want to hear, ask what you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions might start with "Why..." or "How..." or "What if..." Think about what seems unclear, surprising, or difficult to apply. Start now.

### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board. Look for themes around the three requirements, the tension between religion and ethics, and practical application challenges.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence shows that the people's religious practices had become disconnected from their daily ethics?"
- "Why might God prefer justice, mercy, and humility over elaborate religious offerings?"
- "When might acting justly conflict with loving mercy, and how do we navigate that?"

- "What's the difference between false humility and walking humbly with God?"

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- "How do we discern when justice requires action versus when mercy calls for patience?"

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- "Where do you see this same pattern today, impressive religious activity covering ethical failures?"

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- "What would change if a community actually prioritized justice, mercy, and humility over religious performance?"

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- "Why do you think Micah presents these as three separate requirements rather than one general principle?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? The people's solution to feeling distant from God is to offer more impressive religious performances, bigger sacrifices, more expensive offerings, even their own children. But God reveals that what He's always wanted isn't religious spectacle but transformed living. Justice, mercy, and humility together address every dimension of human relationship: how we treat society, individuals, and God. The pattern shows us that authentic worship flows into ethical living, not the other way around.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension between religious performance and authentic living? Think about school, family, friend groups, social media, even church. Where are you tempted to impress rather than integrate these three values?

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

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- Academic integrity: choosing honesty over grade performance when cheating is normalized

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- Family dynamics: navigating fairness between siblings while showing grace for different needs

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- Friendship conflicts: deciding when loyalty requires confronting harmful behavior

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- Social media presence: balancing authentic self-expression with humility and kindness

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- Economic choices: considering justice and mercy in spending, giving, and work decisions

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- Political engagement: pursuing justice while maintaining humility and extending mercy to those with different views
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Different situations may call for different applications. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone successfully balance all three, justice, mercy, and humility, in a difficult situation?"
  - "What would help you remember these three requirements when making decisions under pressure?"
  - "How do you discern between wise caution and fear when justice requires action?"
  - "What's the difference between mercy that helps and mercy that enables harm?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: God's requirement for authentic worship is surprisingly simple yet comprehensively demanding. Act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with God. These aren't three separate boxes to check but three integrated dimensions of transformed living that inform every relationship and decision. The complexity comes not from understanding what God wants but from living it out when these values seem to conflict.

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This week, pay attention to your decision-making process. When you face choices, big or small, try asking yourself Micah's three questions: "How does justice apply here? How does mercy apply? How does humility with God apply?" Don't expect easy answers, but notice how considering all three dimensions changes how you think about your options.

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I'm impressed by the thoughtful questions you asked today and your willingness to wrestle with complexity rather than settle for simple answers. Keep that curiosity about how faith intersects with real life. That's exactly the kind of thinking that leads to wisdom.

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# Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God cares more about how we treat people (justice and mercy) and listen to Him (humility) than about perfect religious performance or impressive behavior.

## If Kids Ask "Why doesn't God want people to give Him good gifts?"

Say: "God loves gifts that come from grateful hearts! But He wants our gifts to match how we live. If we're mean to people all week but give God expensive presents on Sunday, that doesn't make sense. God wants our whole lives to be a gift to Him."

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever tried really hard to make someone happy when you knew they were upset with you. Maybe you cleaned your room without being asked, or made them a picture, or offered to do extra chores. Sometimes when we feel like someone's disappointed in us, we try to fix it with impressive actions.

Now here's a harder question: what if you found out that the person wasn't upset about your room being messy or wanting a picture, they were sad because you'd been mean to your little brother all week? How would you feel if you spent all this time on the room and the picture, but you never said sorry to your brother or stopped being mean?

That's a confusing feeling, isn't it? Your heart was in the right place with the room cleaning and the picture-making. You really did want to make things better. But you were trying to fix the wrong problem. The person you wanted to make happy actually cared more about kindness than about clean rooms or nice pictures.

This reminds me of the movie "Coco," where Miguel thinks he needs to become a famous musician to honor his family, but he discovers that what really matters is understanding and respecting his family's values. Sometimes what we think will impress people isn't what they actually care about most.

The tricky part is figuring out what really matters to the people we love. What do they actually care about? What makes them truly happy versus what just looks impressive?

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Today we're going to hear about a time when God's people were trying really hard to make God happy, but they were confused about what God actually wanted. They thought they needed to give bigger and better religious gifts, but God had something completely different in mind. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to trying to make up for being in trouble. Acknowledge their examples briefly but keep moving toward the story without getting stuck on details.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago, God's people had a big problem. They were doing lots of impressive religious things, bringing expensive animals to sacrifice, pouring out costly olive oil, performing elaborate ceremonies. But in their everyday lives, they were being unfair and mean.

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Rich people were cheating poor people out of money. Judges were taking bribes and letting guilty people go free while punishing innocent people. Merchants were using crooked scales to steal from their customers. Families were fighting and hurting each other.

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God watched all this happening and felt heartbroken. His people were acting like they loved Him on religious holidays, but then treating each other terribly the rest of the time. Something had to change.

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Imagine how confused and frustrated you'd feel if your friends were really nice to you at your birthday party but then ignored you and said mean things about you at school all week. That's how God felt.

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So God decided to have a serious conversation with His people. But this wasn't going to be a quiet talk, this was going to be like a courtroom trial, with witnesses and everything.

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God called the prophet Micah and said, "I want you to set up a courtroom. But not just any courtroom, call the mountains and hills to be the witnesses. This case is so important that all of creation needs to hear it."

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Can you picture this? Micah standing on a mountainside, calling out to the peaks and valleys around him: "Listen up, mountains! Pay attention, hills! God has something important to say to His people!"

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Then God began to speak, and His voice was full of hurt and love at the same time: "My people, what have I done wrong? How have I been unfair to you? Tell me!"

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God reminded them of all the good things He'd done for them: "I rescued you from slavery in Egypt. I sent Moses and Aaron and Miriam to lead you to freedom. I protected you from enemies who wanted to hurt you. I brought you safely to the good land I promised. What more could I have done?"

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**Micah 6:6-7 (NIV)**

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*6 With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil? Shall I offer my firstborn for my transgression, the fruit of my body for the sin of my soul?*

When the people heard this, they felt terrible. They knew God was right, they had been unfair and mean while pretending to be good religious people. But they didn't know how to fix it, so they started suggesting bigger and bigger religious gifts.

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Someone called out, "Should we bring young cows for sacrifices?" When that didn't seem like enough, another person shouted, "What about thousands of sheep?" Then someone else panicked and said, "Maybe ten thousand rivers of olive oil?" They were getting more and more desperate, suggesting increasingly expensive gifts.

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But they were missing the point completely. God didn't want bigger religious performances. God wanted something much simpler and much harder at the same time.

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Then came the most important moment. Through Micah, God gave His answer, and it was probably nothing like what anyone expected.

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**Micah 6:8 (NIV)**

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*8 He has shown you, O mortal, what is good. And what does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God.*

The people must have looked at each other in surprise. That's it? No expensive animals? No rivers of olive oil? No complicated ceremonies? Just three things: be fair, be kind, and listen to God?

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Yes, that's exactly what God wanted. Act justly, that means be fair, tell the truth, stand up for people who are being treated badly. Love mercy, that means be kind, forgive people, help those who are hurting. Walk humbly with God, that means listen to God, let Him guide your choices, don't think you're better than others.

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God was saying, "I don't want your impressive religious shows if your hearts aren't changed. I want you to treat people the way I treat you, with fairness and kindness. I want you to stay close to me and let me help you become the people I created you to be."

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This was revolutionary. Instead of focusing on having perfect ceremonies or giving the most expensive gifts, God wanted them to focus on treating each other well and staying connected to Him.

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When people started actually doing this, being fair instead of cheating, being kind instead of cruel, asking God for help instead of trying to impress Him, everything changed. Families got along better. Communities became safer. People trusted each other again.

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The amazing result was that their whole society became healthier and happier. When people prioritize fairness, kindness, and staying close to God, life gets better for everyone.

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Sometimes in our lives, we think we need to do impressive things to make God happy, get perfect grades, never make mistakes, always say the right prayers. But God is like the parent in our opening story: He cares more about how we treat our siblings, friends, and classmates than about looking perfect on the outside.

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What we learn is that God wants our everyday lives to match our Sunday school lessons. If we're learning about God's love, He wants us to be loving. If we're learning about God's fairness, He wants us to be fair. If we're learning about God's kindness, He wants us to be kind.

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The core truth is this: God cares more about the kind of people we're becoming than about the impressive things we can do. He wants fairness, kindness, and humility to shape every part of our lives.

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

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

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#### **Question 1: The Confusion**

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The people in our story were really confused about what would make God happy. They kept suggesting bigger and more expensive religious gifts, young cows, thousands of sheep, rivers of olive oil! If you were their friend and you saw them getting more and more panicked about impressing God, what would you want to tell them?

**Listen For:** "Calm down," "You're trying too hard," "Just be nice to people", affirm: "You're seeing exactly what they missed, they were making it too complicated."

### Question 2: The Real Solution

God's answer was much simpler than expensive sacrifices: be fair, be kind, and listen to God. Think about your school or your family. What would change if everyone actually did these three things every day? What would be different about how people treat each other?

**If They Say:** If they say "Less fighting" or "More sharing", respond "How do you think fairness and kindness would create those changes?"

### Question 3: The Hard Choice

Sometimes being fair or kind is harder than just doing religious things perfectly. Think about a time when you had to choose between looking good and doing right, maybe standing up for someone being teased, or telling the truth when you'd get in trouble. Why is it sometimes easier to focus on religious behavior than on treating people well?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made God's people's situation so hard, and so important to change."

### Question 4: The Ripple Effect

In the story, when people started actually being fair, kind, and humble, their whole community got better. If you decided to really focus on these three things, fairness, kindness, and listening to God, what do you think would happen in your friend group or family? How might it spread to others?

**If They Say:** If they express doubt about whether it would work, affirm "Sometimes it takes time and courage, but kindness and fairness really do make a difference."

You've all noticed something important: God cares more about how we treat each other every day than about performing perfectly in religious settings. Now let's do an activity that shows us how fairness, kindness, and humility actually work together in real life.

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#### **4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)**

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

##### **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces how justice, mercy, and humility work together by having kids experience the need for fairness, kindness, and cooperation to solve a shared problem. Success looks like kids discovering that they need all three values, not just one, to accomplish their goal together.

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

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We're going to build human bridges! Divide into two equal groups and line up on opposite sides of the room. Your challenge is that everyone from both groups needs to end up on the other side of the room, but here's the catch: you can only cross by creating bridges with your bodies.

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Here are the rules: only three people at a time can be "bridge pieces" lying down or on hands and knees. The rest must walk across these human bridges to get to the other side. Once someone crosses, they can become a bridge piece to help others. But here's the twist: if anyone falls or if a bridge breaks, everyone who was crossing must go back to their starting side.

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You'll need fairness to make sure everyone gets a turn. You'll need kindness because being a bridge is hard work and requires trust. And you'll need humility because some people will need to serve as bridge pieces while others get to cross first.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what God told His people: you can't succeed with just one value, you need justice, mercy, and humility working together to accomplish something good for everyone.

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

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First phase: Let them start trying to cross. You'll see immediate challenges as they realize they need to coordinate, take turns, and help each other. Let them struggle for about 90 seconds without intervening.

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The struggle: As bridges start breaking and people have to go back, watch for frustration and blame. This is the perfect teaching moment about how all three values are needed, not just one.

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Coaching phrases: "I notice you need everyone to work together, not just the fastest people." "I wonder if there are people who could help but haven't been asked yet." "What would fairness look like right now?" "How could kindness help solve this problem?"

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The breakthrough: When someone suggests taking turns, helping the smaller kids go first, or asks who wants to be bridge pieces, celebrate this immediately. "That's exactly the kind of fairness and kindness that makes community work!"

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Completion: Once they've all crossed successfully, have them notice how they felt different when they worked together fairly and kindly versus when they were just trying to win individually.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to be a bridge piece for others or suggests a fair rotation system, this is the physical representation of justice and mercy working together.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when people were just trying to get across the fastest versus when you started thinking about fairness and kindness? Did you need just one of God's three values, justice, mercy, and humility, or did you need all of them working together? That's exactly what God was telling His people: impressive individual performance doesn't work. Community success requires fairness, kindness, and humility all at once.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God wants us to act justly, love mercy, and walk humbly with Him. That means being fair, being kind, and listening to God. God cares more about how we treat people every day than about doing impressive religious things or being perfect.

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This doesn't mean church and prayer and worship don't matter. They do! But God wants our Sunday school lessons to change how we live Monday through Saturday. If we learn about God's love, He wants us to be loving. If we learn about God's fairness, He wants us to be fair.

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The amazing result is that when we focus on fairness, kindness, and humility, everyone's life gets better, not just ours, but our families', our classes', our whole community's.

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

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Pick one of God's three requirements, fairness, kindness, or humility, and pay attention to it this week. When you make choices, ask yourself: "How can I be fair here?" or "How can I be kind here?" or "How can I listen to God here?" See what happens when you let that value guide your decisions.

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

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*Dear God, thank You for making it simple for us to know what You want. Help us remember that You care more about how we treat people than about looking perfect. Give us courage to be fair, kind, and humble this week. Help us listen to You and let You guide our choices. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants them to be fair, kind, and listen to Him more than doing church things perfectly.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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Compare being fair, kind, and listening to God to being a good friend, then ask "What makes someone a really good friend?"

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's love or being kind to others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind," or "God is So Good." Use movements: hands on heart during "love" lyrics, pointing to others during "kind" lyrics, hands raised during praise lyrics.

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Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about what God really wants from us. This story has a big surprise in it!

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when people are panicking, sound gentle when God speaks, sound excited when revealing God's simple answer.

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Today we're going to meet some people who were very confused about what makes God happy!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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A long time ago, God's people were doing something that made God very sad. They were being mean to each other! They were cheating and lying and hurting people's feelings.

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*[Make a sad face, shake head]*

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But then on special church days, they would bring fancy gifts to God and act like everything was fine. God felt confused and sad about this.

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

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So God decided to talk to His people. He called a man named Micah to help Him. God said, "Micah, I need to have an important conversation with my people."

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

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God asked His people, "What have I done wrong? Haven't I always taken care of you? Didn't I save you when you needed help? Why are you being mean to each other?"

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

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When the people heard this, they got very worried! They said, "Oh no! God is upset with us! Quick, let's give Him better gifts!"

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**Micah 6:6-7 (NIV)**

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*6 With what shall I come before the Lord and bow down before the exalted God? Shall I come before him with burnt offerings, with calves a year old? 7 Will the Lord be pleased with thousands of rams, with ten thousand rivers of olive oil?*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you think giving bigger and fancier gifts was what God really wanted? No! The people were missing something very important!

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

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But then God gave them the most amazing answer. It wasn't what anyone expected!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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God said, "I don't want your fancy gifts. I want something much better and much simpler."

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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Here's what God said He really wanted: "Be fair to people. Be kind to people. And listen to me."

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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That's it! Just three things: be fair, be kind, and listen to God. No fancy gifts needed!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God wants us to treat people the same way He treats us, with fairness and kindness. He wants us to stay close to Him and let Him help us make good choices.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes we think God wants us to be perfect at church things, perfect singing, perfect sitting, perfect praying. But God cares more about how we treat our friends, our brothers and sisters, and our classmates.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone is being mean to your friend, you can choose to be fair and stand up for them. When someone makes a mistake, you can choose to be kind and forgive them. When you don't know what to do, you can choose to pray and listen to God.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves you so much, and He wants to help you be fair, kind, and close to Him every single day!

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

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

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Find a partner and spread out around the room. I'm going to give each pair a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

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

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### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think God felt when people were mean to each other?

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2. What does it mean to be fair to someone?

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3. What does it mean to be kind to someone?

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4. How do you listen to God?

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5. Why do you think God cares more about being nice than about fancy gifts?

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6. When is it hard to be fair?

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7. When is it hard to be kind?

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8. What would happen if everyone in our class was fair and kind?

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9. How can you be fair to your friends?

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10. How can you be kind to your family?

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11. What's one way you can listen to God this week?

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12. Why did the people think God wanted expensive gifts?

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13. What surprised you about what God really wanted?

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14. How do you feel when someone is fair to you?

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15. How do you feel when someone is kind to you?

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16. What's the difference between being fair and being mean?

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17. What's the difference between being kind and letting people hurt you?

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18. How can you help someone else be fair and kind?

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19. What would you tell the people in our story?

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20. How can you show God you love Him through being fair and kind?

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

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

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

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Select a song about kindness or following God. Suggestions: "The Fruit of the Spirit," "Love One Another," or "I Will Follow Jesus." Include movements: hands reaching out to others during "kindness" lyrics, hands to ears during "listen" lyrics, marching in place during "follow" lyrics.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for prayer. Remember, we can talk to God anytime, and He loves to hear from us.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank You for loving us so much.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that You want us to be fair and kind to everyone we meet. Help us listen to You when we don't know what to do.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank You that we don't have to be perfect to make You happy. Thank You that You love us and want to help us every day.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us treat our friends, our families, and everyone else the way You treat us, with fairness and kindness. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being fair, kind, or listening to God. Examples: "Help me be kind to my sister" or "Help me listen to You when I'm scared."

Remember, God wants you to be fair, kind, and listen to Him. You don't have to be perfect, just try your best and ask God to help you. Have a wonderful week, and keep being the amazing kids God made you to be!

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# The King Who Protects

*Authority That Serves, Should Those With Power Really Prioritize the Powerless?*

**Psalm 72:1-20**

## 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

**Psalm 72:1-20 (NIV)**

*1 Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. 2 May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. 3 May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. 4 May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. 5 May he endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. 6 May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. 7 In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.*

*8 May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. 9 May the desert tribes bow before him and his enemies lick the dust. 10 May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to him. May the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts. 11 May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.*

*12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. 13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. 14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. 15 Long may he live! May gold*

*from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. 16 May grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. May the crops flourish like Lebanon and thrive like the grass of the field. 17 May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. 18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. 19 Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. 20 This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.*

## Context

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Psalm 72 is a royal psalm traditionally attributed to Solomon, functioning as both prayer and ideal vision for kingship in Israel. Written during the height of Israel's monarchy, it reflects the ancient Near Eastern understanding that earthly rulers should mirror divine justice and compassion. The psalm sits within Israel's broader covenant framework where kings were accountable to God's law and expected to protect the vulnerable rather than exploit them.

The immediate literary context places this psalm as the conclusion of Book II of Psalms, ending with a doxology and the note that this concludes David's prayers. The psalm moves from petition to prophecy, painting an idealized portrait of righteous rule that extends beyond any single human king. The focus on defending the needy comes at the psalm's center, suggesting this priority stands at the heart of legitimate authority.

## The Big Idea

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**Righteous authority finds its legitimacy not in power over people, but in protection of the powerless.**

This psalm presents an idealized vision that functions both as prayer for earthly kings and prophetic glimpse of ultimate divine rule. The tension lies in whether this describes practical governance or sets an impossible standard. Yet the psalm's placement of needy-deliverance at its center suggests this isn't optional decoration but the essential test of righteous authority.

## Theological Core

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- **Authority Obligation.** Those granted power bear responsibility to protect the vulnerable, not exploit them for personal gain.
- **Precious Blood.** The vulnerable possess inherent worth that demands protection from violence and oppression, regardless of their social status.
- **Needy Deliverance.** Legitimate leadership actively delivers those crying for help rather than ignoring their pleas or maintaining systems that perpetuate their affliction.
- **Divine Standard.** Human authority derives legitimacy from reflecting God's own character of justice and compassion toward the helpless.

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## Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Authority's legitimacy depends on protecting the powerless, even when costly or unpopular
- The tension between idealized leadership and practical governance requires ongoing discernment
- Everyone has spheres of influence where they can choose to help or ignore the vulnerable
- Measuring leadership by how it treats those who can't fight back reveals true character

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### Grades 4, 6

- Good leaders use their power to help people who can't help themselves
- When we have the ability to help someone weaker, that's what we should choose to do
- Helping the powerless brings good results for everyone, not just the people being helped
- Sometimes helping others feels hard, but it's still the right thing to do

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### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to help people who need help
  - God cares about people who are sad, scared, or hurt
  - When we can help someone who can't help themselves, we should do it
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Idealizing Human Authority.** This psalm describes divine standards that earthly leaders approximate but never perfectly achieve. Don't present human authority figures as infallible or suggest that good intentions excuse harmful actions.
  - **Oversimplifying Complex Situations.** Protecting the vulnerable often involves navigating competing interests and limited resources. Acknowledge that applying these principles requires wisdom and sometimes involves difficult trade-offs.
  - **Ignoring the Messianic Dimension.** While applicable to human leadership, this psalm ultimately points beyond human capacity to divine rule. Don't reduce it to mere political instruction without acknowledging its prophetic scope.
  - **Creating False Binary Thinking.** The psalm doesn't suggest that authority is either completely good or completely bad. Help students understand that even well-intentioned leaders can make mistakes while still striving toward righteous standards.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What if helping the needy means other people get hurt or lose something?"**

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This question gets at the real complexity of leadership. The psalm doesn't promise easy answers but establishes priorities: those who can't protect themselves deserve special consideration. Good leadership seeks creative solutions that protect the vulnerable without unnecessarily harming others. Sometimes this means sacrificing convenience or profit, but it doesn't mean being reckless. The goal is justice for all, with special attention to those who have no voice.

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### **"Why doesn't God just fix everything instead of expecting people to help?"**

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God could override human choice and directly solve every problem, but He chooses to work through people who reflect His character. This psalm shows God's heart for the vulnerable and invites us to share that heart. When we protect the powerless, we become part of how God cares for the world. This doesn't excuse inaction by saying "God will handle it" but recognizes that God often handles things through people who choose to act with compassion.

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### **"Is this just about kings, or does it apply to everyone?"**

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While written about royal leadership, the principles apply wherever someone has influence or ability that others lack. Everyone has some form of authority or capacity, whether it's physical strength, knowledge, resources, or social position. The question becomes: how do we use whatever advantage we have? The psalm suggests our influence gains legitimacy when used to help those who need protection rather than to benefit ourselves at others' expense.

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

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**True authority proves itself by protecting those who cannot protect themselves, even when the powerful could easily ignore their needs.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the radical claim that legitimate authority finds its purpose in protecting the powerless, not in accumulating benefits for those already in power. Help them explore how this applies to their own spheres of influence.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Should those with power really prioritize people who can't help them back? What happens when protecting the vulnerable conflicts with other goals or interests?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their observations about how authority often works in practice, don't dismiss their cynicism as wrong
- Help them see the difference between describing ideals and creating impossible expectations
- Let them wrestle with the complexity rather than providing neat answers to messy situations

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

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Imagine you're elected to student council at your school. You have real influence over policies that affect everyone's daily experience. The popular students want you to focus on things that make their lives better, better food, more privileges, fewer restrictions. But you notice that these changes would mostly benefit people who already have it pretty good, while students who struggle with bullying, learning differences, or feeling left out wouldn't see much improvement.

Your friends remind you that the popular kids voted for you, and their support could help you accomplish other good things. It makes practical sense to keep your supporters happy. Besides, they argue, you can't solve everyone's problems, and trying to help everyone might mean helping no one. It's a reasonable argument, work with the people who can help you get things done.

But then you remember why you ran for student council in the first place. You wanted to make school better for people who didn't have a voice, people who couldn't advocate for themselves. The question becomes: do you use your influence to benefit those who already have advantages, or do you focus on those who need protection? Either choice has consequences.

Today we're exploring an ancient psalm that addresses exactly this dilemma, except the stakes are much higher than student council. This isn't just about school policies, it's about how authority itself should work. As you read, notice how the psalm defines good leadership and what it says about who should be the focus of a leader's attention.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 72 and begin reading silently. We're going to wrestle with some challenging questions about power, protection, and priorities.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly among students. Some may need help with ancient royal language or concepts like "oppression" and "afflicted." This psalm builds to its central point, so let them feel the weight of the repeated focus on vulnerable people.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What kind of person does this psalm describe, and what are they supposed to do?
- Who gets the most attention in this psalm, powerful people or powerless people?
- What surprises you about the priorities described here?
- How would you feel if you were one of the "needy who cry out"?

### Psalm 72:1-20 (NIV)

*1 Endow the king with your justice, O God, the royal son with your righteousness. 2 May he judge your people in righteousness, your afflicted ones with justice. 3 May the mountains bring prosperity to the people, the hills the fruit of righteousness. 4 May he defend the afflicted among the people and save the children of the needy; may he crush the oppressor. 5 May he endure as long as the sun, as long as the moon, through all generations. 6 May he be like rain falling on a mown field, like showers watering the earth. 7 In his days may the righteous flourish and prosperity abound till the moon is no more.*

*8 May he rule from sea to sea and from the River to the ends of the earth. 9 May the desert tribes bow before him and his enemies lick the dust. 10 May the kings of Tarshish and of distant shores bring tribute to him. May the kings of Sheba and Seba present him gifts. 11 May all kings bow down to him and all nations serve him.*

*12 For he will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. 13 He will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. 14 He will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in his sight. 15 Long may he live! May gold from Sheba be given him. May people ever pray for him and bless him all day long. 16 May grain abound throughout the land; on the tops of the hills may it sway. May the crops flourish like*

*Lebanon and thrive like the grass of the field. 17 May his name endure forever; may it continue as long as the sun. Then all nations will be blessed through him, and they will call him blessed. 18 Praise be to the Lord God, the God of Israel, who alone does marvelous deeds. 19 Praise be to his glorious name forever; may the whole earth be filled with his glory. Amen and Amen. 20 This concludes the prayers of David son of Jesse.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for verses 12-14 since these carry the psalm's emotional weight.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-7 (Opening prayer for righteous rule) **Reader 2:** Verses 8-11 (Vision of universal authority) **Reader 3:** Verses 12-20 (Focus on protecting the vulnerable and concluding praise)

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Listen for the emotional weight in these words. This isn't just political theory, it's a passionate vision of how authority should work.

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

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

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 questions about this psalm that you're genuinely curious about. Not quiz questions with obvious answers, but things that made you think "Wait, what?" or "How does that work?" For example, you might ask about why certain things are emphasized, or how this would actually work in real life, or what something means. You have 3 minutes, focus on what you're actually wondering about.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive the discussion with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guiding discovery rather than lecturing. Write their questions on the board and look for themes.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions. I'll write them on the board, and we'll start with ones that most of you can relate to or are curious about.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that this king is supposed to focus on specific types of people?"
- "Why does the psalm say the blood of the needy is 'precious' in the king's sight?"
- "How would you feel if you were the 'afflicted who have no one to help'?"
- "What's the connection between verses 12-14 and the prosperity described elsewhere?"
- "Is this describing an ideal that no human could reach, or setting a practical standard for leadership?"
- "Where do you see the opposite pattern happening, authority that ignores or exploits the vulnerable?"
- "What would change if leaders actually prioritized people who can't help them back?"
- "How does this apply to influence and authority that isn't political, like social status, physical ability, or family resources?"

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening in this psalm? The writer starts with a prayer for righteous leadership, then describes universal authority, but the center of the whole thing is verses 12-14, protecting people who can't protect themselves. Everything else flows from that core purpose. The psalm suggests that authority gains legitimacy not from power itself, but from using that power to shield those who would otherwise be helpless. That's a radically different way of thinking about leadership than what we usually see.

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

Let's get real about your lives. You might not be kings, but you all have influence and abilities that others don't. Maybe you're stronger than younger kids, smarter in certain subjects, more confident socially, or have access to resources others lack. The question this psalm raises is: what do you do with whatever advantages you have?

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

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- When you see someone being bullied and you could intervene or get help
  - Deciding whether to include someone who's typically left out of group activities
  - Using your social media platform to highlight issues affecting people who don't have a voice
  - How you treat younger siblings or students when parents or teachers aren't watching
  - Standing up for students with disabilities or learning differences when others mock them
  - Choosing whether to share resources, knowledge, or opportunities with those who need them
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to prescriptive answers. Different situations require different responses. Help them think through principles rather than providing blanket solutions.

### **Discussion Prompts**

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- "When have you seen someone use their influence to protect or help people who couldn't help themselves?"
  - "What would help you choose to defend someone even when it might cost you popularity or convenience?"
  - "How do you tell the difference between helping people and enabling dependence?"
  - "What's the difference between authority that serves itself and authority that serves others?"
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## **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

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Here's what I want you to take with you from this ancient psalm: legitimate authority, whether it's political power, social influence, or just being stronger than someone else, proves itself by protecting those who can't protect themselves. This isn't easy, and it doesn't mean you can solve everyone's

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problems. But it does mean that how you treat people who can't benefit you reveals something important about your character.

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This week, pay attention to moments when you have the ability to help or protect someone who can't return the favor. Notice what influences your choice to act or stay uninvolved. You might be surprised by how many opportunities you have to reflect this psalm's vision of righteous authority in your daily life.

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You asked really thoughtful questions today and wrestled honestly with complex issues. That kind of thinking, engaging seriously with difficult ideas rather than settling for easy answers, is exactly what will help you become people who use whatever influence you have wisely and compassionately.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that good leaders use their power to help people who can't help themselves, and that this is how God wants all of us to act when we have the ability to help someone who needs it.

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### If Kids Ask "Why Doesn't God Just Help Everyone Himself?"

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Say: "God could do everything by himself, but he chooses to work through people like us. When we help someone who needs it, we're showing them what God is like."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been chosen as team captain or group leader for something. Keep your hand up if you've ever been the oldest kid in a group and everyone was looking to you to decide what to do. One more, keep your hand up if you've ever been stronger, taller, or better at something than the people around you.

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Here's a harder question. Imagine you're the captain of a team, and there's a kid who's not very good at the game. Everyone wants you to leave that person out because they might make the team lose. Part of

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you thinks "Well, we do want to win, and everyone else wants to leave them out." But another part of you thinks "That kid really wants to play, and it would hurt their feelings to be left out."

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That's a confusing situation, isn't it? It makes sense that you'd want your team to succeed. But you also know how it feels to be left out, and you can see that this person really wants to be included. Your friends are counting on you to make a choice, but either choice will disappoint someone.

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It's like that movie *Inside Out*, where Riley has different emotions telling her different things to do. Sometimes being a leader means you have competing feelings, you want to do well, but you also want to be kind. You want to make your friends happy, but you don't want to hurt someone who's already struggling.

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The tricky part is figuring out what good leadership actually looks like. When you have the power to make decisions that affect other people, how do you decide what to do? Do you focus on the people who are already strong and popular, or do you pay attention to people who need help?

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Today we're going to explore one of the most beautiful passages in the Bible about what it means to be a leader who makes decisions like God would make them. This isn't about kings and palaces, it's about how to use whatever power you have to make things better for people who need help. Let's find out what God thinks makes a leader truly great.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share experiences with unfair treatment or times they've felt powerless. Acknowledge these briefly but keep momentum moving toward the story without getting stuck in lengthy examples.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago, in the time of kings and kingdoms, there lived a king who was very different from other kings. Most kings in those days used their power to make themselves richer, stronger, and more comfortable. But this king had a different idea about what made a king truly great.

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One day, the king was walking through his kingdom, and he heard crying. He stopped and listened carefully. Do you know what he heard? He heard people calling for help, people who were hungry, people who were being hurt by others, people who had no one to protect them.

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Now, many kings would have just kept walking. They might have thought, "That's not my problem," or "I have more important things to worry about." But this king stopped and thought, "These are my

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people. If they're crying for help, it's my job to help them."

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Imagine what that felt like for the people who were crying. They had been ignored for so long. Maybe they thought no one cared about them. But suddenly, the most powerful person in the kingdom was listening to them and cared about their problems.

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The king called his advisors together and said something that surprised them: "I want you to make a list of everyone in our kingdom who needs help. I want to know about every person who is hungry, every person who is afraid, every person who is being treated unfairly."

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His advisors were confused. They said, "But Your Majesty, shouldn't we focus on the important people? The wealthy merchants, the powerful nobles, the strong armies? They're the ones who can help your kingdom succeed."

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The king looked at his advisors with determination in his eyes. "You don't understand," he said. "The measure of a kingdom isn't how well the powerful people are doing, it's how well the weakest people are doing. Anyone can take care of people who are already strong. A true king takes care of people who can't take care of themselves."

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And then the king said something that changed everything:

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**Psalm 72:12-14 (NIV)**

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*12 "I will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. 13 I will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death. 14 I will rescue them from oppression and violence, for precious is their blood in my sight."*

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Do you hear what the king said? He said the blood of needy people was "precious" to him. That means he saw them as valuable, as worth protecting, as important. Not because they could do anything for him, but because they needed help and he had the power to help them.

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From that day forward, everything in the kingdom changed. When someone was hungry, the king made sure they had food. When someone was being bullied or hurt, the king sent people to protect them. When someone was sick and couldn't afford medicine, the king made sure they got what they needed.

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But here's the amazing part, when the king started taking care of people who couldn't help themselves, the whole kingdom became a better place. People weren't afraid anymore. They didn't have to worry

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about being hurt or forgotten. They could focus on learning, creating, and helping each other.

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The strong people in the kingdom began to see what the king was doing, and they started helping too. The wealthy merchants shared their resources with families who didn't have enough. The skilled craftsmen taught their trades to people who needed work. The healthy people looked out for those who were sick.

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Soon, other kingdoms heard about what was happening. They heard about a place where the king cared more about protecting weak people than impressing powerful people. They heard about a kingdom where no one was forgotten or left behind.

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Other kings came to visit, and they were amazed. "How did you create such a peaceful, prosperous kingdom?" they asked. And the king replied, "I learned that true strength isn't about how much power you can gather for yourself, it's about how you use your power to help people who need it most."

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Years later, people would still tell stories about this king. But the most important thing they remembered wasn't his wealth or his armies or his impressive palace. What they remembered was how he listened to people who were crying for help, and how he used his power to rescue them.

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Sometimes in our lives, we have the chance to be like this king. Maybe we're stronger than younger kids, or smarter at certain subjects, or have things that others don't have. The question is: do we use our advantages to help people who need it, or do we only think about ourselves?

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What we learn from this king is that God wants us to use whatever power we have, whether it's being popular, being strong, being smart, or having resources, to help people who can't help themselves. When we do that, we're showing the world what God is like.

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The most beautiful part is that when we help people who need it, amazing things happen. Not just for them, but for everyone around us. That's how God designed the world to work, when the strong help the weak, everyone becomes stronger.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine you're one of the people crying for help in the story. Maybe you're hungry and don't know where your next meal will come from, or someone bigger than you is being mean to you and you can't make them stop. You've been calling for help, but no one seems to care. Then suddenly, the most powerful person around stops and listens to you. How would that make you feel?

**Listen For:** "Happy," "relieved," "surprised", affirm: "Yes! After feeling forgotten, suddenly someone important cares about what happens to you."

### Question 2: The Different Choice

The king's advisors wanted him to focus on powerful, wealthy people who could help the kingdom become stronger. That actually makes sense, you want allies who can help you succeed. But the king chose differently. Why do you think he decided to focus on people who couldn't do anything for him instead?

**If They Say:** "Because he was nice", respond: "What kind of 'nice' do you think this was? How is this different from just being polite?"

### Question 3: The Precious Blood

The king said that the blood of needy people was "precious" in his sight. That's a special word, precious means something is valuable and worth protecting. Why do you think he saw people who couldn't help him as precious? What made them valuable to him?

**Connect:** "This is exactly why the king's choice was so powerful, he saw worth in people that others overlooked."

### Question 4: The Kingdom Effect

When the king started protecting people who needed help, the whole kingdom became better, even for the people who were already doing well. Why do you think helping weak people made strong people's lives better too? How does that work?

**If They Say:** "Because everyone was happier", respond: "What do you think made everyone happier? What changed about how people treated each other?"

You're discovering something important about how God designed the world to work. When people with power use it to help people without power, everyone benefits. It creates the kind of place where everyone can thrive. Now let's experience this principle in action.

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#### **4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)**

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

##### **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces the psalm's pattern by having kids physically experience how people with advantages can choose to help those without, and how helping the "weak" actually makes everyone stronger. Success looks like kids discovering that the best solutions happen when stronger people use their abilities to help those who need it most.

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

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We're going to play Bridge Builders. I need everyone to find a partner. One person will be the Island Walker, you can only step on certain spots. The other person will be the Bridge Builder, you can step anywhere, but you can't go to the final destination alone.

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Here's the challenge: Island Walkers are trying to get from one side of the room to the other, but they can only step on "safe islands", the tiles that have certain patterns or colors. Bridge Builders can step anywhere they want, but they can't cross the finish line unless their Island Walker partner makes it too.

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The twist is this: Island Walkers will discover that some gaps are too big to cross alone, and Bridge Builders will realize they need their Island Walker partners to complete the challenge successfully. Neither person can win unless both people make it to the end.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like the psalm we just heard. The Bridge Builders have advantages that Island Walkers don't have, but the goal isn't just for strong people to succeed, it's for everyone to succeed together.

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

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Let everyone start trying to cross the room independently. Most Island Walkers will get stuck quickly when they encounter gaps they can't cross alone. Bridge Builders will initially move ahead easily but then realize they can't finish without their partners.

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Watch for the moment when Bridge Builders realize their partners need help. Some will try to drag or carry their Island Walker partners, but guide them toward more creative solutions like becoming human stepping stones or finding ways to extend their partners' reach.

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Coach with phrases like: "I notice your partner needs to get to that spot, but they can't reach it. I wonder what your abilities could do to help..." or "Remember, both people have to finish for the team to succeed."

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Celebrate the breakthrough when Bridge Builders start using their freedom of movement to create paths for their Island Walker partners. Point out how the Bridge Builder's advantages become most valuable when used to help their partner succeed.

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Once teams start succeeding, have them notice how much better it feels to cross together than it would to cross alone. The Bridge Builder's victory is hollow without their partner, and the Island Walker's success depends on their partner's help.

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**Watch For:** The moment when Bridge Builders choose to use their advantage to create opportunities for Island Walkers, this is the physical representation of the psalm's vision of righteous authority.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when Bridge Builders used their freedom to help Island Walkers versus when they just went ahead by themselves? The best feeling came when people with advantages used them to help their partners succeed, right? That's exactly what the psalm is talking about, people with power using it to help people who need it, so everyone can celebrate together.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God wants people with power, whether that's being strong, smart, popular, or having resources, to use their advantages to help people who can't help themselves. The king in our story showed us that true leadership means listening to people who are crying for help and using your abilities to rescue them.

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This doesn't mean you have to solve everyone's problems or that you should let people take advantage of you. But it does mean that when you have the ability to help someone who needs it, and they can't help themselves, that's what God wants you to do.

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The amazing result is what we experienced in our activity, when strong people help weak people, everyone becomes stronger. The whole community becomes a better place where everyone can thrive.

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

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Pay attention to times when you have an advantage that someone else doesn't have, maybe you're taller, stronger, know something they don't, or have access to something they need. When you notice these moments, ask yourself: "How can I use this advantage to help them?" Then try it and see what happens.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for showing us what good leadership looks like through this psalm. Help us notice when we have the ability to help someone who needs it. When we see someone crying for help, give us brave and kind hearts like the king in our story. Help us remember that when we help people who can't help themselves, we're showing them what you are like. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to help people who need help, especially when we can do something they can't do for themselves.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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## If Kids Don't Understand

Compare helping people who can't help themselves to helping a baby bird that fell from its nest, the bird can't fix its own problem, but you can.

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

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about helping others or God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Love One Another." Use movements: reach up high during verses about God, reach out to help during verses about loving others, march in place during strong, confident lyrics.

Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit down in our special story shape and hear about a very special king who knew how to help people. Make a horseshoe on the floor facing me, I have an exciting story to tell you!

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### 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 concerned when talking about people who need help, sound strong and determined when voicing the king.

Today we're going to meet a very special king who was different from all the other kings!

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

Most kings only cared about rich people and strong people. They wanted big armies and lots of gold. But this king cared about different people.

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*[Cup hand to ear, look concerned]*

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One day, the king heard crying. "Help us!" some people called. "We're hungry!" "We're scared!" "No one cares about us!"

---

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

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The king's helpers said, "Don't worry about those people, King. They can't help you. Focus on the rich people instead."

---

*[Move to center, stand tall and speak firmly]*

---

But the king said something amazing: "No! These people who need help are special to me. I will help them!"

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*[Move to side, gesture widely]*

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The king said, "I will listen when people cry for help. I will protect people who are weak. I will save people who are in danger."

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**Psalm 72:12-13 (NIV)**

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*12 "I will deliver the needy who cry out, the afflicted who have no one to help. 13 I will take pity on the weak and the needy and save the needy from death."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you think the people who were crying felt happy when the king said that? Yes! They felt so happy because someone important cared about them!

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*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

---

So the king started helping right away! When people were hungry, he gave them food. When people were scared, he protected them.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

The king said something very important: "These people are precious to me." Do you know what precious means? It means very, very valuable, like a treasure!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

The king helped everyone who needed help, even though they couldn't give him anything back. He helped them because it was the right thing to do.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And you know what happened? When the king helped weak people, everyone in the kingdom became happy! The whole place became safe and peaceful.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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This king showed everyone what God is like. God cares about people who need help. God thinks every person is precious, like a treasure!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes we can be like this king! Maybe you're bigger than your little brother, or you know how to do something your friend doesn't know, or you have toys that someone else wants to play with.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone needs help and you can help them, God wants you to be like the good king. Use your big-ness, your smarts, or your toys to help people who need it!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves it when we help people who can't help themselves. When we do that, we show everyone what God's love looks like!

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

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

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Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'm going to give each pair a question to talk about for about one minute. 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 the crying people felt when the king said he would help them?
2. What would you do if you heard someone calling for help?
3. Why do you think the king wanted to help people who couldn't help him back?
4. What would you feel if someone bigger than you protected you from something scary?
5. How did helping weak people make the whole kingdom better?
6. What does it mean that God thinks people who need help are "precious"?
7. When did the people in the story feel happiest?
8. Who at your school might need someone to help them?
9. How can you help someone in your family who is smaller than you?
10. What would happen if everyone helped people who needed it?
11. Why is it important to listen when someone says they need help?
12. How can you be like the good king when you're at home?
13. What kinds of help can kids give to other kids?
14. How do you think God feels when we help people who need help?
15. What would you want someone to do if you were the one needing help?

16. How does it feel good to help someone who can't help themselves?

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17. What can you do if someone bigger than you needs to be reminded to be kind?

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18. How can you tell if someone needs help?

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19. What would happen if the good king had ignored the crying people?

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20. How can you show someone that they are precious to you?

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

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

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

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Select an action song about helping or kindness. Suggestions: "If You're Happy and You Know It" (adapted with helping actions), "The Wise Man Built His House Upon the Rock," or "Father Abraham." Use movements: reach out to help during verses about kindness, march confidently during verses about being strong, clap hands during celebration sections.

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Wonderful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Make rows and sit criss-cross applesauce with your hands folded.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for the story about the good king who helped people.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to help people who need help, especially when we can do something they can't do by themselves.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us be like the good king who thought that people who needed help were precious and special.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you that you love us and help us when we need it. Help us show your love to others. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "God, help me be kind to my little sister" or "God, help me notice when someone needs help."

Remember, God wants you to help people who need help, just like the good king! Have a wonderful week, and look for ways to show God's love by helping others!

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