

Living in Community

Volume 11

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Living in Community

Volume 11

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About This Series

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

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

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

A Note on Scripture Sources

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

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

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

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

How to Use This Book

For Teachers and Group Leaders

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

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

For Individual Study

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

For Families

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

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

The 1611 Press Team

Love's True Character

The Counter-Program to Automatic Enmity, What does love actually look like when it's real?

1 Corinthians 13:1-13

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NIV)

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part will disappear. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; but

then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

Context

Paul writes to the church in Corinth during a time of internal conflict and division. The Corinthians are arguing about spiritual gifts, with members claiming superiority based on their abilities to speak in tongues, prophesy, or demonstrate faith. Church members are developing factions, keeping score of wrongs, and treating each other with dishonor and pride. What they think makes them spiritual is actually dividing them.

Paul's famous "love chapter" isn't primarily about romantic love or even general kindness, it's a direct response to a community tearing itself apart. He's showing them that without love, even the most impressive spiritual gifts become "resounding gongs" and "clanging cymbals", noise that destroys rather than builds. The specific characteristics he lists directly counter the enemy-making patterns destroying their fellowship.

The Big Idea

Love functions as a complete counter-program to the automatic patterns of enmity that destroy relationships and communities.

This isn't sentimental love or good intentions. Paul defines love through specific behaviors that directly oppose how humans naturally respond when threatened, frustrated, or wounded. The "always" statements reveal love's radical nature, it persists even when others don't reciprocate, creating space for healing rather than escalating conflict.

Theological Core

- **Record-keeping prohibition.** "Keeps no record of wrongs" directly challenges the mental accounting that fuels ongoing hostility and prevents reconciliation.

- **Restraint from automatic responses.** The "does not" statements counter natural human reactions like envy, boasting, pride, anger, and self-seeking when relationships become difficult.
- **Active persistence in counter-responses.** The "always" statements, protects, trusts, hopes, perseveres, show love as actively choosing opposite responses to what circumstances might warrant.
- **Truth and protection balance.** Love "rejoices with the truth" while "always protecting," showing that authentic love neither enables evil nor destroys through exposure.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Love's characteristics directly counter patterns that create enemies and destroy relationships
 - The tension between "always trusts" and wisdom about boundaries requires discernment rather than naive application
 - Self-examination against these characteristics reveals where automatic enmity operates instead of love
 - Love creates space for healing by refusing to keep score and choosing counter-responses to natural reactions
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Grades 4, 6

- Love means choosing specific behaviors even when someone hurts or frustrates us
 - Not keeping track of wrongs helps friendships heal instead of getting worse
 - Our automatic reactions (getting angry, being mean back) can be changed with different choices
 - Feeling hurt is normal, but we can still choose kind actions even when we feel bad
-

Grades 1, 3

- God loves us with patience and kindness, even when we make mistakes
 - We can be kind to others even when they aren't kind to us
 - Love means being helpful and nice, especially when it's hard to do
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Naive application of "always" statements.** "Always trusts" doesn't mean being gullible or enabling abuse. Paul is describing love's nature, not eliminating wisdom about boundaries and safety.
 - **Treating this as impossible idealism.** While we can't love perfectly, these characteristics show us what love looks like so we can recognize when we're operating from enmity instead.
 - **Making it about feelings rather than choices.** This passage describes behavioral choices that can be made regardless of emotions. Love is something we do, not just something we feel.
 - **Skipping the community conflict context.** This isn't general advice about love, it's specific medicine for a community being destroyed by accumulated grievances and competitive spirituality.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Does 'always trusts' mean I have to trust someone who has hurt me repeatedly?"

Trust in this context means giving people space to change rather than writing them off permanently. It doesn't mean being naive about patterns of behavior or putting yourself in harm's way. Love protects (also in the passage), which sometimes means setting boundaries. The point is refusing to let past wrongs determine future possibilities while still being wise about safety.

"What about righteous anger? Isn't it sometimes right to be angry about injustice?"

"Not easily angered" doesn't eliminate all anger, Jesus himself got angry at injustice. The key is "easily", love doesn't have a hair trigger that explodes over minor offenses. When anger comes from

love for what's right rather than wounded ego, it can be part of protection and hope rather than enmity.

"How do you 'rejoice with the truth' but still 'always protect'? Isn't that contradictory?"

Truth without protection becomes gossip or cruelty. Protection without truth becomes enabling or denial. Love finds ways to honor reality while still seeking the good of others. Sometimes this means confronting someone privately before exposing them publicly, or finding ways to address wrongs that create space for repentance rather than just punishment.

The One Thing to Remember

Love is the counter-program to our automatic patterns of making enemies, it chooses opposite responses that create space for healing instead of escalating conflict.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to recognize how love functions as a counter-program to automatic enmity patterns, helping them see where their own relationships might be operating from accumulated grievances rather than love's characteristics.

The Tension to Frame

How do the "always" statements work practically without being naive about abuse, manipulation, or genuine danger?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with people who have broken trust or been consistently harmful
 - Honor the complexity between love and boundaries, they're not opposites
 - Let students wrestle with applications rather than giving them neat answers
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about that person who really gets under your skin. Maybe it's someone at school who always has to be right, or someone in your family who pushes your buttons, or that friend who always makes everything about themselves. You know exactly who I'm talking about. When you see their name pop up on your phone or hear their voice in the hallway, you can feel your whole body tense up.

Now here's what's interesting: you probably have very good reasons for feeling that way. They probably have done things that justify your reaction. Maybe they've been selfish or mean or inconsiderate multiple times. Your brain has been keeping track, adding up all the evidence that this person is problematic. And honestly? Your brain might be right about the pattern.

But here's where it gets complicated. Paul is writing to a church that had very similar problems. People were keeping score of who was more spiritual, who had better gifts, who was right in various arguments. They had legitimate grievances against each other. But Paul says something radical: he gives them a completely different operating system for relationships.

Today we're looking at what might be the most famous description of love ever written. But it wasn't written for wedding ceremonies, it was written for a community that was destroying itself through accumulated resentments and competitive spirituality. Pay attention to how specific these characteristics are, and notice which ones directly challenge the mental accounting we do in difficult relationships.

Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 13 and start reading silently from verse 1. We're going to focus mainly on verses 4-7, but read the whole chapter to get the full context.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage feels familiar to many students, so encourage them to read it as if for the first time. Watch for students who finish early and point them to reread verses 4-7 more slowly.

As You Read, Think About:

- What problem was Paul trying to solve with this description of love?
 - Which characteristics would be hardest for you personally to live out?
 - How do the "does not" and "always" statements work as opposites to normal human reactions?
-

- What would change in your most difficult relationship if you actually operated this way?
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1 Corinthians 13:1-13 (NIV)

1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.

4 Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. 5 It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. 6 Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. 7 It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres.

8 Love never fails. But where there are prophecies, they will cease; where there are tongues, they will be stilled; where there is knowledge, it will pass away. 9 For we know in part and we prophesy in part, 10 but when completeness comes, what is in part will disappear. 11 When I was a child, I talked like a child, I thought like a child, I reasoned like a child. When I became a man, I put the ways of childhood behind me. 12 For now we see only a reflection as in a mirror; but then we shall see face to face. Now I know in part; then I shall know fully, even as I am fully known.

13 And now these three remain: faith, hope and love. But the greatest of these is love.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read each section. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic verses 1-3 and the climactic verses 4-7.

Reader 1: Verses 1-3 (The dramatic setup, spiritual gifts without love) **Reader 2:** Verses 4-7 (The characteristics of love) **Reader 3:** Verses 8-13 (Love's permanence and greatness)

Listen for the contrast Paul is setting up, impressive spiritual accomplishments versus the specific behaviors that actually matter in community.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 questions about what you just read, not questions you think I want to hear, but things you're actually curious about. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How can..." or "What about when..." You have exactly 3 minutes to talk and come up with questions that your group really wants to explore.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board, look for themes around the "always" statements, the specific behaviors, and the practical applications.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What pattern do you notice in all the 'does not' statements, what do they have in common?"
 - "Why do you think Paul specifically mentions 'keeps no record of wrongs', what happens when we do keep records?"
 - "How is 'not easily angered' different from never being angry about anything?"
 - "What's the tension between 'always trusts' and protecting yourself from people who have proven untrustworthy?"
 - "When Paul says love 'rejoices with the truth,' what's the difference between that and gossip or public shaming?"
-

- "Think about social media drama or friend group conflicts, which of these characteristics would most change how that usually goes?"
- "What would happen to most of your conflicts if you actually 'kept no record of wrongs'?"
- "Why do you think Paul calls this the greatest, greater than even faith and hope?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Every single one of these characteristics is the opposite of what we naturally do when someone hurts, threatens, or frustrates us. Paul isn't describing feelings, he's describing a completely different operating system for relationships. Instead of the automatic pattern of accumulating grievances and defending ourselves, love chooses counter-responses that create space for healing rather than escalation.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see the opposite of these characteristics showing up most often? Think about school hallways, group chats, family dinner tables, team dynamics, social media interactions. Where do you find yourself keeping the most detailed records of wrongs?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Friend drama where everyone's keeping track of who said what and who's been more wrong
- Sibling relationships where past hurts get brought up in every new conflict
- Social media where someone's old posts or mistakes get weaponized against them
- Team or group projects where someone's past unreliability determines how they're treated forever
- Dating relationships where every small slight gets added to an internal scoreboard
- Dealing with authority figures who have been unfair or inconsistent in the past

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix them. Some situations require boundaries and wisdom. Help them think through when love requires protection versus when it calls for trust.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone live out these characteristics in a way that actually changed a difficult situation?"
 - "What's the difference between 'always trusts' and being naive about someone's patterns?"
 - "How do you balance 'keeps no record of wrongs' with learning from experience?"
 - "What would help you choose these responses when your automatic reaction is to defend or attack?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: love isn't just a feeling or even just good intentions. It's a complete counter-program to our automatic patterns of making enemies. Every time you choose patience over impatience, kindness over meanness, or letting go of old wrongs instead of bringing them up again, you're participating in something that literally changes the world by refusing to escalate conflicts.

This week, pay attention to your internal record-keeping. Notice when you're adding something to someone's account versus when you're choosing to let something go. Try experimenting with one of these characteristics in a relationship that's been difficult, not because you feel like it, but because you want to see what happens when love interrupts the usual patterns.

I'm genuinely impressed by the thoughtfulness you brought to this today. These aren't easy questions, and you wrestled with them honestly. Keep asking hard questions about what it means to love people who are genuinely difficult to love. That's where the real growth happens.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that love means choosing specific kind behaviors even when someone hurts or frustrates us, and that these choices can change what happens in our relationships.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps being mean to me no matter how nice I am?"

Say: "Love doesn't mean letting people hurt you. Sometimes love means getting help from adults or staying safe. But love also means not becoming mean yourself, even when others are."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone be really unfair to you. Maybe they blamed you for something you didn't do, or they were mean to you for no good reason, or they broke a promise they made to you. Keep your hand up if you remember exactly what they did and you could tell me all the details right now.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where you and a friend or sibling kept being mean to each other back and forth, and it just kept getting worse. One person does something mean, so the other person does something meaner back, and then it escalates until everyone's really upset and can't even remember how it started.

This is totally normal. Our brains are really good at remembering when someone hurts us, and really good at wanting to hurt them back so they know how it feels. Part of you thinks "They deserve it" and another part of you thinks "This doesn't feel good, but I don't know how to stop it." Both of those thoughts make complete sense.

This reminds me of those Marvel movies where the heroes and villains keep fighting each other, and each battle makes everyone angrier and more determined to win the next time. The problem is that nobody ever wins, the fighting just keeps going because everyone's keeping track of what the other side did wrong.

The tricky part is figuring out how to break that cycle. How do you choose to be kind when someone isn't being kind to you? How do you stop keeping track of all the ways someone has wronged you? Is it even possible to do that without being a pushover?

Today we're going to hear about a time when a really wise teacher named Paul had to help a whole community of people who were stuck in exactly this pattern. They were all keeping track of who was better, who was right, who had been wronged. And Paul gave them a completely different way to think

about love. Let's find out what he told them.

What to Expect: Kids will be eager to share their stories of unfairness. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really frustrating" but keep momentum moving toward the lesson.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a big church building full of people who all thought they were better than everyone else. Some people could speak in special languages that sounded mysterious and important. Others could predict the future or understand complicated mysteries about God. Everyone had different abilities, and instead of being thankful, they were all competing to see who was the most special.

But it wasn't just about who had the best gifts. These people were keeping track of everything. "Remember when Sarah said that thing about my family three months ago?" "Don't forget that Marcus always shows up late to our meetings." "I can't believe Rebecca got picked to help with the important stuff when I've been here longer." Sound familiar?

The church was falling apart. People were forming little groups against other groups. They were gossiping about each other, competing with each other, getting angry over small things. Everyone had very good reasons for being upset, but all that anger and scorekeeping was destroying their friendships.

Imagine being in a club where everyone was always proving they were better than everyone else, and everyone remembered every mean thing anyone had ever done. That would feel terrible, wouldn't it? You'd be walking on eggshells, worried about saying the wrong thing, never feeling safe or loved.

Paul heard about all this drama and realized the problem wasn't that some people had better gifts than others. The problem was that they had completely forgotten what love actually looks like. They thought being spiritual meant being impressive, but Paul knew that wasn't right at all.

So Paul sat down and wrote them a letter. First, he told them that even if you could speak like an angel or move mountains with your faith, if you don't have love, you're just making noise. You're like someone banging pots and pans together, really loud but totally annoying.

Then he said something that probably shocked them: even if you give away everything you own to help poor people, but you don't have love, it doesn't count for anything. Even good actions don't matter if they're not done with love.

But then Paul did something really interesting. Instead of just saying "you should love each other," he told them exactly what love looks like when it's real. He gave them a list of specific behaviors that they could actually do.

This is what Paul told them about love:

1 Corinthians 13:4-5 (NIV)

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It does not dishonor others, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs."

Think about how different their church would be if everyone actually did this! Instead of getting mad quickly, people would be patient. Instead of bragging about their gifts, people would be kind. Instead of keeping lists of who did what wrong, people would choose to let things go.

But Paul wasn't done. He told them even more about what love does:

1 Corinthians 13:6-7 (NIV)

"Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres."

Do you see how radical this is? Paul said love "always" protects, "always" trusts, "always" hopes, "always" perseveres. Even when other people aren't doing the same thing back! Even when you have good reasons to be mad! Even when someone has hurt you before!

This doesn't mean you let people walk all over you or that you pretend bad things didn't happen. But it means you choose to respond with kindness instead of meanness. You choose to hope for the best instead of expecting the worst. You choose to protect people's feelings instead of trying to hurt them back.

The amazing thing is that when people started living this way, their whole community began to change. Instead of everyone fighting and keeping score, they started actually caring about each other. Instead of trying to prove who was better, they started using their different gifts to help each other.

It wasn't easy. Sometimes people still got their feelings hurt. Sometimes it was hard to choose kindness when someone was being difficult. But they discovered something incredible: when you stop keeping track of wrongs and start choosing love's behaviors, it breaks the cycle of everyone being mean to each other.

Sometimes in our lives, we get stuck in those same patterns. Someone is mean to us at school, so we're mean back. A sibling does something annoying, so we do something annoying back. A friend breaks a promise, so we decide not to trust them anymore about anything.

What Paul discovered is that love gives us a different choice. Instead of automatically being mean when someone is mean to us, we can choose patience and kindness. Instead of keeping a mental list of all the ways someone has wronged us, we can choose to let things go and hope for something better.

This is how God loves us, with patience when we mess up, with kindness when we don't deserve it, always hoping for the best and never giving up on us. And when we love others the same way, amazing things start to happen in our relationships.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Imagine your friend borrows your favorite game and then "forgets" to bring it back for two weeks. When you finally get it back, you discover they let their little brother play with it and some of the pieces are missing. How would you feel, and what would your automatic reaction be?

Listen For: "Angry," "Never lending things again," "Demanding they replace it", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. You trusted them and they were careless."

Question 2: The Choice Point

Now imagine that instead of automatically writing your friend off or getting revenge, you tried some of Paul's love behaviors. What would it look like to be patient and kind in that situation, while still addressing the problem?

If They Say: "That's too hard" or "They don't deserve it", respond "You're right, it is hard. But what do you think would happen to your friendship with each approach?"

Question 3: The Record-Keeping Problem

Paul said love "keeps no record of wrongs." Think about a relationship where you do keep track of everything someone has done wrong. What would change if you stopped adding things to their account and started fresh each time?

Connect: "This is exactly what made Paul's advice so powerful, it breaks the cycle where everything keeps getting worse."

Question 4: The Always Challenge

Paul said love "always" protects, trusts, hopes, and perseveres. That sounds impossible! What do you think he meant by "always", does that mean we never protect ourselves or learn from experience?

If They Say: "That's unrealistic", guide them to think about the difference between being wise and being mean, between protecting yourself and hurting others back.

These are really mature insights! The beautiful thing about Paul's description of love is that it gives us specific actions we can choose, even when our feelings are hurt. Instead of just trying harder to feel loving, we can practice acting loving and see what happens.

4. Activity: The Tangle Rescue (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces love's counter-pattern by having kids physically experience how cooperation and letting go of blame can solve problems that competition and blame-keeping make worse. Success looks like kids discovering that focusing on helping rather than whose fault something is actually gets everyone untangled.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do the Tangle Rescue. Everyone stand in a tight circle, shoulder to shoulder, and reach both hands into the center. Grab two different hands from two different people, but don't grab both hands of the same person, and don't grab the hands of people right next to you.

Perfect! Now you're all tangled up together. Your challenge is to get completely untangled so you're back in a circle holding hands, but here's the twist: you cannot let go of the hands you're holding, and if someone starts blaming other people for the tangle or getting frustrated, the whole group has to start over.

The only way this works is if everyone focuses on helping each other get untangled instead of keeping track of who's making it worse. You have to be patient when someone moves slowly, kind when someone makes a mistake, and always looking for ways to help instead of ways to blame.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what was happening in Paul's church, everyone was tangled up in conflicts, but instead of working together to solve problems, they were keeping track of whose fault everything was, which just made everything worse.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Let them struggle for about a minute before giving any guidance. Watch for kids who start getting frustrated or blaming others. Initially, they'll probably try to force their way through or get impatient with slower movers.

As they encounter the challenge, listen for blame language like "You're doing it wrong" or "This person isn't helping." This is the key teaching moment, gently remind them that blame makes everyone start over, but helpful suggestions move everyone forward.

Coach with phrases like: "I notice this part looks really tight, I wonder if someone could duck under..." or "What if instead of pulling, someone tried stepping in a different direction?" Guide them toward cooperation without solving it for them.

Celebrate the breakthrough moment when someone offers to help another person instead of criticizing them, or when they start communicating about solutions rather than problems. This is the physical representation of Paul's love characteristics.

Once they succeed, have them notice how different they feel compared to when they were focused on blame. Point out specific moments when kindness and patience moved them forward while frustration held them back.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to help instead of blame, this is the physical representation of love's counter-pattern to automatic enmity.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when people started blaming each other versus when everyone focused on helping? This is exactly what Paul was talking about! When we keep track of who's doing what wrong, problems get worse and people get more frustrated. But when we choose patience, kindness, and focusing on solutions instead of blame, amazing things become possible that seemed impossible before.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: love isn't just a feeling, it's a choice to respond with specific behaviors even when someone hurts or frustrates us. Paul's list gives us clear actions we can take: be patient instead of impatient, be kind instead of mean, don't keep a mental scorecard of everything someone has done wrong, always look for ways to help and protect instead of ways to hurt back.

This doesn't mean you let people walk all over you or pretend that bad things didn't happen. Sometimes love means getting help from adults or setting boundaries to stay safe. But it does mean choosing not to become mean yourself, even when others are being mean to you.

The amazing result is what you just experienced in our activity: when we stop keeping track of whose fault things are and start focusing on solutions and helping each other, problems that seemed impossible to solve suddenly become solvable. Relationships that were stuck in mean cycles can actually heal and become stronger.

This Week's Challenge

Pick one person in your life where you've been keeping a mental list of their mistakes or annoying habits. This week, try Paul's approach: stop adding things to their account and look for opportunities to be patient and kind instead. See what happens when you focus on helping rather than keeping score.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us what real love looks like through Paul's words. Help us choose kindness and patience, especially when it's hard. Help us stop keeping track of how others have wronged us and instead look for ways to help and protect. Give us courage to break the mean cycles and create space for healing in our relationships. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God loves us with patience and kindness, and we can choose to be kind to others even when they aren't kind to us.

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 love to being a good friend when someone is having a bad day, you can still be nice even when they're grumpy.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

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 during "God loves," point to self during "loves me," and hug yourself during "always."

Great singing! I can tell you know God loves you so much. Let's sit in our story shape and hear about how God wants us to show love to other people, even when they're not being very nice to us.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when describing the fighting, sound warm and loving when sharing Paul's advice.

Today we're going to meet a very wise teacher named Paul who helped people learn how to love each other better!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Paul heard about a big church where everyone was fighting. They were saying mean things like "I'm better than you!" and "You did something wrong last week and I remember!" and "My gifts are more special than your gifts!" It was like a big playground where everyone was being mean and no one wanted to share or be kind.

[Make a sad, frustrated face]

Paul felt really sad when he heard about all this fighting. He knew that God wanted these people to love each other, not fight with each other. So he decided to write them a very important letter to help them understand what love really looks like.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak with excitement]

Paul sat down with his pen and paper and wrote them the most beautiful description of love ever written! He told them exactly how to act when someone is mean to them or when they feel frustrated with someone else.

[Move to center, speak clearly and warmly]

This is what Paul told them about love: "Love is patient and kind. It doesn't get angry fast. It doesn't keep track of all the wrong things people do."

[Use hand gestures, point to head when talking about "keeping track"]

Think about that! Instead of remembering every time someone was mean to you and getting madder and madder, love chooses to let things go and be kind anyway. Instead of getting angry really quickly, love takes deep breaths and stays patient.

1 Corinthians 13:4 (NIV)

"Love is patient, love is kind."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Have you ever had someone be mean to you and you wanted to be mean right back? That's a normal feeling! But Paul said love gives us a different choice. We can choose to be kind even when someone else isn't being kind to us.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

But Paul told them even more wonderful things about love! He said love always protects people, always hopes for good things, and never gives up on people, even when they make mistakes.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

This means that even when your little brother breaks your toy, or your friend says something that hurts your feelings, or someone at school is being unfair, you can still choose to be loving. You don't have to be mean back!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

The people in Paul's church tried this, and something amazing happened! Instead of everyone fighting and being mean, they started being kind to each other. When someone made a mistake, instead of staying mad forever, they chose to forgive and be friends again.

[Speak with excitement]

Their whole church became a place where people felt safe and loved instead of scared and angry! They discovered that when you choose kindness instead of meanness, wonderful things happen that you never expected.

[Pause dramatically]

Do you know why Paul knew so much about love? Because that's exactly how God loves us! God is always patient with us when we make mistakes. God is always kind to us even when we're not perfect. God never gives up on us, no matter what.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, people at school might be mean to us, or our siblings might do annoying things, or our friends might hurt our feelings. When that happens, we can remember Paul's words and choose to be patient and kind, just like God is with us.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can take a deep breath and choose to be kind anyway. When someone makes you mad, you can choose to forgive them instead of staying mad forever. When someone hurts your feelings, you can choose to hope for something better instead of being mean back.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

This isn't always easy, but God helps us! God gives us the power to love others the same way God loves us, with patience, kindness, and never giving up hope that things can get better.

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 spread out around the room! I'll give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just talk together about what you think!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the people felt when they were all fighting with each other?

2. What would you do if someone took your toy without asking?

3. How do you think Paul felt when he heard about all the fighting?

4. When is it hard for you to be patient and kind?

5. What changed when the people started being loving instead of mean?

6. How does God show love to you when you make mistakes?

7. Why do you think being kind is better than being mean back?

8. Tell about a time someone was kind to you when you were sad or mad.

9. What would happen at school if everyone chose to be kind instead of mean?

10. How can you show love to someone in your family this week?

11. What does it mean that love "never gives up" on people?

12. When someone hurts your feelings, what can you choose to do instead of being mean back?

13. How does it feel when someone is patient with you when you're having a hard day?

14. What's the difference between being kind and being a pushover?

15. Why do you think God wants us to love people who aren't always nice to us?

16. Tell about someone you know who is really good at being patient and kind.

17. What would you tell a friend who said "They were mean first, so I can be mean back"?

18. How can we ask God to help us when it's hard to be loving?

19. What do you think would happen if everyone in our class always chose kindness?

20. How can we remember to be like Paul's description of love when we're mad or upset?

Great discussions! Let's come back together. Who wants to share what you and your partner talked about?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about kindness and love. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love One Another," or "I've Got the Joy." Use movements like gentle clapping during "kind," arms spread wide during "love," and pointing to others during "one another."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for a prayer and thank God for teaching us about love.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for loving us with patience and kindness every single day.

[Pause]

Help us remember to choose kindness when someone is mean to us. Help us be patient when someone makes us frustrated or sad.

[Pause]

Thank you for never giving up on us when we make mistakes. Help us love others the same way you love us.

[Pause]

Thank you for your amazing love that never ends. Help us share that love with everyone we meet this week. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about love and kindness. Examples: "Thank you God for loving me" or "Help me be kind to my sister."

Remember, you can choose to be patient and kind this week, just like God is with you! Have a wonderful week showing God's love to everyone around you.

God Is Love

The Source of All Love, Does loving others matter more than believing right?

1 John 4:7-21

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.

16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us: We will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears

is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.

20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he gave us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

Context

John writes to believers facing false teachers who claimed special spiritual knowledge while living unloving lives. These teachers were dividing churches with their claims of superiority and their rejection of basic Christian love. John responds by establishing love as the fundamental test of genuine faith, not esoteric knowledge or impressive claims.

This passage comes at the climax of John's letter, where he directly confronts the core issue: what proves someone truly knows God? The false teachers had convinced some that advanced doctrine and mystical experiences mattered most. John counters that love, particularly love for fellow believers, serves as the ultimate diagnostic of authentic relationship with God.

The Big Idea

Love originates in God's character, flows through those who know Him, and serves as evidence of genuine divine relationship.

This doesn't reduce Christianity to mere moralism or suggest that loving feelings automatically equal spiritual maturity. Rather, John argues that true knowledge of God necessarily produces love because God's essential nature is love. The absence of love reveals the absence of genuine God-knowledge, regardless of theological claims or spiritual experiences.

Theological Core

- **Love's Divine Source.** All authentic love flows from God's character, making human love possible only as God shares His nature with us through spiritual birth and knowledge.
- **Love as Spiritual Evidence.** The presence or absence of love reveals the reality of our relationship with God, serving as a more reliable indicator than claims, feelings, or doctrinal

knowledge.

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- **God's Essential Nature.** "God is love" defines His character, all His actions, including judgment and discipline, express perfect love, even when they don't feel loving to us.
 - **Love's Completing Work.** Love perfects our spiritual development and removes fear of judgment because loving people reflect God's character and thus align with His purposes rather than oppose them.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Love originates in God and serves as evidence of genuine relationship with Him, not just nice behavior
 - The absence of love reveals spiritual problems that impressive doctrine or experiences cannot overcome
 - God's love enables our love, we don't generate love independently but receive and channel God's character
 - Discerning authentic faith requires examining love patterns, not just beliefs or claims
-

Grades 4, 6

- Real love comes from God, not from trying hard to be nice
 - When we know God, love grows naturally in us toward others
 - People who don't love others might not really know God, even if they say they do
 - Feeling scared or angry is normal, but we can choose to love anyway because God helps us
-

Grades 1, 3

- God loves us so much that He helps us love others
 - God is love, everything about God is loving and good
 - We can be kind and caring because God is kind and caring to us
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Reducing Love to Feelings.** John describes love as action and character, not emotional affection. Avoid suggesting that warm feelings toward everyone equals spiritual maturity. Focus on love as choosing to act for others' good, even when it's difficult.
 - **Making Love Equal to God.** "God is love" doesn't mean love is God or that all expressions called "love" are automatically divine. God's character defines true love, not human definitions or cultural preferences.
 - **Dismissing Doctrine for Love.** John isn't opposing truth to love but showing that authentic doctrine necessarily produces love. False teaching that doesn't generate love reveals its falsehood, regardless of how sophisticated it sounds.
 - **Creating Impossible Standards.** Don't suggest that any failure to love perfectly proves someone doesn't know God. John addresses patterns and directions, not perfection. Growth in love indicates spiritual health; complete absence indicates problems.
-

Handling Hard Questions

"What about people who seem loving but don't believe in God?"

John focuses on the love that flows among believers, not general human kindness. All people reflect God's image and can show kindness, but the specific love John describes, love rooted in God's character and directed toward fellow believers, requires spiritual birth. Non-Christians can be kind and generous, which reflects God's image in them, but that's different from the divine love that John says evidences knowing God personally.

"Does this mean beliefs don't matter as long as you're loving?"

John actually shows that right beliefs and love go together, they're not opposites. The false teachers he's addressing had impressive-sounding beliefs but lived unloving lives, which revealed their beliefs were wrong despite sounding spiritual. True beliefs about God naturally produce love because God's character is love. If someone's theology doesn't make them more loving, their theology needs examination.

"What if I don't feel very loving toward someone?"

Love in John's terms is more about action than feeling. You can choose to act for someone's good even when you don't feel warm toward them. In fact, this kind of love, choosing to bless even when it's hard, most clearly shows God's character. Start with actions; feelings often follow. Also, ask God to help you see that person as He sees them, which can change your perspective over time.

The One Thing to Remember

Love's presence or absence reveals whether someone truly knows God, because God's essential character is love, and knowing Him means receiving and reflecting that character.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the relationship between love and doctrine, helping them discover that love serves as evidence of authentic faith. Your role is to facilitate their exploration, not lecture about the answer.

The Tension to Frame

Does loving others matter more than believing the right things about God? Or does genuine belief necessarily produce love?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate students who've experienced "unloving" religious people, their observations matter
 - Acknowledge the complexity, some loving people don't profess faith, some religious people seem unloving
 - Let students wrestle with the tension rather than rushing to resolve it cleanly
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You've probably met two kinds of religious people. The first kind knows all the right answers, quotes Scripture confidently, and can explain complex theological concepts. But when it comes to how they treat others, especially people they disagree with, they can be judgmental, harsh, or dismissive. They seem more interested in being right than being kind.

The second kind might not have all the theological answers memorized, but they consistently show genuine care for others. They listen well, help people in need, and somehow make others feel valued and safe. When you're around them, you sense something different, something that feels like grace or peace or authentic goodness.

If you had to choose which person really knows God, which would you pick? The one with perfect doctrine or the one with consistent love? Your instinct probably points toward the loving person, but that might make you wonder: does what you believe even matter, as long as you're kind?

This tension isn't new. Early Christians faced the same question when false teachers arrived with impressive spiritual claims but unloving lifestyles. These teachers divided churches and hurt people while claiming special knowledge of God. The apostle John had to help believers figure out who really knew God and who was faking it.

Today we're looking at John's answer to this question. As you read, notice how he connects knowing God with loving others. Pay attention to whether he sees love and truth as competing against each other or working together.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage can feel emotionally heavy, some students might react to verses about fear or to the strong language about lying. Let them process without interruption.

As You Read, Think About:

- What does John say love proves about someone's relationship with God?
- Why does John connect love so directly to knowing God?
- What does John say about people who claim to love God but don't love others?
- How would this passage challenge the false teachers John was addressing?

1 John 4:7-21 (NIV)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love. 9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

11 Dear friends, since God so loved us, we also ought to love one another. 12 No one has ever seen God; but if we love one another, God lives in us and his love is made complete in us. 13 This is how we know that we live in him and he in us: He has given us of his Spirit. 14 And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent his Son to be the Savior of the world. 15 If anyone acknowledges that Jesus is the Son of God, God lives in them and they in God.

16 And so we know and rely on the love God has for us. God is love. Whoever lives in love lives in God, and God in them. 17 This is how love is made complete among us: We will have confidence on the day of judgment, because in this world we are like Jesus. 18 There is no fear in love. But perfect love drives out fear, because fear has to do with punishment. The one who fears is not made perfect in love. 19 We love because he first loved us.

20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen. 21 And he gave us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Choose confident readers for this passage, some verses have complex theology. Let students pass if they prefer not to read.

Reader 1: Verses 7-10 (Love's source and God's demonstration) **Reader 2:** Verses 11-16 (Our response and God's presence) **Reader 3:** Verses 17-21 (Love's completion and the final test)

Listen for John's logic as he builds his case. Notice how he connects love to knowing God, and pay attention to the strong language he uses.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What seemed strongest to you?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions with obvious answers, but things you're actually curious about or confused by. For example, you might ask "Why does John call people liars?" or "What does it mean that God is love?" You have three minutes to discuss and come up with your questions.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around love, doctrine, evidence, and the relationship between belief and action.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence does John give for his claim that 'everyone who loves has been born of God'?"
 - "How does John define love here, is it a feeling, an action, or something else?"
 - "Why does John say people who don't love others are lying when they claim to love God?"
 - "What's the difference between general human kindness and the love John describes?"
 - "How would you test whether someone really knows God, based on this passage?"
 - "Can you think of examples where someone's doctrine seemed right but their love was missing?"
 - "What if someone is loving but doesn't have correct beliefs about Jesus?"
 - "Why does John connect love so directly to spiritual confidence and removing fear?"
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Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what John is doing here? He's not saying doctrine doesn't matter, look at verse 15, where he talks about acknowledging Jesus as Son of God. But he's saying that true doctrine and love go together. If your beliefs about God don't make you more loving, something's wrong with your beliefs, not just your behavior. Love becomes the evidence that proves whether someone's faith is real or fake.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. You encounter this tension regularly, at school, in your family, online, even at church. You see people who say the right things but act unloving. You also might meet people who seem genuinely loving but don't share your beliefs. How do you sort that out?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Classmates who mock others while wearing religious symbols or talking about church
 - Family members who attend church regularly but speak hatefully about certain groups
 - Friends who show genuine care and kindness but don't believe in Christianity
 - Social media where people post Bible verses and harsh judgments in the same feed
 - Youth group members who know all the right answers but gossip or exclude others
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- Teachers or coaches who demonstrate consistent love and integrity without professing faith
-

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone whose love matched their beliefs in a way that impressed you?"
 - "What helps you when you're struggling to love someone who's been difficult?"
 - "How do you discern between genuine love and manipulation or people-pleasing?"
 - "What's the difference between loving someone and enabling harmful behavior?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: John isn't asking you to choose between loving others and believing truth about God. He's showing that real faith naturally produces love, while fake faith, no matter how doctrinally impressive, stays unloving. Love becomes the evidence that reveals whether someone's relationship with God is authentic.

This week, pay attention to how your beliefs about God affect your love for others. Notice when theology makes you more gracious, patient, or caring. Also notice when it makes you more judgmental or harsh. Let that awareness guide your spiritual growth, real truth should make you more loving, not less.

You did excellent thinking today, wrestling with complex questions that have challenged Christians for centuries. Keep asking hard questions and keep growing in both truth and love. They're supposed to work together, not compete.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that real love comes from God and shows up when someone actually knows God, not just when they try to be nice.

If Kids Ask "What about nice people who don't believe in God?"

Say: "God made everyone in His image, so everyone can be kind sometimes. But the special love that comes from really knowing God is different, it's stronger and lasts even when it's hard."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever met someone who seemed really nice at first, but then when something went wrong, they became mean or selfish. Maybe they were your friend when everything was fun, but when you needed help or made a mistake, suddenly they weren't very kind anymore.

Now here's a harder question. Have you ever met someone who was kind even when it was difficult for them? Like someone who helped you when they were tired, or forgave you when you messed up, or stood up for someone who was being picked on even though it might get them in trouble?

Both kinds of people can seem nice on the surface, but there's something different about the second kind. The first kind is nice when it's easy or when it benefits them. The second kind is loving even when it costs them something. That difference matters, and it tells us something important about what's in their hearts.

This is like the difference between Elsa in Frozen before and after she learns to love. At first, she tries to be good by staying away and controlling her powers, but she's really just scared and protecting herself. Later, when she learns to love Anna and others, her powers become beautiful and helpful instead of dangerous.

The tricky part is figuring out who really loves from their heart and who just acts nice when it's convenient. How can you tell the difference? What makes someone truly loving versus just temporarily nice?

Today we're going to hear about what the apostle John discovered about love. John was Jesus's best friend, and he learned something amazing about where real love comes from and how you can recognize it in people. Let's find out what he learned.

What to Expect: Kids might share examples of fake kindness or genuine love they've experienced.

Acknowledge briefly: "That sounds like the difference I'm talking about."

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

John had spent three years with Jesus, watching him love people in amazing ways. Jesus loved people who were sick, people who were mean, people who made mistakes, even people who hated him back.

After Jesus went to heaven, John helped take care of churches full of people who wanted to follow Jesus. But then something troubling started happening. Some people came to the churches claiming they knew special secrets about God.

These people sounded very smart and spiritual. They used big words and claimed they had better knowledge about God than everyone else. Some people in the churches were impressed by them and started following their teaching.

But John noticed something important. Even though these false teachers talked about knowing God, they weren't very loving to people. They were proud and mean. They divided friends and made people feel bad about themselves.

John watched this happen and realized he needed to help people understand something crucial. He needed to teach them how to tell who really knew God and who was just pretending.

So John wrote a letter to the churches. In this letter, he explained the most important test for figuring out whether someone truly knows God or is just faking it.

1 John 4:7-8 (NIV)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. Everyone who loves has been born of God and knows God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

John was saying something revolutionary. He was saying that if you want to know whether someone really knows God, don't just listen to their words or look at how smart they seem. Look at how they love other people, especially when it's difficult.

John explained that love doesn't start with us trying really hard to be nice. Love actually starts with God. Because God is love, that's who He is, and when people really know God, His love flows into them and through them to others.

Then John told them about the most amazing example of God's love that had ever happened.

1 John 4:9-10 (NIV)

9 This is how God showed his love among us: He sent his one and only Son into the world that we might live through him. 10 This is love: not that we loved God, but that he loved us and sent his Son as an atoning sacrifice for our sins.

God didn't wait for people to love Him first. While people were ignoring God or even being mean to God, God loved them so much that He sent Jesus to save them. That's what real love looks like, loving even when the other person doesn't deserve it.

John continued explaining how this changes everything for people who really know God.

He wrote that when God lives in someone, that person naturally starts loving others in the same way God loves. It's like God's love is a river that flows into them and then flows out to other people.

But then John said something that might have shocked some people who thought they knew God but weren't very loving.

1 John 4:20 (NIV)

20 Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar. For whoever does not love their brother and sister, whom they have seen, cannot love God, whom they have not seen.

John used strong words, he called people "liars" if they claimed to love God but were mean to other people. That might sound harsh, but John had learned something important from Jesus: you can't truly love God if you don't love the people God loves.

John was helping people understand that real love is like a tree that produces fruit. If a tree is healthy, it naturally grows apples or oranges. If someone really knows God, they naturally grow love for other people.

This doesn't mean they're perfect or never get frustrated. But it means that love becomes part of who they are, not just something they try to do when they remember.

John's message spread through all the churches. People began to understand that the false teachers, no matter how smart they sounded, didn't really know God because they lacked love. And people who did love others, even if they couldn't explain complicated theology, showed evidence that God lived in them.

This discovery helped protect the churches from people who wanted to trick them. Instead of being impressed by big words or fancy claims, they could look for genuine love as proof of genuine faith.

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who say they know about God but treat others badly. We also meet people who show real love even when it's hard for them. John's teaching helps us understand the difference.

Real love comes from really knowing God. When God lives in someone, His love flows through them to others. Love becomes the proof that someone truly knows God, not just knowledge about God.

The amazing truth is that God loved us first, before we loved Him back, and He helps us love others in the same way.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Difference

Imagine two kids at your school. One kid is nice to you when you have something they want, like snacks or help with homework, but ignores you when you can't help them. The other kid is kind to you even when you're having a bad day, can't share anything, or make mistakes. What do you think is different about what's inside their hearts?

Listen For: "One cares about you, the other just wants stuff" or "One is real, one is fake", affirm: "You're noticing something important about real love versus using people."

Question 2: The Source

John said that love comes from God, not from trying really hard to be nice. What do you think is the difference between love that comes from God and niceness that comes from just trying hard? Why might God's love be stronger or last longer?

If They Say: "God's love is stronger", respond "What makes it stronger? What does God have that we don't have on our own?"

Question 3: The Test

If you wanted to know whether someone really knows God or just knows about God, what would you look for in how they treat other people? What would real love look like in action, especially when it's difficult?

Connect: "This is exactly the test John gave the churches, look for love that lasts even when it's hard."

Question 4: The Challenge

Think about times when it's hard for you to love someone, maybe when they're annoying, or they hurt your feelings, or they're different from you. What would it look like to love them the way God loves you? What might God help you do?

If They Say: "It's too hard", respond "You're right, it is hard. That's why we need God's help. What do you think God might give us to make it possible?"

You're all noticing something important: real love comes from God and shows up even when it's difficult. That's how we can tell who really knows God, not by their big words, but by their lasting love.

4. Activity: The Love River (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that love flows from God through people to others by having kids physically experience being channels of love rather than sources of love. Success looks like kids discovering that

they can't generate love independently but can receive and pass it on.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to create a "Love River." One person will be God, standing at one end of the room. Everyone else will spread out between God and the far wall, making a winding river path by standing in a line with small gaps between you.

God will start with all the love (I'll give God some invisible love to hold). God's job is to pass love to the first person in the river. That person's job is to pass it to the next person, and so on, until it reaches the people at the far end who need love.

Here's the twist: you can only pass love that you've received. If no one gives you love, you have nothing to pass on. If someone passes love to you, you get to keep some and pass the rest along. But you can never create love on your own, you can only receive it and share it.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what John taught. Love comes from God, flows into people who know God, and then flows out to others who need it.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start with God passing love to the first person. Watch how the love moves from person to person down the river. Each person should receive it, keep some (put hands on heart), then pass the rest to the next person.

After one round, try blocking the river by having someone refuse to pass the love on. Notice what happens to the people downstream, they don't receive any love because it got blocked.

Then try having the person at the end try to create their own love without receiving any from God. Have them mime trying really hard to squeeze love out of themselves. "I notice you're working very hard, but where's the love coming from? Can you make it appear?"

Finally, restore the river and watch how smoothly love flows when everyone receives it from God and passes it along. "Look how much easier it is when love comes from its source!"

Rotate roles so different kids get to experience being God, being in the middle of the river, and being at the end receiving love.

Watch For: The moment when kids realize they can't generate love independently, this is the physical representation of John's teaching that love originates in God.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when the love got blocked versus when it flowed freely? And what happened when you tried to create love without receiving it from God? This is exactly what John was teaching, love starts with God and flows through people who know Him to reach others who need it.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Real love comes from God, not from trying really hard to be nice. When people truly know God, His love flows into them and through them to others. You can tell who really knows God by looking for love that lasts even when it's difficult.

This doesn't mean you have to be perfect or never get frustrated with people. It means that when God lives in you, love becomes part of who you are, not just something you try to remember to do.

The amazing result is that when God's love flows through you to others, it creates a beautiful chain of love that spreads everywhere, just like our love river activity!

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is hard to love, maybe they're annoying, different from you, or hurt your feelings, ask God to help you love them the way He loves you. Notice how God's love feels different from trying to be nice on your own.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank You for loving us first before we loved You back. Help us remember that real love comes from You. When it's hard to love someone, help us ask for Your love to flow through us to them. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God loves us so much that He helps us love others too.

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 God's love to a mommy or daddy's love that helps you love your baby brother or sister, then ask "How does God help you love others?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God's Love Is So Wonderful," or "I've Got the Love of Jesus." Use movements: point up to God during "God loves," hug yourself during "loves me," and reach out to others during "love others."

Great singing! Now let's sit in our story shape so I can tell you about something amazing that Jesus's best friend John learned about God's love. Come sit in a horseshoe on the floor!

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 warm and excited when talking about God's love, sound sad when talking about mean people.

Today we're going to meet John, who was Jesus's very best friend!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

John loved Jesus so much, and Jesus loved John so much. John got to see Jesus love people every single day. Jesus loved sick people and made them better. Jesus loved sad people and made them happy.

[Use gentle, caring voice]

After Jesus went to heaven, John helped take care of God's people. John wanted everyone to know how much God loves them. But then something not-so-good started happening.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look concerned]

Some people came who said they knew about God, but they were mean to others. They said big fancy words about God, but they didn't act loving like God does.

[Move to center, speak with warm authority]

John knew that God is love. Everything about God is loving and kind and good. So John wrote a letter to help people understand something very important.

[Look directly at each child]

John said that when people really know God, God's love comes into their hearts and helps them love other people too!

1 John 4:7-8 (NIV)

7 Dear friends, let us love one another, for love comes from God. 8 Whoever does not love does not know God, because God is love.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what this means? It means God loves you so much that He wants to share His love with you!

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

John told everyone about the most wonderful thing God did to show His love. God sent Jesus to earth because He loves us so much!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

John explained that God didn't wait for people to love Him first. God loved people first, even when they were being naughty or ignoring Him.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

That's what real love looks like, loving someone even when they make mistakes or aren't being nice back to you!

[Speak with gentle excitement]

And here's the most amazing part: when God lives in our hearts, His love grows in us too! It's like God puts His love inside us so we can share it with others.

[Pause dramatically]

John said that people who really know God will love other people. God's love is so big and so wonderful that it can't help but spill over to everyone around!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at home or at school, it might be hard to love someone who's being mean or annoying. But when God lives in your heart, He can help you love them anyway!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can ask God to help you be kind to them. When someone is sad, you can ask God to help you comfort them. God gives you His love so you can share it!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you so, so much, and He wants to help you love others too. That's how everyone can know that God lives in your heart, by seeing God's love come out of you!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think John felt when he saw people being mean but saying they knew God?
 2. What are some ways people show love to you at home?
 3. What would God want you to do if someone at school was being mean to you?
 4. How do you think God feels when He sees you being kind to others?
 5. What's the difference between being nice because you have to and being loving because God helps you?
 6. Who is someone you know who shows God's love really well?
 7. What happened when John taught people that God is love?
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8. How can you tell when someone really loves you versus when they're just being fake nice?

9. What would you do if your little brother or sister was being really annoying?

10. How does it feel when someone is genuinely kind to you?

11. Why do you think God loved people first before they loved Him back?

12. What's something loving you could do for someone this week?

13. How does God help you when it's hard to love someone?

14. What does it mean that God is love?

15. When is it hard for you to be loving to others?

16. What did John want people to remember about God?

17. What would the world be like if everyone shared God's love?

18. How can you ask God to help you love someone who's difficult?

19. What would happen if everyone acted like God lives in their heart?

20. How can you show others that God's love lives in you?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about loving others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," or "Love Is Something If You Give It Away." Use movements: hug yourself during "love," point to others during "one another," and spread arms wide during "give it away."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for a prayer. Sit cross-legged like we're in school, fold your hands, and bow your heads.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

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

[Pause]

Help us remember that Your love lives in our hearts and that You want to help us love others too...

[Pause]

When it's hard to be kind to someone, help us ask You for help. Thank You that You are love and You share Your love with us. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about God's love. Examples: "Thank You God for loving me" or "Help me love my sister when she's annoying."

Remember this week that God loves you so much, and He wants to help you love others too! Have a wonderful week sharing God's love!

Better Together

The Strength of Partnership, When is isolation worth the cost?

Ecclesiastes 4:9-16

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Ecclesiastes 4:7-16 (NIV)

7 Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: 8 There was a man who was all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless, a miserable business!

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: 10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

13 Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. 14 The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. 15 I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the second one, the successor to the king. 16 There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is

meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

Context

The Teacher (Qoheleth) in Ecclesiastes continues his observations about what brings meaning "under the sun." He has just examined oppression and envy as futile pursuits. Now he turns to the contrast between isolation and partnership. The setting appears to be the royal court where the Teacher observes both powerful loners and the dynamics of succession, giving him unique insight into human relationships at every level of society.

The immediate context reveals the Teacher watching a wealthy but solitary man whose endless toil brings no joy because he has no one to share it with. This stark picture of isolation sets up the wisdom that follows about partnership's practical benefits. The Teacher isn't being sentimental, he's making an economic and social observation about what actually works in human life.

The Big Idea

Partnership provides practical benefits that isolation forfeits, help when fallen, warmth, defense. Human flourishing requires maintained relationships even when conflict makes us want to retreat alone.

This isn't naive optimism about relationships always being easy or pleasant. The Teacher acknowledges that partnerships involve labor and potential disagreement. Yet the practical mathematics of human life consistently favor maintained relationships over chosen isolation, even when working through conflict requires extra effort.

Theological Core

- **Partnership Value.** God designed humans for mutual dependence, not self-sufficiency. The practical benefits of relationship, assistance, warmth, protection, reflect our created need for community.
 - **Isolation Costs.** Choosing aloneness, especially during conflict, forfeits tangible benefits. The isolated person faces vulnerability in areas where partnership would provide strength.
-

- **Practical Relationship Benefits.** Relationships aren't just emotional, they provide concrete advantages in work, protection, and survival that individual effort cannot match.
 - **Maintained Ties.** Even difficult relationships often provide more benefit than severance. The wisdom calls for perseverance in partnership rather than retreat to isolation when challenges arise.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Partnership provides measurable benefits even when relationships involve conflict or difficulty
 - The temptation toward isolation during disagreement often costs more than working through problems together
 - Discerning when relationship maintenance serves flourishing versus when boundaries or distance serve safety
 - Developing wisdom to distinguish between normal relationship challenges and genuinely toxic situations
-

Grades 4, 6

- Two people working together accomplish more than two people working separately
 - When we face problems alone, we're more vulnerable than when we have help
 - Choosing to stay angry and work alone usually makes things harder, not easier
 - Even when teammates annoy us or we disagree, working together often gets better results than going it alone
-

Grades 1, 3

- God made us to help each other and work together
 - When we help our friends, everybody does better
 - It's better to have friends to help us than to try to do everything by ourselves
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Overlooking Abuse.** This passage assumes normal relationship conflict, not abusive situations. Don't apply "partnership is always better" to relationships where safety requires distance. Acknowledge that some situations call for protective boundaries.
 - **Minimizing Real Costs.** Partnership does require labor and compromise. Don't present relationships as effortless or always pleasant. The Teacher's wisdom acknowledges difficulty while still advocating for maintained connection.
 - **Mandating Specific Relationships.** The text advocates for the principle of partnership, not for staying in every specific relationship regardless of circumstances. Help students think about building and maintaining healthy partnerships rather than enduring unhealthy ones.
 - **Ignoring Individual Limits.** Some people need more solitude than others to function well. The wisdom here is about not defaulting to isolation when conflict arises, not about eliminating all alone time or personal space.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What about relationships where the other person is mean or hurtful?"

That's exactly the kind of situation where we need wisdom to know the difference. This passage is talking about normal disagreements and conflicts, the kind where you're annoyed or frustrated but not unsafe. If someone is genuinely mean or hurtful in ways that damage you, that might be a situation where distance is the right choice. The Teacher is saying don't give up on partnerships just because they're hard work. But he's not saying stay in partnerships that are actually harmful.

"Doesn't this mean we should never want alone time?"

Not at all. The Teacher isn't condemning solitude or quiet time, he's warning against isolation as a response to conflict. There's a difference between choosing some alone time because you need to recharge, and cutting yourself off from people because you're angry or hurt. The passage is about not losing the benefits of partnership when temporary conflicts make us want to retreat permanently.

"What if I'm better at doing things by myself?"

You might be more efficient at certain tasks alone, but the Teacher is looking at the bigger picture of life. Even if you can do specific things well by yourself, the overall pattern of life, dealing with problems, staying motivated, getting help when you need it, having people who care about you, benefits from partnership. It's not about every single activity, but about the general approach to life.

The One Thing to Remember

Partnership provides practical benefits that isolation costs us, even when relationships involve conflict and require effort to maintain.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between the benefits of maintained partnership and the legitimate need for boundaries or distance in some relationships. Help them think through the practical costs of isolation during conflict.

The Tension to Frame

When relationships get difficult or hurtful, is it wise to maintain partnership despite the cost, or are there times when isolation actually serves our well-being better?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of difficult relationships while helping them distinguish between normal conflict and genuinely harmful situations
- Honor the complexity, sometimes isolation is protective, sometimes it's self-defeating
- Let students explore the nuances rather than rushing to simple answers about what they "should" do

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about a time when you were working on a group project and someone in your group was being difficult, maybe they weren't doing their share, or they kept shooting down everyone else's ideas, or they were just annoying to be around. You probably thought, "I could just do this whole thing myself and it would be so much easier."

And you're probably right, in the short term, working alone would feel easier. No arguments, no waiting for people, no compromising your vision. You get to do exactly what you want, exactly how you want, exactly when you want. That sounds pretty appealing when you're frustrated with other people.

But here's what's interesting: even though working alone might feel easier in the moment, you often end up with a smaller result than if you had found a way to work with difficult people. You lose access to their ideas, their skills, their connections, their perspective, even when they're annoying you.

Today we're looking at some ancient wisdom about this exact dilemma. The author has been watching people choose between partnership and isolation, and he's noticed something important about what each choice costs and what it provides. He's asking whether the benefits of maintained relationships outweigh the difficulty of dealing with conflict and disagreement.

Open your Bibles to Ecclesiastes chapter 4, starting at verse 7. As you read, notice the specific things the author says partnership provides that isolation forfeits. Pay attention to his tone, is he being sentimental about relationships, or is he making a more practical argument?

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage has some challenging vocabulary. Help students with "Qoheleth," "contentment," and "successor." Let them feel the weight of the isolated man's

question: "For whom am I toiling?"

As You Read, Think About:

- What does the isolated man in verses 7-8 have, and what is he missing?
- What specific benefits does the author list for partnership in verses 9-12?
- What surprises you about this advice, what did you expect him to say versus what he actually says?
- Where do you see this tension between isolation and partnership in your own life?

Ecclesiastes 4:7-16 (NIV)

7 Again I saw something meaningless under the sun: 8 There was a man who was all alone; he had neither son nor brother. There was no end to his toil, yet his eyes were not content with his wealth. "For whom am I toiling," he asked, "and why am I depriving myself of enjoyment?" This too is meaningless, a miserable business!

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: 10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12 Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

13 Better a poor but wise youth than an old but foolish king who no longer knows how to heed a warning. 14 The youth may have come from prison to the kingship, or he may have been born in poverty within his kingdom. 15 I saw that all who lived and walked under the sun followed the youth, the second one, the successor to the king. 16 There was no end to all the people who were before them. But those who came later were not pleased with the successor. This too is meaningless, a chasing after the wind.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who feel confident reading. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose someone with good expression for the isolated man's question in verse 8.

Reader 1: Verses 7, 8 (the isolated man's story) **Reader 2:** Verses 9, 12 (the partnership benefits)

Reader 3: Verses 13, 16 (the succession story)

Listen for the emotion in what you're hearing, the loneliness of the man who has everything but no one, the practical wisdom about partnership, the fickleness of popularity and power.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What confused you most?" or "What made you think of your own life?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, not questions you already know the answer to, but things you're actually curious or confused about. These might be questions about what the author means, or about how this applies to real life, or about whether you agree with his advice. You want to ask about things you're genuinely wondering about. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Help them think through the implications rather than giving answers.

Collecting Questions: I'll write your questions on the board and we'll explore the ones that interest the most people. What did you come up with?

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What exactly does the isolated man have, and what is he missing? What does his question reveal about his state of mind?"
-

- "The author gives very practical benefits of partnership, help when fallen, warmth, defense. Why focus on practical benefits rather than emotional ones?"

- "Is the author saying all isolation is bad, or is he talking about a specific kind of isolation? What's the difference?"

- "How do you distinguish between normal relationship conflict that's worth working through and genuinely toxic situations where distance is healthier?"

- "When you're frustrated with friends or family, what's your instinct, to work it out or to withdraw? What usually happens when you follow that instinct?"

- "The 'cord of three strands' suggests even stronger partnership. What would that look like in real life? What does the third strand represent?"

- "Look at verses 13-16 about the king and successor. How does this connect to the partnership theme? What's the author warning about?"

- "Where do you see the costs of isolation versus the benefits of maintained partnership in your own world, school, family, friendships?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what the author is doing here? He's making an economic argument about relationships. He's not saying relationships are always pleasant or easy, he's saying they're profitable in ways that isolation isn't. Even when partnership involves conflict or compromise, it provides practical benefits that you lose when you choose to go it alone. The question becomes: when is the cost of conflict worth paying for the benefits of maintained relationship?

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you face the choice between maintaining difficult partnerships and choosing isolation? This shows up everywhere, when your family is driving you crazy, when friends disappoint you, when group projects get frustrating, when you disagree with people you have to work with or live near.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Staying engaged with family members when you disagree about important things rather than shutting down and avoiding them
- Working through friend drama instead of cutting people off when they hurt or annoy you
- Participating in team activities or group projects even when other people slow you down or disagree with your approach
- Maintaining connections with people whose political or social views differ from yours rather than unfriending or blocking them
- Staying involved in communities (school, church, teams) when conflict or disappointment makes you want to withdraw
- Asking for help when you need it instead of insisting you can handle everything alone

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to advice. Acknowledge that some situations are genuinely harmful and require distance. Help them think through discernment rather than applying blanket rules.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone benefit from staying engaged in a difficult relationship rather than walking away?"
- "What helps you distinguish between 'this relationship requires work' and 'this relationship is actually harmful'?"
- "How do you know when to push through conflict for the sake of partnership versus when to create boundaries for your own well-being?"
- "What's the difference between healthy independence and self-defeating isolation?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: partnership provides practical benefits that isolation costs us, even when relationships involve conflict and require effort to maintain. The author isn't saying all relationships are worth maintaining regardless of the cost, he's saying that the default of choosing isolation when things get difficult often costs more than we realize.

This week, pay attention to your instinct when relationships get challenging. Notice when you want to withdraw, cut people off, or handle things alone. Ask yourself: what would I gain by maintaining this connection, and what would I lose by severing it? Sometimes distance is the right choice for safety or health. But sometimes we choose isolation simply because it feels easier in the moment, and we end up paying a price we didn't anticipate.

You did some really thoughtful wrestling with complex issues today. Keep asking these hard questions about how to build relationships that serve both your flourishing and other people's. That kind of wisdom takes time to develop, and I'm confident you're building it well.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help students understand that teamwork accomplishes more and protects better than going alone, even when teammates are annoying or difficult to work with.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is being really mean to me?"

Say: "If someone is hurting you or being cruel, that's different. This is about normal disagreements and annoyances, not about staying with people who are mean or unsafe."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in a group where one person was being really difficult to work with, maybe they kept interrupting, or they wanted to do everything their way, or they weren't doing their fair share of the work. Keep your hands up if your first thought was, "I could just do this by myself and it would be so much easier!"

That makes total sense! When people are being difficult, working alone sounds way better. No arguments, no waiting around, no having to compromise or deal with other people's ideas that you think are dumb. Plus, when you work alone, you get to do exactly what you want exactly how you want to do it.

But here's what's tricky: even when other people are annoying, you usually end up with a better result when you find a way to work together than when you just give up and do everything by yourself. It's harder and more frustrating, but you often get something bigger and better than what you could make alone.

It's like in movies, think about *The Incredibles*. Remember how Mr. Incredible kept insisting "I work alone" and trying to handle everything by himself? He was strong and capable, but he kept getting into situations where he needed help. He had to learn that even superheroes accomplish more when they work together than when they try to handle everything alone.

The tricky part is figuring out when it's worth the frustration of working with difficult people and when you really would be better off on your own. How do you know when to stick with the team even though it's harder?

Today we're going to hear what one of the wisest people in the Bible discovered about working alone versus working with others. He watched people make both choices and noticed something important about what each choice cost and what it provided. Let's find out what he learned.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to group project frustrations. Acknowledge their experiences briefly, "Yes, that's exactly the kind of situation I'm talking about", then move forward to the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Our story comes from the book of Ecclesiastes, which was written by one of the wisest people who ever lived. He spent his life watching people and learning about what works and what doesn't work in human life.

One day, this wise teacher was walking around, observing the world around him, when he noticed something that made him sad. He saw a man who had become very wealthy and successful, this man owned lots of property, had plenty of money, and could buy whatever he wanted.

But here's what was tragic: this man was completely alone. He had no wife, no children, no brothers or sisters, no close friends. He worked and worked and worked, making more and more money, but he had no one to share it with.

Imagine working really hard to earn money for something special, but then realizing you have no one to give gifts to, no one to share the fun with, no one who cares that you succeeded. That's what this man's life was like every single day.

The wise teacher watched this man and noticed that he kept asking himself a heartbreaking question: "Why am I working so hard? Who am I doing all this for? Why am I missing out on enjoying life just to make more money that I'll never really enjoy?" The man was successful but miserable because he had everything except the most important thing: people who cared about him.

This made the teacher think about the difference between doing life alone and doing life with other people. He started paying attention to what happened when people worked together versus when they worked by themselves.

Here's what he discovered. He noticed that when two people worked on the same project, they didn't just get twice as much done, they actually accomplished more together than two people working separately could accomplish. There was something about cooperation that made both people more effective.

Then he noticed what happened when people faced problems. When someone working alone ran into trouble or made a mistake, they had to figure everything out by themselves. But when two people were working together and one of them messed up or got stuck, the other person could help them get back on track.

The teacher saw this happen over and over again. People working alone would face a problem and sometimes just get completely stuck, while people working in partnerships could help each other through the same kinds of problems.

He also noticed what happened when people faced danger or felt threatened. A person by themselves could sometimes be overpowered by problems that felt too big to handle. But when people worked together, they could defend each other and protect each other in ways that made them both safer.

Ecclesiastes 4:9-12 (NIV)

9 Two are better than one, because they have a good return for their labor: 10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up. 11 Also, if two lie down together, they will keep warm. But how can one keep warm alone? 12

Though one may be overpowered, two can defend themselves. A cord of three strands is not quickly broken.

The teacher was discovering something that God built into how people work. He made us in such a way that we're stronger together than we are apart. Even when working with other people is more complicated and sometimes more frustrating, we usually end up with better results when we cooperate than when we try to handle everything ourselves.

Think about that last part: "A cord of three strands is not quickly broken." If you take one piece of rope, you can break it pretty easily. If you take two pieces of rope and twist them together, it's harder to break. But if you take three pieces of rope and braid them together, you get something much stronger than any of the individual pieces.

That's how people work too. One person can do some things. Two people working together can do more things and harder things. But when three or more people learn to cooperate and help each other, they can accomplish things that seemed impossible when they were working alone.

The wise teacher realized that even when other people are annoying or difficult to work with, the benefits of cooperation usually outweigh the frustrations. You get more done, you're safer when problems come up, and you can tackle bigger challenges when you have people working with you.

But he also realized how tempting it is to give up on working with others when they disagree with you or slow you down or do things differently than you would do them. It's natural to want to just handle things yourself when cooperation gets complicated.

The problem is that when you choose to work alone because you're frustrated with other people, you lose all the benefits that come from cooperation. You might avoid the annoyance of dealing with others, but you also lose the extra strength, the help when problems come up, and the ability to do bigger things together.

Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice that people in this story faced. When friends or family members or teammates are being difficult, we can choose to keep working with them even though it's harder, or we can choose to go off by ourselves and try to handle things alone.

What we learn from this wise teacher is that cooperation usually works out better than isolation, even when cooperation is more work and more frustrating. When we learn to work together through

disagreements and difficulties, we end up stronger and more successful than when we try to handle everything by ourselves.

God made us to help each other and work together, and even though that's sometimes harder than working alone, it usually leads to better results and better protection when problems come our way.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Lonely Rich Man

Think about the man in our story who had lots of money but was completely alone. He could buy anything he wanted, but he had no one to share it with. If you could have anything you wanted but you had to enjoy it all by yourself with no friends or family around, how would that feel? What would be missing even if you had all the stuff you thought you wanted?

Listen For: "Sad," "boring," "lonely", affirm: "Yes, having things is fun, but sharing them with people you care about is what makes them really enjoyable."

Question 2: The Frustration of Teamwork

We all know that working with other people can be really frustrating sometimes, they have different ideas, they work at different speeds, they might not do things the way you would do them. But think about a time when you and other people worked together and accomplished something bigger or cooler than what you could have done alone. What was that like? What made it worth dealing with the frustrating parts?

If They Say: "It wasn't really worth it", respond: "That's honest. Sometimes cooperation doesn't work out. What would have made it better?"

Question 3: When You Need Help

The wise teacher noticed that when people working alone ran into problems, they had to figure everything out by themselves, but people working together could help each other. Think about a time

when you were struggling with something, maybe schoolwork, or a problem with friends, or something at home, and someone helped you. How was that different from trying to handle it all by yourself?

Connect: "This is exactly what the teacher was talking about, we're stronger when we have people who can help us than when we try to handle everything alone."

Question 4: The Rope Illustration

Remember the part about how one rope breaks easily, two ropes twisted together are harder to break, but three ropes braided together are really strong? Think about your friend group or your family or a team you're on. How do you see that working, how are all of you together stronger than any of you would be by yourselves?

If They Say: "We're not really stronger together", respond: "What would it look like if you were? What would need to change for that to happen?"

You're noticing something really important: cooperation is harder work than going alone, but it usually leads to better results and better protection when problems come up. Even when other people are annoying or difficult, learning to work together is usually worth the effort.

4. Activity: Human Knots (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the "cord of three strands" principle by having kids physically experience how individual effort leads to being stuck, but cooperation leads to freedom. Success looks like kids discovering that they need each other's help to solve a problem that no one can solve alone.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do an activity called Human Knots. Everyone stand in a circle and hold hands with the person on either side of you. Now I'm going to have you twist and turn until you're all tangled up in a knot, but you have to keep holding hands the whole time.

Once you're knotted up, your challenge is to get untangled and back into a regular circle without letting go of anyone's hands. You can twist and turn and duck under people's arms, but you cannot let go of the hands you're holding.

Here's the important part: you might be tempted to think "this would be so much easier if I just let go and untangled myself," but if you do that, you'll solve your problem but everyone else will still be stuck. The only way everyone gets free is if everyone works together to solve the whole puzzle.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what the wise teacher was talking about, sometimes staying connected to other people feels harder than going off on your own, but cooperation leads to solutions that individual effort can't achieve.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Let them work for the first minute to see what happens naturally. Most groups will struggle initially because everyone tries to solve their own part of the problem rather than working together.

As they encounter frustration, watch for kids who want to give up or let go. This is the key moment that represents the lesson, choosing to maintain connection even when it's harder.

When you see them struggling, offer coaching: "I notice some of you are getting frustrated. What would happen if one person let go? Would that solve the problem for everyone or just for one person? What do you need from each other to solve this together?"

Celebrate the breakthrough when someone suggests a strategy that requires cooperation, "Yes! That's what it looks like when people work together instead of just trying to solve their own piece."

Once they've succeeded, have them notice the difference between how it felt when everyone was pulling their own direction versus when they started cooperating.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to help another person get untangled even though it makes their own situation temporarily more complicated, this is the physical representation of partnership benefits.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when everyone was just trying to solve their own problem versus when you started working together to solve the whole puzzle? This is exactly what the wise teacher

discovered, when we choose to stay connected and help each other even when it's more complicated, we can solve problems together that none of us could solve alone.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: two are better than one. When we work together, we accomplish more than we can alone. When we face problems, having people to help us is better than trying to figure everything out by ourselves. When we face danger or big challenges, we're stronger together than we are apart.

This doesn't mean we should never have any alone time or that working with others is always easy. Sometimes people are difficult to work with, and sometimes we need space to think or recharge. But when we choose to stay connected and work through problems together, we usually end up with better results than when we give up on cooperation and try to handle everything by ourselves.

The amazing result is that when we learn to work together even when it's hard, we can accomplish things that seemed impossible when we were working alone. We become like that three-strand rope that's much stronger than any individual piece.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you face a situation where you're tempted to just handle something by yourself because working with others feels too hard or frustrating, try choosing cooperation instead. See if you can find a way to work together that leads to a better result than what you could accomplish alone.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for making us in such a way that we're stronger together than we are apart. Help us this week to choose cooperation even when it's harder than working alone. Help us be the kind of people others can count on, and help us remember to ask for help when we need it. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God made us to help each other, and we're stronger when we work together than when we try to do everything by ourselves.

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 teamwork to puzzle pieces, each piece is important, but they're much better when they fit together than when they're all separated in the box.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about friendship, helping, or working together. Suggestions: "Make New Friends," "The More We Get Together," or "Friends Are Friends Forever." Use movements: hold hands during chorus, reach up high during "together," point to friends during "help each other."

Great singing! That song is all about being together and helping each other, which is exactly what our Bible story is about today. Let's sit down in our horseshoe shape so I can tell you about what one very wise person discovered about friends and teamwork.

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 emotions, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound sad when talking about the lonely man, sound strong and happy when talking about teamwork.

Today we're going to meet one of the smartest people who ever lived. He spent his whole life watching people and learning about what makes people happy.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

One day, this wise teacher saw something that made him very sad. He saw a man who had lots and lots of money and could buy anything he wanted. But do you know what? This man was all by himself. He had no family, no friends, nobody who cared about him.

[Use sad voice and lonely facial expression]

Every day, this man worked and worked to get more money, but he had nobody to share it with. He had no one to give presents to, no one to play with, no one to talk to. Even though he had everything, he felt empty inside because he was all alone.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change to curious tone]

This made the wise teacher think: "What's the difference between doing things by yourself and doing things with friends?" So he started watching people very carefully to see what happened when they worked together versus when they worked alone.

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

Here's what he discovered! When two friends worked on something together, they could do way more than two people working by themselves. It was like magic, they helped each other and made each other better at everything!

[Act out falling down, then getting helped up]

He also noticed that when someone working alone fell down or made a mistake, they had to get up all by themselves. But when friends were working together and one person fell down, the other friend

could help them get back up!

Ecclesiastes 4:10 (NIV)

10 If either of them falls down, one can help the other up. But pity anyone who falls and has no one to help them up.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think it's better to have a friend help you when you fall down, or to have to get up all by yourself? Yes! It's so much better to have help!

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

The wise teacher also noticed that when someone by themselves got cold, they had no way to get warm. But when two friends were together, they could share their warmth and both of them would feel cozy and comfortable.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

And here's something really cool he discovered: when one person faced something scary or difficult, sometimes it was too hard for them to handle alone. But when two friends faced the same scary thing together, they could protect each other and be brave together!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Then the wise teacher said something really smart. He said working together is like making a rope. If you have just one piece of string, it breaks easily. If you twist two pieces together, it's stronger. But if you braid three pieces together, you get a rope that's really, really hard to break!

[Speak with excitement, make braiding motions]

That's how friends work too! One friend is good. Two friends working together are even better. But when three or more friends help each other, they can do amazing things that no one could do by themselves!

[Pause dramatically]

The wise teacher learned that God made us to help each other and work together. Even though working with others is sometimes harder than doing things by yourself, we're always stronger and happier when we have friends to help us!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes when we get frustrated with our friends or our brothers and sisters, we want to just do everything by ourselves. We think, "I don't need help! I can do this alone!" But God made us to be helpers for each other.

[Move closer to the children]

When we choose to work together and help each other, even when it's harder than working alone, we can do bigger and better things than any of us could do by ourselves. We become like that strong rope that can't be broken!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we help each other, and He gives us friends and family so we don't have to do life all by ourselves. We're always better together than apart!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the lonely rich man felt having lots of stuff but no friends?
 2. When has a friend helped you when you were hurt or sad?
-

3. What would you rather do, play a game by yourself or with friends?

4. If you fell down on the playground, would you rather get up alone or have someone help you?

5. What's something you can do better with help than by yourself?

6. How do you feel when you help someone else?

7. What happens when two people work together to build something?

8. When do you like to have friends with you instead of being alone?

9. How can you be a good helper to your friends?

10. What's hard about working with other people sometimes?

11. Why do you think God gave us friends and families?

12. What would happen if everyone always did everything alone?

13. How does it feel when someone includes you in what they're doing?

14. When someone is being mean, should you still try to be their friend?

15. What's your favorite thing to do with friends?

16. How can you help someone who looks lonely?

17. What does it mean to be like a strong rope together?

18. How can we ask God to help us be good friends?

19. What would you tell the lonely man in our story?

20. How can we remember to help each other this week?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs that reinforce teamwork and helping. Suggestions: "When We All Work Together," "Love One Another," or "We Are Family." Use movements: link arms during "together," reach out to others during "help," make heart shapes with hands during "love."

Beautiful singing! You sound like a team when you sing together like that. Now let's sit down in our rows for our prayer time, where we can ask God to help us be good teammates and helpers for each other.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for giving us friends and families to help us and work with us.

[Pause]

Help us remember this week that we're stronger when we work together than when we try to do everything by ourselves. Help us be good helpers to other people.

[Pause]

Help us remember to ask for help when we need it, and help us be kind and helpful when other people need us. Thank you for making us like a strong rope that can't be broken when we work together.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and always being there to help us. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being good helpers or having good friends. Examples: "Thank you for my friend Emma" or "Help me be nice to my brother."

Remember this week that God made you to help others and to receive help from others. You're stronger together than you are by yourself! Have a wonderful week being a good friend and teammate to the people around you.

Gentle Restoration

Restoring the Fallen, How do we help without becoming judgmental?

Galatians 5:25-6:5

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

Galatians 5:25-6:5 (NIV)

25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load.

Context

Paul is writing to Galatian churches struggling with legalism and spiritual division. Some members have fallen into serious sin, and the community faces a choice: how will they respond to moral failure? The immediate context shows Paul addressing conceit, provocation, and envy within the church, attitudes that would poison any attempt at restoration.

This passage follows Paul's teaching on living by the Spirit versus gratifying the flesh. Now he turns practical: when someone fails morally, how should the Spirit-filled community respond? This isn't theoretical, real people have fallen, and the church's response will either demonstrate Christ's heart or reveal their own spiritual poverty.

The Big Idea

When someone falls into sin, our response reveals whether we're truly walking by the Spirit. Gentle restoration, not condemnation, is the mark of spiritual maturity.

This challenges our instinctive responses to others' moral failures. Paul insists that the goal is restoration, literally "to mend" or "to repair", not punishment or separation. The qualifier "gently" suggests tenderness, not harshness. The warning "watch yourselves" acknowledges that moral superiority is an illusion that leads to spiritual danger.

Theological Core

- **Restoration over condemnation.** The goal when someone sins isn't punishment but healing. We're called to mend what's broken, not cast away what's damaged.
 - **Gentleness as spiritual maturity.** Harsh judgment reveals spiritual immaturity, while gentleness demonstrates we understand our own frailty and God's mercy.
 - **Self-awareness prevents self-righteousness.** Recognizing our own vulnerability to temptation keeps us humble and compassionate toward those who have fallen.
 - **Burden-carrying fulfills Christ's law.** Taking on others' struggles and shame as our own responsibility reflects the heart of the gospel, Christ bearing our burdens.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Gentle restoration requires both courage and humility, it's harder than either harsh judgment or passive avoidance
- Self-awareness of our own moral vulnerability prevents the self-righteousness that destroys relationships
- Restoration doesn't mean avoiding accountability, but pursuing healing rather than punishment
- Discernment helps distinguish between enabling harmful behavior and offering redemptive support

Grades 4, 6

- When someone makes a bad choice, the right response is to help them fix it, not just get mad
- Being gentle doesn't mean being weak, it takes strength to help instead of just criticize
- Everyone makes mistakes sometimes, so we should treat others how we'd want to be treated
- It's okay to feel disappointed when someone does wrong, but helping is better than staying angry

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind helpers, even when someone does something wrong
- God loves everyone, even people who make bad choices
- We can help people feel better and do better next time

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Suggesting restoration means no boundaries.** Paul's gentleness doesn't eliminate discernment. Restoration can include appropriate consequences and protective measures while maintaining a redemptive heart and goal.
- **Making this only about "big" sins.** The passage applies to all moral failures, from gossip to adultery. Our tendency to grade sins on severity often reveals our own blind spots and judgmental attitudes.

- **Ignoring the "watch yourselves" warning.** Self-awareness isn't optional, it's essential. Those who think they're immune to temptation are the most dangerous restorers because they lack the humility necessary for genuine help.
- **Turning this into a technique rather than character.** Gentle restoration flows from spiritual maturity, not from following a formula. It requires transformed hearts, not just modified behaviors.

Handling Hard Questions

"What if someone keeps sinning and won't change?"

Paul's focus here is on our initial response to discovered sin, not the long-term process of discipline. Gentle restoration doesn't mean endless enabling. It means our first response reveals Christ's heart for redemption rather than our desire for judgment. Ongoing restoration may require firmer boundaries, but it maintains hope for repentance rather than writing people off.

"How do we know if someone is truly repentant?"

Paul doesn't make restoration dependent on proven repentance, he makes it the pathway toward repentance. Our gentle approach creates space for genuine change rather than demanding proof before we engage. Discernment matters, but it serves love, not suspicion. Time reveals genuine repentance, but grace creates the environment where it becomes possible.

"Doesn't this make us responsible for everyone else's choices?"

Paul balances burden-carrying (verse 2) with personal responsibility (verse 5). We're called to help with overwhelming loads, not to remove all consequences from poor choices. The distinction lies in moving toward people in their failure rather than away from them, offering support while maintaining healthy boundaries.

The One Thing to Remember

How we respond to others' moral failures reveals whether we truly understand grace, and our own need for it.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to explore their instinctive responses to others' moral failures and discover how gentle restoration differs from both harsh judgment and passive enablement. Help them wrestle with what practical gentleness looks like in real situations.

The Tension to Frame

How do we help someone who has sinned without becoming judgmental ourselves? What does "gentle restoration" actually look like when someone we know has made a serious mistake?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with both being judged and wanting to judge others, these reactions are human and understandable
- Honor the complexity of real situations, gentle restoration isn't simple or easy, and sometimes boundaries are necessary
- Let students wrestle with scenarios rather than giving quick answers, the goal is developing wisdom, not memorizing rules

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: You discover that someone you respect, maybe a friend, teammate, or family member, has been lying about something important. Maybe they've been cheating, stealing, or hurting someone. Your first reaction might be shock, disappointment, maybe anger. Part of you wants to call them out, lecture them, maybe distance yourself from them entirely.

That reaction makes complete sense. When someone violates trust or does something harmful, our instinct is often to protect ourselves and express our disapproval. We might think, "I would never do that," or "They deserve whatever consequences they get." The feeling of moral distance can actually

feel good, it reassures us that we're different, better.

But today we're looking at someone who faced a similar situation in the early church, except the stakes were higher. Paul is writing to a community where people had fallen into serious sin, and he's about to challenge their natural response completely. He's going to suggest a radically different approach to moral failure.

As we read, I want you to notice two things: first, Paul's instructions about how to respond to sin, and second, his warning about what can happen to us in the process. There's something surprising here about who's really at risk.

Open your Bibles to Galatians 6, and let's read what Paul says about restoration versus condemnation.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "restoration" or "conceit." Let early finishers sit with the weight of Paul's countercultural instructions. This passage challenges our instinctive responses to moral failure.

As You Read, Think About:

- Who is Paul talking about, both the people who sinned and the people responding?
 - What does Paul want the community to do, and how should they do it?
 - What warnings does Paul give, and why might they be necessary?
 - How would you naturally want to respond to someone "caught in a sin"?
-

Galatians 5:25-6:5 (NIV)

25 Since we live by the Spirit, let us keep in step with the Spirit. 26 Let us not become conceited, provoking and envying each other.

1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted. 2 Carry each other's

burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ. 3 If anyone thinks they are something when they are not, they deceive themselves. 4 Each one should test their own actions. Then they can take pride in themselves alone, without comparing themselves to someone else, 5 for each one should carry their own load.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read each section. Let students pass if they're uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the key verses about restoration and burden-carrying.

Reader 1: Galatians 5:25-26 (Setting the spiritual context) **Reader 2:** Galatians 6:1-2 (The restoration instructions) **Reader 3:** Galatians 6:3-5 (The warnings about self-deception)

Listen for the contrast Paul is setting up, between spiritual maturity and spiritual pride. This isn't just advice; it's about what kind of people we're becoming.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups, listening for insights. Help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What seems hardest to actually do?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two real questions about what you just read. Not questions you already know the answer to, but things you're genuinely curious or confused about. For example: "What does 'gently' actually look like?" or "Why does Paul warn the restorers about temptation?" You have three minutes to talk and come up with questions we can explore together.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive the discussion with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the complexity.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around gentleness, temptation, burden-carrying, and practical application. Start with questions most students will relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between being 'caught in a sin' and just making a mistake?"
 - "Why does Paul emphasize gentleness? What would the opposite approach look like?"
 - "What kind of temptation might face someone trying to help a person who has sinned?"
 - "How is 'carrying burdens' different from just giving advice or lectures?"
 - "When Paul warns against thinking 'they are something when they are not,' what attitude is he addressing?"
 - "How do you balance helping someone with protecting yourself or others from harmful behavior?"
 - "What would happen if a community actually followed these instructions when someone messed up badly?"
 - "Why does Paul connect this to 'fulfilling the law of Christ'? What does that mean?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul is completely flipping our natural response to moral failure. Instead of distancing ourselves from people who sin, we move toward them. Instead of judging from a position of superiority, we help from a place of humility. The goal isn't punishment or even justice, it's restoration. Paul seems to think that how we respond to others' failures reveals more about our spiritual condition than the failures themselves.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you encounter people who have messed up, made bad choices, or hurt others? Think about school drama, family conflicts, friend betrayals, social media mistakes, or even larger issues in our community. When do you find yourself in positions where you could either judge someone or help restore them?

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a classmate is caught cheating and everyone starts gossiping about them

- When a family member struggles with addiction, anger issues, or broken promises

- When a friend betrays your trust or treats someone else badly

- When someone's private mistakes become public on social media

- When you see injustice or harmful behavior in your community

- When you discover your own moral failures and need grace from others

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix everything. Some situations require different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice. Gentle restoration looks different in different contexts.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone respond to moral failure with gentleness instead of judgment? What was the result?"

- "What would help you choose restoration over condemnation when someone disappoints or hurts you?"

- "How do you discern when to engage with someone's problems versus when to maintain healthy boundaries?"

- "What's the difference between gentle restoration and enabling someone's harmful behavior?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: How you respond to others' moral failures reveals whether you truly understand grace and your own need for it. Paul challenges us to be restorers, not condemners, people who move toward brokenness with gentleness rather than away from it with judgment. This isn't easy or simple, and it requires wisdom to know what restoration looks like in different situations.

This week, pay attention to your first instincts when someone messes up, disappoints you, or does something wrong. Notice whether your impulse is to judge, distance yourself, or find ways to help. Experiment with asking, "How could I help restore this situation?" instead of "How could they have

done that?" You might be surprised at how it changes both your relationships and your heart.

I'm proud of the thoughtful way you wrestled with these hard questions today. Keep asking them. The world needs people who know how to offer grace without compromising truth, and restoration without abandoning wisdom. That's who you're becoming.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that when someone makes a bad choice, the right response is to help them fix it rather than just get angry or reject them.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps doing bad things?"

Say: "You can still care about helping them while protecting yourself and others. Sometimes helping means telling a trusted adult who can keep everyone safe."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever broken something that belonged to someone else. Keep your hands up if you felt really bad about it and wanted to fix it somehow. Now raise your other hand if someone was kind to you about it instead of just yelling at you or staying mad.

Here's a harder question: Think about a time when someone hurt your feelings or made you angry by doing something wrong. Maybe they broke your toy, said something mean, cheated in a game, or got you in trouble. Part of you probably wanted to yell at them or get them back somehow. But another part might have wondered if you should try to work it out or forgive them.

Those feelings make complete sense. When someone does something wrong, especially something that affects us, it's normal to feel angry or hurt. It's also normal to want them to feel sorry or face consequences. Sometimes we might even feel a little glad when someone who hurt us gets in trouble.

This reminds me of stories where characters have to choose between revenge and forgiveness. Think about movies like Frozen where Elsa accidentally hurts Anna, or Toy Story when Buzz and Woody have to decide whether to help or abandon each other. The interesting characters are the ones who choose to help fix the problem instead of just staying angry.

The tricky part is figuring out how to respond when someone really messes up. How do you help them do better next time without just ignoring what they did wrong? How do you stand up for what's right while still being kind?

Today we're going to hear about what the apostle Paul told some Christians about this exact problem. There were people in their church who had made some really bad choices, and everyone had to decide: Should we just be angry and push them away, or should we try to help them fix what they broke? Let's find out what Paul said they should do.

What to Expect: Kids will relate stories of being hurt or disappointing others. Acknowledge these briefly: "That must have felt terrible" or "I can understand why you felt angry." Keep momentum toward the Bible story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

There was a group of Christians in a place called Galatia who had a big problem. Some people in their church family had been caught doing things that were really wrong, lying, hurting others, and disobeying God.

The apostle Paul heard about this situation and had to write them a letter. But here's the thing: Paul wasn't writing to scold the people who had sinned. He was writing to everyone else, the people who had discovered the sins and had to decide what to do about it.

Imagine you're in that church. You've just found out that someone you trusted has been lying to you for months. Or someone you thought was kind has been saying mean things behind people's backs. How would you feel? Hurt? Angry? Disappointed? Maybe a little bit glad that you're not like them?

That's exactly how these Christians were feeling. Some of them probably wanted to kick the sinners out of the church. Others might have wanted to give them a long lecture about how terrible their behavior was. Still others might have felt proud that they had never done such awful things.

But Paul surprised them with what he wrote. Instead of telling them to punish the people who sinned, he gave them a completely different instruction. Let me read you exactly what he said:

Galatians 6:1-2 (NIV)

1 Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently. 2 Carry each other's burdens, and in this way you will fulfill the law of Christ.

Did you catch that word "restore"? When something is broken, you restore it by fixing it, healing it, making it work again. Paul wasn't telling them to throw away the people who had sinned. He was telling them to help fix what was broken. And notice how he said to do it: gently.

But then Paul said something really interesting. He warned them about something that could happen to them while they were trying to help:

Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

But watch yourselves, or you also may be tempted.

Wait, why would the helpers be tempted? They weren't the ones who had sinned! But Paul knew something important: when we try to help someone who has done wrong, we can be tempted to feel proud that we're better than them. We might be tempted to be mean instead of gentle. Or we might be tempted to think we could never do anything that bad.

Paul was saying, "Remember, you need grace too. You make mistakes too. Be gentle with people who are hurting because someday you might need someone to be gentle with you."

Then Paul explained what it means to really help someone who has messed up. He said they should "carry each other's burdens." That means when someone is struggling under the weight of their mistakes, their shame, or the mess they've made, you don't just stand there watching them struggle. You get under that heavy load and help them carry it.

This doesn't mean you pretend they didn't do anything wrong. It doesn't mean there are no consequences. It means you help them figure out how to make things right instead of just making them feel worse.

Paul said that when we do this, when we help restore people gently instead of just condemning them, we're following "the law of Christ." We're doing what Jesus would do. And what does Jesus do when we mess up? Does he yell at us and push us away? Or does he help us get back on our feet and do better next time?

Some of those Christians probably read Paul's letter and thought, "But that's not fair! They should be punished!" Others might have thought, "That sounds too hard. It would be easier to just avoid them." But Paul was challenging them to be like Jesus, to be restorers instead of condemners.

The amazing result when people follow Paul's advice is that broken relationships get healed, people learn to do better, and everyone discovers what grace really means. Instead of a community where people hide their mistakes and fear being found out, you get a community where people can be honest about their struggles and find help instead of rejection.

Sometimes in our lives, we have to choose between being someone who makes people feel worse when they mess up, or someone who helps them do better next time. Paul is telling us that God wants us to be gentle helpers and burden-carriers.

What we learn from this is that when someone does something wrong, our job isn't to punish them or feel superior to them. Our job is to help them fix what's broken and learn to make better choices.

That's what it means to be like Jesus. That's how God's family is supposed to work.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Imagine your best friend promised to keep a secret, but then they told everyone at school. You find out when kids start teasing you about something personal. You feel embarrassed, hurt, and angry. What would your first reaction probably be? Would you want to yell at them, ignore them, or tell everyone what a terrible friend they are?

Listen For: "Get mad," "Never trust them again," "Tell on them", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. It would really hurt to have your trust broken like that."

Question 2: The Harder Choice

Now imagine you remember what Paul said about restoring people gently. What would it look like to be a gentle restorer in this situation? How could you help fix what's broken without just pretending everything is fine?

If They Say: "Tell them how I feel" or "Ask for an apology", respond: "Those are gentle ways to start fixing the relationship instead of just staying angry."

Question 3: The Surprise Warning

Paul warned the helpers to "watch yourselves" because they might be tempted too. What kind of temptation might face someone who is trying to help a person who has done something wrong? What bad attitudes might creep in?

Connect: "Thinking we're better than them is exactly the temptation Paul was worried about. It makes it hard to be truly gentle."

Question 4: The Heavy Load

Paul said to "carry each other's burdens." Think about someone who feels really bad about a mistake they made. What kind of heavy feelings might they be carrying? How could you help carry that load without just taking over their responsibility?

If They Say: "Make them feel better" or "Help them fix it", affirm: "That's exactly what burden-carrying looks like. You help them handle the heavy emotions while they work on making things right."

You've been thinking like gentle restorers already! You understand that helping someone who has messed up is better than just staying angry or proud. Now let's do an activity that shows us what restoration really feels like.

4. Activity: The Restoration Circle (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that gentle restoration means moving toward people who have failed rather than away from them. Success looks like kids discovering that isolation makes problems worse, while gentle support creates space for healing and positive change.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do something called the Restoration Circle. Everyone stand up and form a big circle holding hands. I'm going to choose one person to be in the center, they represent someone who has been "caught in a sin" and feels ashamed and isolated.

Here's the challenge: The person in the center will try to break out of the circle because they feel like they don't belong with good people anymore. The circle's job is to keep them from leaving, but here's the twist, you can only use gentle strength. No hard pulling or rough holding. You have to find a way to keep them connected that feels safe and caring, not forceful or mean.

The person in the center should start by trying to push through or duck under the circle. The circle should hold gently but firmly. After about 30 seconds, I'll give new instructions that change everything. We're doing this because it's exactly like what happens when someone messes up, they often try to isolate themselves, thinking they don't deserve community anymore.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First phase: Let the person in the center try to break free while the circle holds gently. Watch for about 30 seconds. Notice how it feels to try to escape versus how it feels to prevent someone from leaving.

The struggle: As they encounter the gentle resistance, coach the circle: "Remember, you care about this person. You want to keep them close, but not in a way that hurts them." Coach the center person: "You feel like you don't deserve to be here. Keep trying to get away."

Coaching breakthrough: After 30 seconds, say: "Circle, instead of just holding them in, what if you brought them closer? What if you showed them they belong here?" Watch as the circle gently draws the center person closer, maybe into a group hug.

The breakthrough: Celebrate when the circle transforms from keeping someone from leaving to actively welcoming them closer. This is the physical representation of restoration, movement toward connection rather than just prevention of isolation.

Completion: Have them notice the difference between being held in place and being drawn close with love. Switch roles quickly if you have time, so more kids can experience both perspectives.

Watch For: The moment when the circle stops just restraining and starts embracing, this is the physical representation of moving from law-keeping to love-expressing.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when the circle was just trying to keep you from leaving versus when they pulled you closer with care? How is this like what Paul was teaching? When someone feels ashamed of their mistakes, they often try to isolate themselves. But gentle restoration means we don't let them drift away in shame, we draw them closer with love and help them heal.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: When someone makes a bad choice or hurts us, God wants us to be gentle restorers instead of angry condemners. That means we help them fix what's broken instead of just making them feel worse about it.

This doesn't mean we pretend wrong things are okay, or that there shouldn't be any consequences. It means we respond like Jesus responds to us when we mess up, with gentleness, hope, and help to do better next time.

The amazing result is that people feel safe enough to be honest about their mistakes and to learn from them. Everyone gets better at handling problems, and the whole community becomes stronger and more loving.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone does something that hurts your feelings or makes you angry, try asking yourself: "How can I help fix this situation?" instead of "How can I make them feel as bad as they made me feel?" Look for one chance to be a gentle restorer instead of an angry judge.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us how to help people when they make mistakes. Help us be gentle restorers who care more about fixing what's broken than about being right. When we mess up, help us remember that you want to restore us too. 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 be kind helpers, even when someone does something wrong.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare helping someone who made a mistake to helping someone who fell down, then ask "Which makes them feel better, helping them up or walking away?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love and kindness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God's Love Is So Wonderful." Use movements: hug yourself during lyrics about love, reach out to neighbors during lyrics about kindness, point up during lyrics about God.

Great singing! Now let's sit in our special story shape and hear about a time when some people had to choose between being kind helpers or staying angry. Find your spot in our horseshoe!

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 disappointed when talking about people who did wrong, sound gentle when talking about restoration.

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who had to help some Christians with a big problem.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

There was a church, a group of people who loved Jesus, and some of the people in the church had done really bad things. They had lied and hurt people and disobeyed God.

[Make a sad face and speak in a disappointed voice]

When the other people in the church found out, they felt really sad and angry. Some of them wanted to tell those people to go away and never come back!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change to a thoughtful tone]

But Paul, who was a wise teacher, heard about this problem. He knew these people needed help deciding what to do.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

So Paul wrote them a letter. But he didn't tell them to be mean to the people who had sinned. Instead, he told them something surprising!

[Move to side, sound like Paul giving gentle instructions]

Paul said, "If someone does something wrong, you should help restore them gently. Be kind and help them fix what they broke."

Galatians 6:1 (NIV)

Brothers and sisters, if someone is caught in a sin, you who live by the Spirit should restore that person gently.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what "restore" means? It means to fix something that's broken! Paul was saying, "Don't throw away people who mess up. Help fix what's wrong!"

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

But Paul also gave them a warning. He said, "Be careful! Remember that you make mistakes too. Don't think you're better than other people."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Then Paul told them the most important part: "Help each other with heavy problems. When someone is sad or ashamed, don't leave them alone. Help them carry their heavy feelings!"

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Paul said that when we help people who have made mistakes, instead of just being mean to them, we're doing what Jesus would do!

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what happened? The people who had done wrong things felt so much love that they wanted to do better! They said sorry and learned to make good choices!

[Pause dramatically]

God loves everyone, even people who make bad choices. God wants us to be kind helpers instead of mean rejectors!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, someone might do something wrong to you. They might take your toy, say something mean, or hurt your feelings. You might feel angry and want to be mean back to them.

[Move closer to the children]

When that happens, you can remember Paul's words: "Be a gentle helper!" Instead of being mean back, you can help them learn to do better next time.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God will help you be kind even when it's hard. That's how God's family shows love to everyone!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the people felt when they found out someone in their church did bad things?
2. Have you ever felt really angry when someone hurt your feelings?
3. What does it mean to "restore someone gently"?
4. If your friend took something without asking, what would you want to do?
5. What changed when Paul told them to be kind instead of mean?
6. Why does God want us to help people who make mistakes?
7. How do you think people feel when others help them instead of just being angry?

8. When has someone been kind to you when you did something wrong?

9. What would happen at school if everyone helped each other fix problems?

10. Who in your family is good at being a gentle helper?

11. Why did Paul warn people not to think they're better than others?

12. How can you help someone who feels sad about a mistake they made?

13. What does God do when we make mistakes?

14. Why is it sometimes hard to be kind to people who hurt us?

15. How does helping someone feel different from just being angry at them?

16. What can you say to someone who made a mistake?

17. What did you learn about God's love today?

18. How can you pray for someone who did something wrong?

19. What would happen if everyone just stayed angry instead of helping?

20. How can you be like Jesus when someone hurts your feelings?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines. Who wants to share something you talked about with your partner?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about helping and kindness. Suggestions: "I Will Be a Helper," "Love One Another," or "When We Help Each Other." Include movements: reach out to help during helper lyrics, hug yourself during love lyrics, point to friends during lyrics about caring for others.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time and thank God for teaching us how to be gentle helpers.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for loving everyone, even people who make bad choices.

[Pause]

Help us be kind helpers when someone does something wrong. Help us remember that you want to help them get better.

[Pause]

When we make mistakes, thank you for forgiving us and helping us do better. Help us treat others the same way.

[Pause]

Thank you for your love that never gives up on us. Help us love others like you love us. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "God, help me be kind when I'm angry" or "Thank you for helping me when I make mistakes."

Remember, God wants you to be gentle helpers! When someone makes a mistake, you can choose to help them instead of just being angry. Have a wonderful week being kind like Jesus!

Praying for Unity

Divine Oneness in Divided Times, How do we pursue unity without compromising truth?

John 17:13-26

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

John 17:13-26 (NIV)

13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

Context

This prayer occurs on the night before Jesus's crucifixion, after the Last Supper, as Jesus prays with His disciples. Known as the High Priestly Prayer, it represents Jesus interceding for His followers as He faces the cross. The disciples have just been told that Jesus is leaving them, and they're confused and afraid about their future.

Jesus has already prayed for Himself and for His immediate disciples. Now He expands His prayer to include believers who don't yet exist, those who will come to faith through the disciples' future testimony. This is remarkable: in His final hours, Jesus is praying for people He hasn't met, including believers living today.

The Big Idea

Jesus prays for unity among all believers, past, present, and future, that reflects the perfect oneness of the Trinity itself and serves as proof to the world of God's love.

This isn't merely organizational cooperation or denominational merger. Jesus sets the standard for Christian unity at the highest possible level: the perfect, mysterious oneness between Father and Son. The prayer acknowledges that division among believers undermines the credibility of the Gospel message itself.

Theological Core

- **Divine Unity as Model.** The oneness Jesus prays for mirrors Trinitarian relationship, distinct persons in perfect unity of purpose, love, and mission.
 - **Missional Purpose of Unity.** Unity among believers serves as evidence to the world that God sent Jesus, making division not just internal failure but missionary failure.
-

- **Prayer Across Time.** Jesus prays for future believers, demonstrating that God's concern transcends present circumstances to include those not yet born or believing.
 - **Unity Through Indwelling.** True unity comes not from human effort but from shared participation in divine life, "that they may also be in us."
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Unity among believers reflects divine nature and serves missional purpose, even when theological differences exist
 - Division among Christians undermines the credibility of the Gospel message to non-believers
 - True unity requires both truth and love, creating ongoing tension that requires wisdom and humility
 - Jesus prayed specifically for future believers, meaning His prayer includes each of us today
-

Grades 4, 6

- When Christians fight or don't get along, it makes it harder for other people to believe in Jesus
 - Working together and loving each other shows the world that God is real
 - Jesus prayed for people who weren't even born yet, including us
 - Sometimes we can disagree about things but still love each other and work together
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Grades 1, 3

- Jesus prayed for us before we were even born
 - God wants His people to love each other and be friends
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- When we love each other, it helps other people see God's love too
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying Unity.** Don't suggest that all differences are unimportant or that unity means agreeing about everything. The text doesn't resolve the tension between unity and truth but establishes unity as divine priority.
 - **Denominational Superiority.** Avoid implying that one Christian tradition has it all right while others are wrong. The prayer encompasses all believers across time and traditions.
 - **Dismissing Real Divisions.** Don't minimize the genuine theological differences that have divided Christians throughout history. Acknowledge complexity while maintaining the prayer's challenge.
 - **Unity Without Mission.** Remember that the purpose of unity is missional, "so that the world may believe." Unity isn't just for believers' benefit but for Gospel credibility.
-

Handling Hard Questions

"But what about churches that teach wrong things? Shouldn't we separate from them?"

This is exactly the tension Jesus's prayer creates for us. Throughout Christian history, believers have wrestled with when to prioritize unity and when to stand for truth. The prayer doesn't give us easy answers, but it does tell us that division always comes at a cost, it damages our witness to the world. We need wisdom to know when differences are worth dividing over and when they're not, and even when we must disagree, we can do so with love and respect.

"Why do Christians fight so much if Jesus prayed for unity?"

Jesus's prayer reveals God's heart, not what always happens in reality. Christians are still sinful people who sometimes let pride, fear, and misunderstanding drive wedges between them. The fact that Jesus had to pray for unity suggests He knew it wouldn't be automatic or easy. His prayer gives us something to work toward and reminds us that division among believers breaks God's heart and damages our

mission.

"Does this mean all religions are the same and we should just unite with everybody?"

Jesus is specifically praying for "those who will believe in me through their message", people who trust in Jesus as Lord and Savior. This prayer is about unity among Christians, not unity among all religions. But it does challenge us to treat believers from different Christian traditions with love and respect, even when we disagree about secondary issues.

The One Thing to Remember

Jesus prayed that believers' unity would be so profound it would convince the world of God's love, meaning division among Christians undermines the Gospel itself.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the real tension between unity and truth in Christian communities they observe. Help them understand that Jesus's prayer creates an ongoing challenge rather than simple answers, and that division among believers has missional consequences.

The Tension to Frame

How do we pursue the unity Jesus prayed for while maintaining commitment to truth, especially when Christians disagree about important things?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate students' observations about Christian divisions, they've likely witnessed conflict in church or between denominations
 - Honor the complexity rather than rushing to neat solutions, this tension has challenged believers for 2,000 years
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- Let students struggle with the implications rather than lecturing about what they should think
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you're trying to convince your friend to try a new restaurant. You tell them the food is amazing, the service is great, and they'll love it. But when you get there, you see the kitchen staff shouting at each other, servers arguing with customers, and the manager publicly firing someone. What happens to your recommendation now?

Even if the food actually is good, your friend is probably thinking, "If this is what this place is really like, I don't want any part of it." The internal conflict undermines everything you said about the restaurant. Your friend might even wonder if you really know what a good restaurant looks like.

Today we're looking at Jesus's prayer for His followers, including us, on the night before He died. But here's what's remarkable: He's not just praying for the disciples in the room. He's praying for believers who don't even exist yet, including people who would come to faith centuries later through their witness.

As you read, notice what Jesus says unity among believers will accomplish. Notice the standard He sets for that unity. And notice what happens to the Christian message when that unity breaks down.

Open your Bibles to John 17, starting at verse 13. We're going to read through verse 26. Read silently first.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This prayer is dense and profound, let students feel its weight. Help with difficult phrases like "sanctify" or "the glory you gave me." Watch for students who finish early and direct them to reread verses 20-23.

As You Read, Think About:

- Who is Jesus praying for in verses 20-21? Why does this matter?
 - What does Jesus say unity among believers will accomplish?
 - What standard does Jesus set for Christian unity in verse 21?
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- How would division among Christians affect non-believers' response to the Gospel?
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John 17:13-26 (NIV)

13 "I am coming to you now, but I say these things while I am still in the world, so that they may have the full measure of my joy within them. 14 I have given them your word and the world has hated them, for they are not of the world any more than I am of the world. 15 My prayer is not that you take them out of the world but that you protect them from the evil one. 16 They are not of the world, even as I am not of it. 17 Sanctify them by the truth; your word is truth. 18 As you sent me into the world, I have sent them into the world. 19 For them I sanctify myself, that they too may be truly sanctified.

20 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, 21 that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me. 22 I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, 23 I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me.

24 "Father, I want those you have given me to be with me where I am, and to see my glory, the glory you have given me because you loved me before the creation of the world. 25 Righteous Father, though the world does not know you, I know you, and they know that you have sent me. 26 I have made you known to them, and will continue to make you known in order that the love you have for me may be in them and that I myself may be in them."

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: This is Jesus's prayer to His Father, ask for confident readers who can capture the intimacy and urgency. Suggest they read slowly since these are weighty words.

Reader 1: Verses 13-19 (Prayer for current disciples) **Reader 2:** Verses 20-23 (Prayer for future believers and unity) **Reader 3:** Verses 24-26 (Prayer for glory and love)

Listen for the emotion in this prayer. This is Jesus's final conversation with His Father before the cross, and He's thinking about us.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about this prayer?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1 or 2 questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How can..." or "What does it mean when..." Don't worry about having the answers; we want to know what you're actually wondering about. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Watch for questions about Christian divisions they've observed.

Collecting Questions: Let me write your questions on the board. We'll start with the ones that most of you can relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that Jesus is praying for believers who don't exist yet?"
 - "What does 'just as you are in me and I am in you' tell us about the standard Jesus sets for unity?"
 - "According to verse 21, what's supposed to happen when believers are unified? What happens when they're not?"
 - "Why do you think Jesus prayed for unity instead of just commanding it?"
 - "What's the difference between the unity Jesus describes and just getting along or being nice?"
 - "How do you think non-Christians respond when they see Christians fighting with each other?"
-

- "What if Christians have genuine disagreements about important things? Should they just ignore their differences?"
- "Why would unity among believers make the world believe that God sent Jesus?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus is setting up unity among believers as proof of divine reality. He's saying that when believers reflect the same kind of oneness that exists between Father and Son, it becomes evidence to the world that God actually sent Jesus. But that means the opposite is also true, when believers are divided, it undermines the credibility of the Gospel message itself.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about what you've observed in Christian communities. You've probably seen churches split, denominations that won't work together, or Christian leaders attacking each other on social media. How does Jesus's prayer challenge what you've witnessed?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Church members gossiping about other members or spreading conflict
- Youth group students from different churches treating each other as rivals rather than family
- Christians on social media publicly attacking other Christians over political or theological differences
- Denominations refusing to cooperate on community service or mission work because of secondary disagreements
- Adult Christians dismissing other believers as "not real Christians" because of different worship styles or theological emphases
- Personal decisions to avoid certain churches or Christian groups because "they're different from us"

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix everything. Some divisions involve genuine theological differences. Help them think through when unity is possible and when differences might be

necessary.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen Christians work together across denominational or stylistic differences? What made that possible?"
- "What would help you personally contribute to unity rather than division in Christian communities?"
- "How do you discern when theological differences are worth dividing over and when they're not?"
- "What's the difference between biblical unity and just avoiding conflict or pretending differences don't matter?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you from Jesus's prayer: Unity among believers isn't just a nice idea, it's supposed to be proof to the world that God is real and that Jesus came from God. That means when Christians are divided, fighting, or treating each other poorly, we're not just hurting ourselves; we're undermining the Gospel message itself. This isn't easy to live out, and it doesn't mean all differences are unimportant.

This week, pay attention to how Christians interact with each other, in your church, on social media, in your community. Notice both the divisions and the unity. Ask yourself: If I were someone who didn't know Jesus, what would these interactions tell me about Christianity?

You've done excellent thinking today about one of the hardest challenges in Christian life. Keep wrestling with these questions. The fact that you're taking this seriously means Jesus's prayer is working in you.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that when Christians work together and love each other, it helps other people believe in Jesus. When Christians fight, it makes it harder for others to see God's love.

If Kids Ask "Why do churches sometimes disagree with each other?"

Say: "Sometimes people understand things differently, and that's okay. But Jesus wants us to still love each other and work together, even when we don't agree about everything."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever tried to convince a friend that your favorite movie or TV show was really good. Okay, lots of hands. Now raise your hand if that friend came over to watch it with you, but while you were watching, your family was fighting, maybe siblings yelling at each other or your parents arguing about something.

Here's a harder question: What do you think happens when your friend sees your family fighting while you're trying to tell them how great your family is? Part of you might feel embarrassed. Another part might worry that your friend won't want to come over again. And your friend might wonder if your family is really as great as you said.

That makes complete sense! It's really hard to convince someone that something is wonderful when they can see problems right in front of them. Your feelings make sense, and your friend's confusion makes sense too. Nobody's the bad guy, it's just a tough situation.

This reminds me of the movie *Inside Out*, where Riley's emotions are all fighting inside her head while she's trying to act normal on the outside. Or like in *Toy Story* when the toys have to work together but sometimes they argue and it makes things harder for Andy.

The tricky part is figuring out how to handle problems in your family while still being able to invite friends over and show them love. You can't pretend problems don't exist, but you also don't want the problems to keep you from sharing good things with others.

Today we're going to hear about Jesus praying for His followers, including us, the night before He died. He knew something really important: when people who follow Jesus work together and love each other, it helps other people believe that God is real. But when they fight... well, let's find out what Jesus said

about that.

What to Expect: Kids may share examples of family conflicts or friend drama. Acknowledge briefly: "That sounds really hard," and keep moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

It was the night before Jesus died on the cross. He was in a garden with His disciples, and He knew this was His last chance to pray with them before everything changed.

The disciples were scared and confused. Earlier that evening, Jesus had told them He was going away, and they didn't understand what that meant. They'd been arguing about who was the most important among them. Everything felt uncertain and frightening.

But instead of lecturing them or getting frustrated with their fears, Jesus did something amazing. He started praying out loud so they could hear Him talking to His Father in heaven. And not only did He pray for them, He prayed for people who weren't even there.

Imagine being one of those disciples, feeling scared and unsure, and hearing Jesus pray for you by name. Imagine hearing Him ask God to protect you and help you. That would make you feel pretty special and loved, wouldn't it?

But then Jesus did something even more incredible. He said, "Father, I'm not just praying for these disciples here with me. I'm also praying for everyone who will believe in me in the future because of what these disciples tell them."

Think about what that means. Jesus was praying for people who weren't even born yet. He was praying for their children and their grandchildren. He was praying for people living hundreds of years later. Jesus was praying for us!

The disciples must have looked at each other with wide eyes. Jesus was thinking about people they had never met, people who didn't even exist yet. But Jesus loved all these future believers so much that He was praying for them on the most important night of His life.

What do you think Jesus prayed for? What did He ask God to do for all these future believers, including us?

Jesus looked up to heaven and said these words to His Father:

John 17:20-21 (NIV)

20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father, just as you are in me and I am in you. May they also be in us so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

Jesus was praying that everyone who follows Him would be "one", unified, working together, loving each other like a family. But not just any kind of family. Jesus said He wanted believers to love each other the same way that He and His Father love each other!

Now, how much do you think Jesus and His Father love each other? Perfectly! Completely! They never fight or get jealous or try to hurt each other. They always want what's best for each other. They work together perfectly.

But Jesus wasn't finished. He explained why this unity was so important. He said it was "so that the world may believe that you have sent me." In other words, when people who follow Jesus love each other and work together, it helps other people believe that Jesus really came from God.

John 17:22-23 (NIV)

22-23 "I have given them the glory that you gave me, that they may be one as we are one, I in them and you in me, so that they may be brought to complete unity. Then the world will know that you sent me and have loved them even as you have loved me."

Jesus said something really important here: "Then the world will know that you sent me." He was explaining that when His followers love each other and work together, it becomes like a big sign pointing to God. People see that love and think, "Wow, there must be something real about what these people believe."

But that also means the opposite is true. When people who say they follow Jesus fight with each other, argue, or treat each other badly, it makes it harder for other people to believe. Instead of being a sign that points to God, division becomes a sign that pushes people away.

Jesus continued His prayer, asking God to help all believers experience God's love and presence. He wanted everyone who would ever follow Him to feel connected to God and to each other.

The disciples listening to this prayer must have felt amazed. Here was Jesus, facing the worst night of His life, and He was spending time praying for people He'd never meet, including kids who would be born 2,000 years later. He was praying for you!

This prayer shows us something incredible about Jesus's heart. Even when He was scared and facing death, He was thinking about us and asking God to help us love each other well.

Sometimes in our churches today, adults disagree about things or different churches do things differently. That's okay, people can understand things differently and still love Jesus. But Jesus's prayer reminds us that the most important thing is loving each other and working together so that other people can see God's love.

What we learn from Jesus's prayer is this: When Christians love each other, serve together, and treat each other kindly, it's like a billboard advertising God's love to everyone around them.

The amazing truth is that Jesus was thinking about you before you were born. He prayed specifically for you and everyone else who would come to believe in Him. You matter so much to Jesus that He spent part of His last night on earth praying for your life and your relationships with other believers.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Amazing Prayer

Jesus prayed for people who weren't even born yet, including you! How does it make you feel to know that Jesus was thinking about you and praying for you on the night before He died? If you could have been there listening to Jesus pray, what would you have wanted to say to Him?

Listen For: "Happy," "special," "loved," "surprised", affirm: "Yes! You ARE that special to Jesus. He really was thinking about you."

Question 2: When Christians Get Along

Jesus said that when His followers love each other and work together, it helps other people believe that God is real. Think about your school or neighborhood. If someone who didn't know Jesus saw Christians being really kind to each other and working together, what do you think they might wonder about?

If They Say: "Why are they so nice?", respond "Exactly! They might wonder what makes Christians different, and that could help them learn about Jesus."

Question 3: When Christians Don't Get Along

But what about when people who say they follow Jesus fight with each other or are mean to each other? You might have seen this happen. How do you think that makes people who don't know Jesus feel about Christianity? Does it make them more curious about God or less curious?

Connect: "This is exactly why Jesus prayed for unity. He knew that how Christians treat each other really matters to people who are watching."

Question 4: Making Jesus's Prayer Come True

Jesus prayed that all His followers would love each other like He and His Father love each other. That's a really high standard! What are some ways you could help make Jesus's prayer come true in your church, your family, or with your Christian friends?

If They Say: "But what if someone is mean to me first?", respond "That's really hard. Jesus's prayer doesn't mean we let people hurt us, but it does challenge us to find ways to show love even in difficult situations."

Great insights! Jesus's prayer shows us that unity among His followers isn't just nice, it's actually part of how God reaches other people with His love. Let's do an activity that helps us experience what this kind of unity looks like.

4. Activity: Unity Web (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces how unity among believers creates strength and attracts others by having kids physically experience how working together accomplishes what no one can do alone. Success looks like kids discovering that their individual "light" becomes much brighter when connected to others.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to create a Unity Web. Everyone stand up and spread out around the room, but don't touch anyone else yet. Each of you represents a Christian trying to show God's love to the world.

Here's your challenge: You each have God's light inside you, and you're trying to shine that light as far as possible. But here's the thing, when you're standing alone, your light can only reach a small area around you. Stretch your arms out and that's about how far your individual light goes.

But here's the amazing part: when you connect with other believers, hold hands, your lights combine and get stronger. The goal is to create one connected web that reaches every corner of our room, so that someone standing anywhere could see God's light.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus prayed for, when believers are connected and unified, their combined light reaches much farther than any of them could reach alone.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start by letting them try to "light up" the room while standing separately. Walk around pointing out the dark spaces between them. "I notice there are areas where no light is reaching. People standing here wouldn't be able to see God's love."

Let them struggle with this for about a minute, then start coaching: "I wonder if there's a way to connect your lights so they're stronger. What happens when lights come together?"

As they begin holding hands and forming chains, celebrate: "Look what's happening! Your lights are combining and reaching farther. But I still see some corners that are dark." Guide them toward creating one connected web that reaches the entire room.

When they succeed in creating a connected web that spans the room, have them look around: "Now look! Every part of this room is touched by your connected light. There's nowhere someone could stand without seeing the love you're sharing."

Once they've experienced success, have them notice the difference: "How did it feel when you were trying to light up the room by yourselves versus when you were all connected?"

Watch For: The moment when they realize they need to connect to others to reach the whole space, this is the physical representation of Jesus's prayer for unity accomplishing mission.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how much area you could light up when you were standing alone versus when you were all connected? This is exactly what Jesus was praying for! When Christians are unified and connected, God's love reaches farther than any of us could reach alone. Division breaks the web and leaves dark spaces where people can't see God's love.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Jesus prayed for us before we were even born, asking God that all His followers would love each other and work together. When Christians are unified, it helps other people see God's love and believe in Jesus. When Christians fight or don't get along, it makes it harder for others to see God.

This doesn't mean Christians have to agree about everything or pretend problems don't exist. But it does mean we should always look for ways to love each other, work together, and show the world what God's family looks like.

The amazing result is that when we live this way, our combined light reaches much farther than any of us could shine alone, and more people get to experience God's love.

This Week's Challenge

Look for one way to connect your "light" with another Christian this week. Maybe help someone at church, encourage a Christian friend, or work together on something kind for someone else. Remember that Jesus prayed specifically for you to be part of making His love visible to the world.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear Jesus, thank you for praying for us before we were even born. Help us love other Christians the way you and your Father love each other. When we work together and care for each other, help other people see your love and want to know you too. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that Jesus prayed for them before they were born and wants all His followers to love each other.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

Compare Jesus praying for future people to a mom preparing a bedroom for a baby who isn't born yet, she loves the baby before meeting them.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or unity. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "The B-I-B-L-E," or "I've Got the Joy, Joy, Joy." Use movements: point up to God during "Jesus loves me," hug yourself during "loves"

me," hold hands with neighbors during unity lyrics.

Great singing! Jesus loves hearing you sing to Him. Now let's sit down in our special horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about something Jesus did for YOU before you were even born!

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 gentle and loving when you're Jesus, sound amazed when talking about the future prayer.

Today we're going to meet Jesus on a very special night!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

It was nighttime, and Jesus was with His friends called disciples. But Jesus knew something they didn't know, tomorrow He was going to die on the cross to save everyone from their sins.

[Use gentle, caring voice]

Jesus loved His friends so much, and He was going to miss them. So He decided to pray out loud so they could hear Him talking to His Father in heaven.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look up]

Jesus started praying for His disciples: "Father, please take care of my friends. Help them. Protect them. Keep them safe." His friends felt so loved hearing Jesus pray for them!

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

But then Jesus said something amazing! He said, "Father, I'm not just praying for these friends here with me. I'm also praying for everyone who will believe in me later!"

[Move to side, sound amazed]

The disciples looked at each other with big, surprised eyes! Jesus was praying for people who weren't even born yet! He was praying for their children and grandchildren and great-grandchildren!

John 17:20-21 (NIV)

20-21 "My prayer is not for them alone. I pray also for those who will believe in me through their message, that all of them may be one, Father... so that the world may believe that you have sent me."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what that means? Jesus was praying for YOU! Even though you weren't born yet, Jesus was thinking about you and talking to God about you!

[Move to center, speak with authority and love]

Jesus prayed that everyone who loves Him would love each other too. He wanted all His followers to be like one big, happy family!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Jesus said, "Father, help all my followers love each other the same way you and I love each other." Now, how much do Jesus and His Father love each other? SO MUCH! Perfectly! They never fight or are mean to each other.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

But Jesus had a special reason for this prayer. He said that when His followers love each other, other people will see that love and believe that God is real!

[Speak with excitement]

It's like this: when people see Christians being kind, helping each other, and loving each other, they think, "Wow! There must be something special about God if His people love each other so much!"

[Pause dramatically]

But when Christians are mean to each other or fight, it makes other people sad and confused about God.

[Speak directly to the children]

Jesus finished His prayer by asking God to fill all His followers with love, the same love that God has for Jesus! He wanted everyone to feel loved and connected to God.

[Move closer to the children]

The most amazing thing is that Jesus was thinking about you on the most important night of His life. Before you were born, before your parents were born, Jesus loved you and prayed for you!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

Jesus wants us to love other people who follow Him, help each other, and be kind. When we do that, we help other people see how wonderful God is!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How does it make you feel that Jesus prayed for you before you were born?
2. If you could have been there listening to Jesus pray, what would you want to tell Him?
3. Why do you think Jesus wanted His followers to love each other?
4. What does it look like when Christians love each other well?
5. How do you think other people feel when they see Christians being kind to each other?

6. What happens when Christians fight or are mean to each other?

7. How can you help show God's love to other Christians?

8. What's one way you can be kind to someone at church this week?

9. Why is it important for Christians to work together?

10. How does Jesus want us to treat other people who love Him?

11. What makes you happy about being part of God's family?

12. How can we help other people want to know Jesus?

13. What would you tell a friend about how Christians should treat each other?

14. How do you feel knowing Jesus was thinking about you?

15. What's special about being loved by Jesus?

16. How can you show love to someone who might not know Jesus yet?

17. What does God want His family to look like?

18. How can we pray for other Christians?

19. What would happen if all Christians loved each other perfectly?

20. How can you be like Jesus in the way you treat your Christian friends?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about unity or God's love. Suggestions: "We Are One in the Spirit," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "Love, Love, Love." Use movements: hold hands during unity songs, point to different children during "Jesus loves the little children," make heart shape with hands during "love" lyrics.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time so we can talk to Jesus just like He talked to His Father about us.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear Jesus, thank you for praying for us before we were born...

[Pause]

Help us love other Christians the way you and your Father love each other. Help us be kind and work together...

[Pause]

When we love each other, help other people see your love and want to know you too...

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us so much and for making us part of your family. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about loving other Christians. Examples: "Thank you for loving me, Jesus" or "Help me be kind to my friends at church."

Remember, Jesus prayed for you before you were even born because He loves you so much! Have a wonderful week loving other people who love Jesus too!

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# Strong Bear Weak

*Strength Creates Obligation, When Does Bearing Become Enabling?*

**Romans 15:1-13**

## 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

**Romans 15:1-13 (NIV)**

*1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

*5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name."*

*10 Again, it says: "Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." 12 And again, Isaiah says: "The Root of Jesse will come,*

*one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

## Context

Paul writes to the Roman church in the midst of a divisive dispute between "strong" and "weak" believers. The strong felt free to eat any food and observe any day as special to God, while the weak maintained dietary restrictions and calendar observances from their Jewish background or pagan past. This wasn't a theoretical theological debate, it was threatening to split the church as each group judged the other's practices.

In the preceding chapter, Paul established that both groups must stop judging each other and instead focus on building up the community. Now he shifts from mutual tolerance to a specific obligation: those who are strong must actively bear with the weak's failings. This is the climax of his argument about how strength should function in Christian community.

## The Big Idea

**Strength creates moral obligation toward weakness, not freedom from it, the strong must bear with the weak's failings rather than please themselves.**

This challenges our instinct to see strength as earning us more personal freedom or distance from those who struggle. Paul's "ought" is not a suggestion but a moral imperative that redefines how we use any capacity, maturity, or advantage we possess.

## Theological Core

- **Strength as obligation.** Having strength, knowledge, or freedom creates responsibility to bear with those who lack these things, not permission to criticize or avoid them.
- **Self-pleasing rejection.** The natural impulse to use our strengths for our own comfort and preference must be consciously resisted in favor of neighbor-building.
- **Neighbor-building over self-advancement.** Our actions should aim to build up those around us rather than maximize our own experience or prove our own rightness.

- **Christ as the ultimate model.** Jesus didn't use his divine strength to please himself but instead bore the weight of human weakness and failure, providing the pattern for all Christian use of power.
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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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- Strength in any area creates moral obligation to bear with others' weaknesses in those areas
  - There's a tension between helpful bearing and harmful enabling that requires wisdom to navigate
  - Self-pleasing is a natural impulse that must be consciously resisted in favor of building up others
  - Christ's example shows us how to use power and strength for others rather than ourselves
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- When you're good at something, your job is to help others learn, not to show off or get impatient
  - It's natural to want to please yourself, but it's better to help others succeed
  - Sometimes people fail or struggle, and that's when they need help most
  - Your feelings of frustration with struggling people are okay, but you can choose to help anyway
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#### Grades 1, 3

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- Strong people help others instead of only thinking about themselves
  - God wants us to be kind to people who need help
  - We can use what we're good at to help others
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Blanket enabling.** This passage doesn't mean we should never challenge destructive behavior or that all accommodation is virtuous, Paul specifically addresses capacity differences, not character issues.
  - **Strength-shaming.** The goal isn't to make strong people feel guilty for their strengths but to redirect how they use those strengths relationally.
  - **Weakness-romanticizing.** Paul isn't saying weakness is inherently more virtuous than strength, but that strength creates specific responsibilities.
  - **Contemporary over-application.** While the principle extends beyond dietary disputes, we must be careful not to apply it to situations involving abuse, addiction, or manipulation where "bearing with failings" could enable harm.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Doesn't this just enable bad behavior and make people weak?"**

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Paul is addressing capacity differences and matters of conscience, not destructive patterns or character issues. Bearing with someone means helping them grow from where they are, not excusing behavior that harms them or others. The goal is "building up," which sometimes requires challenge alongside support. We bear with failings while still encouraging growth and health.

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### **"How do I know when I'm being too accommodating versus not accommodating enough?"**

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Look at the fruit: is your accommodation building the person up or keeping them dependent? Paul's criterion is "for their good, to build them up." If your bearing is enabling destructive patterns or preventing necessary growth, it's not the kind Paul describes. Biblical bearing aims at the other person's flourishing, not just their comfort or your peace.

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### **"What if the 'weak' person doesn't appreciate my help or keeps making the same mistakes?"**

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Paul doesn't promise that bearing with others will be appreciated or immediately successful. The obligation isn't based on results or gratitude but on our identity as strong ones who have received grace. Sometimes bearing means staying patient through repeated failures while maintaining appropriate boundaries. The goal is faithfulness to our calling, not controlling outcomes.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Strength creates an obligation to lift others up, even when it's inconvenient, unappreciated, or requires sacrificing your preferences.**

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

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between bearing with others' weaknesses and enabling destructive behavior. Help them identify where they have strength and explore what bearing responsibility for others might look like in those areas.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When does bearing with others' failings build them up versus enable them to stay weak or behave destructively?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of being frustrated with people who repeatedly fail or struggle
  - Honor the complexity that some situations genuinely do enable harm when we're too accommodating
  - Let students wrestle with specific scenarios rather than settling for general principles
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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You're really good at math, and you're assigned to tutor someone who just doesn't get it. They make the same mistakes over and over, don't remember what you taught them last time, and honestly, it would be faster and easier to just do their homework for them. Part of you wants to help, but part of you is getting frustrated and wondering if they're even trying.

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Or maybe you're the one who's naturally good at reading people and managing social situations. You have this friend who constantly says the wrong thing, misses social cues, and creates awkward moments. You find yourself covering for them, redirecting conversations, making excuses to other people. You want to be loyal, but you're starting to feel like you're enabling them to avoid learning basic social skills.

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These situations hit that tricky zone where we know we should help people, but we're not sure if our help is actually helping. Sometimes what feels like kindness might actually be preventing someone from growing. Sometimes what feels like tough love might actually be abandoning someone who genuinely needs support.

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Today we're looking at Paul's instructions to the Roman church about this exact dynamic. He uses the terms "strong" and "weak," and he tells the strong what their responsibility is toward the weak. But as we'll see, it's more complex than just "always accommodate everyone."

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Open your Bibles to Romans 15. As you read, pay attention to the specific word Paul uses to describe what the strong "ought" to do, and notice what he says the goal should be.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage contains some complex theology in verses 8-12, so help with difficult phrases. Watch for early finishers and let them sit with the weight of Paul's "ought", this is a demanding passage.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What exactly are the "strong" supposed to do with the "failings" of the weak?
  - Why does Paul contrast bearing with failings and self-pleasing?
  - What's the purpose or goal of how the strong should act?
  - How does Christ's example connect to this instruction?
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## Romans 15:1-13 (NIV)

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*1 We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. 2 Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up. 3 For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: "The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me." 4 For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through the endurance taught in the Scriptures and the encouragement they provide we might have hope.*

*5 May the God who gives endurance and encouragement give you the same attitude of mind toward each other that Christ Jesus had, 6 so that with one mind and one voice you may glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ. 7 Accept one another, then, just as Christ accepted you, in order to bring praise to God. 8 For I tell you that Christ has become a servant of the Jews on behalf of God's truth, so that the promises made to the patriarchs might be confirmed 9 and, moreover, that the Gentiles might glorify God for his mercy. As it is written: "Therefore I will praise you among the Gentiles; I will sing the praises of your name."*

*10 Again, it says: "Rejoice, Gentiles, with his people." 11 And again: "Praise the Lord, all you Gentiles; let all the peoples extol him." 12 And again, Isaiah says: "The Root of Jesse will come, one who will arise to rule over the nations; in him the Gentiles will hope." 13 May the God of hope fill you with all joy and peace as you trust in him, so that you may overflow with hope by the power of the Holy Spirit.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers for the different sections. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for verses 8-12 since they contain multiple Old Testament quotes.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-4 (Paul's core instruction and Christ's example) **Reader 2:** Verses 5-7 (The goal of unity and acceptance) **Reader 3:** Verses 8-13 (Christ's work for Jews and Gentiles, closing blessing)

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Listen for the tension in Paul's language, notice how he moves between commands and blessings, between what we ought to do and what God will do.

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

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

Get into groups of 3-4. You have 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions you know the answer to, but things you're actually curious or confused about. For example, you might ask about the difference between bearing with failings and enabling bad behavior, or why Paul uses such strong language like "ought," or how to know when you're strong versus weak in different areas. Ask what you're actually wondering about.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the complexities.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board, look for themes around obligation, boundaries, and practical application. Start with questions most students will relate to.

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

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- "What's the difference between 'bearing with failings' and 'pleasing ourselves', what is Paul contrasting?"
  - "Paul says we ought to bear with failings 'for their good, to build them up.' How do you tell if your accommodation is building someone up or keeping them dependent?"
  - "When might bearing with someone's failings actually harm them rather than help them?"
  - "How do you identify where you're 'strong' versus where you're 'weak', is it always obvious?"
  - "Paul uses Christ as the example of someone who didn't please himself. What did that look like, and how is it similar or different from our situations?"
  - "Think about your friend groups, family, or school. Where do you see this dynamic playing out?"
-

- "What would change if the 'weak' person in a situation never appreciates the bearing or keeps making the same mistakes?"
- "How do you balance bearing with someone's failings and maintaining your own boundaries or mental health?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul is redefining what strength is for. We naturally think that being strong, whether that's academically, socially, emotionally, spiritually, gives us more freedom to focus on ourselves. But Paul says the opposite: strength creates obligation. The stronger you are, the more responsible you become for bearing with others who are weaker in that area. But, and this is crucial, the goal is "building them up," not keeping them comfortable in their weakness.

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

Let's get real about your lives. Where are you actually strong? I'm not talking about perfect, I'm talking about areas where you have more capacity, knowledge, skill, or maturity than some of the people around you. And where do you see people struggling in those areas, maybe making the same mistakes, not getting it, needing help repeatedly?

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

- Being academically strong and dealing with friends who constantly need homework help or explanations
  - Having emotionally stable family life and watching friends navigate family chaos or divorce
  - Being naturally social and dealing with friends who are awkward or socially anxious
  - Having more money than some friends and navigating situations where they can't afford activities
  - Growing up in church and interacting with friends who are just starting to explore faith questions
  - Being good at conflict resolution in friend groups where others create or avoid drama
-

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Acknowledge that different situations call for different responses. Help them think through the "building up" criterion rather than giving blanket advice.

## Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone bear with failings in a way that actually helped the struggling person grow?"
- "What would help you have patience with repeated failures while still encouraging growth?"
- "How do you decide when to accommodate someone's weakness and when to challenge them to grow?"
- "What's the difference between helpful bearing and unhelpful enabling?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: strength creates obligation, not freedom. Whatever areas you're genuinely strong in, and we all have some, those become areas where you're responsible for bearing with people who are weaker. Not because it's easy or because they'll appreciate it, but because that's what strength is for in God's economy. It's not always clear how to do this well, and sometimes you'll get it wrong. But the goal is always building people up, not just keeping the peace or making yourself feel generous.

This week, pay attention to moments when your natural instinct is to please yourself, when you want to avoid the struggling person, or get impatient with repeated failures, or focus on your own experience rather than bearing with others. Notice those moments, and ask what bearing might look like instead. Sometimes it'll mean accommodation, sometimes it'll mean gentle challenge, but always with their building-up as the goal.

You did good thinking today. These are genuinely complex situations that don't have easy answers, and you wrestled with them honestly. Keep asking these hard questions, that's how you develop the wisdom to know when and how to bear well.

## Grades 4, 6

## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that being good at something means helping others learn, not showing off or getting impatient with people who struggle.

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### If Kids Ask "What if someone never learns or keeps making the same mistakes?"

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Say: "Sometimes people need lots of practice before they get better. Our job is to be patient and keep helping, just like Jesus is patient with us when we make mistakes."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been really good at something that someone else struggled with. Maybe you're great at math and your friend just doesn't get it. Or you're awesome at video games and your little sister keeps losing. Or you're a strong reader and someone in your class reads really slowly.

---

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever felt frustrated when you were trying to help someone who just wasn't getting it. Like, you explain it three times and they still make the same mistake. Or you're playing a game together and they keep messing up and it's not fun anymore. Part of you wants to help, but another part of you just wants to quit and do something else.

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Those feelings totally make sense! It's normal to feel frustrated when you're good at something and someone else isn't catching on. It's normal to want to just focus on your own fun instead of helping someone who's struggling. Your brain is thinking, "This would be so much easier if I just did it myself!"

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This reminds me of the movie Moana. Remember how Moana knew how to sail, but at first she just wanted to stay on her island and do her own thing? It would have been easier for her to use her sailing skills just for herself. But she realized her skills were meant to help others, even when it was hard and frustrating and people didn't believe in her at first.

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The tricky part is figuring out: when you're good at something, what's your responsibility to people who aren't good at it yet? Do you have to help them even when it's frustrating? How do you help without just doing it for them?

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Today we're going to hear about what the apostle Paul told some early Christians who were dealing with this exact situation. Some people in the church were strong and confident about certain things, and other people were still learning and struggling. Let's find out what Paul said the strong people should do.

**What to Expect:** Kids will readily admit frustration with helping struggling people. Affirm these feelings quickly, "That makes total sense!", then keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a church in ancient Rome, about 2,000 years ago. This church had all kinds of people, some who had grown up learning about God, and others who were brand new to faith and still figuring things out.

Some people in the church felt really confident about what they could eat and which days were special. They'd say, "God cares about our hearts, not whether we eat certain foods or celebrate certain holidays!" These were called the "strong" believers.

But other people weren't so sure. They thought, "What if eating the wrong thing or missing a special day makes God upset with me?" So they were very careful about food and holidays. These were called the "weak" believers, not because they were bad people, but because they weren't as confident yet.

Imagine being in that church. You're one of the strong believers, and you watch the weak believers worry about things that you know don't really matter. Part of you might think, "Just eat the food! It's fine! Why are you making such a big deal about this?"

And the weak believers might look at the strong believers and think, "How can you be so careless? Don't you care about pleasing God?" Both groups were getting frustrated with each other.

Paul, who was like a spiritual father to many churches, heard about this problem. He knew both groups loved God, but they were letting their differences divide them instead of bringing them together.

So Paul wrote them a letter. And here's what he said to the strong believers, the ones who felt confident and free:

**Romans 15:1-2 (NIV)**

*"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up."*

Did you notice that word "ought"? Paul wasn't making a suggestion. He was saying, "This is what you're supposed to do. This is your responsibility." When you're strong in something, you don't get to just think about yourself anymore.

"Bear with the failings" doesn't mean pretend everything is perfect. It means when people mess up or struggle or don't understand, you carry some of that weight with them instead of getting frustrated or walking away.

But Paul knew this wouldn't be easy. Our natural instinct is to "please ourselves", to focus on what makes us happy or comfortable. So he gave them the ultimate example:

**Romans 15:3 (NIV)**

*"For even Christ did not please himself but, as it is written: 'The insults of those who insult you have fallen on me.'"*

Jesus was the strongest person who ever lived. He could have pleased himself. He could have stayed in heaven where everyone appreciated him and everything was perfect. But instead, he came to earth and dealt with people who didn't understand him, who made mistakes, who even insulted and hurt him.

Jesus used his strength not to make his own life easier, but to help weak people become stronger. He was patient when his disciples asked the same questions over and over. He was kind when people were afraid or confused. He kept helping even when people didn't appreciate it.

Paul was telling the strong believers: "This is your model. Use your strength the way Jesus used his strength, to build others up, not to make your own life more comfortable."

So what happened? Well, Paul's letter helped the church understand something amazing: differences in strength aren't meant to divide us. They're meant to help us take care of each other.

The strong believers learned to be patient with the weak believers' concerns. Instead of rolling their eyes or getting frustrated, they found ways to accommodate and help. They might say, "I know you're worried about this food. Let's find something we can both eat comfortably."

And the weak believers felt safer to ask questions and grow because they weren't being judged for not knowing everything yet. They could learn at their own pace with people who cared about building them up.

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The church became a place where people's strengths were used to help others, not to show off or get impatient. Sometimes in our lives, we're the strong ones who need to help others learn. Sometimes we're the weak ones who need patient help from others.

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What we learn from Paul's letter is that being strong at something isn't about making life easier for yourself. It's about making life better for the people around you who are still learning and growing.

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God gives us different strengths not so we can impress people or avoid frustrating situations, but so we can help build each other up. That's what love looks like in action.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine you're really good at basketball, and your friend keeps missing easy shots during recess. Everyone's getting frustrated because your team keeps losing. Your friend feels bad, and you're starting to feel annoyed. What would "bearing with their failings" look like in that situation? What would just "pleasing yourself" look like?

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**Listen For:** "Get a different teammate," "Just shoot yourself", affirm: "Those are natural thoughts! Your brain wants to win and have fun."

#### Question 2: The Choice

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Think about something you're really good at, maybe reading, or math, or making friends, or understanding technology. Now imagine someone who struggles with that thing asks for your help for the third time this week. You're busy and you kind of want to just say, "Figure it out yourself!" What do you think Paul would say to you in that moment?

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**If They Say:** "Help anyway" but sound reluctant, respond "What would make it easier to actually want to help instead of just forcing yourself?"

### Question 3: The Goal

Paul said the goal is to "build them up." What's the difference between helping someone in a way that builds them up versus helping them in a way that keeps them dependent on you? Like, what's the difference between good help and not-so-good help?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Jesus' help so powerful, he helped people become stronger, not just more comfortable."

### Question 4: The Result

Think about how you feel when someone who's really good at something is patient with you while you're learning versus when they get frustrated and impatient. How does that change how much you learn and how willing you are to try? Why do you think Paul cared so much about the strong people being patient?

**If They Say:** "It makes you want to quit when people are mean", affirm "Exactly! Patient help creates safe space to grow."

You guys are getting it! The amazing thing about using our strengths to help others is that it doesn't actually make us weaker, it makes everyone stronger. Now let's try an activity that shows us what this looks like when we work together.

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

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of strong people helping weak people succeed by having kids physically experience how individual strengths can build up the whole group. Success looks like kids

discovering that using their personal strengths to help others makes everyone more successful, including themselves.

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

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We're going to play "Strength Builders." Everyone stand up and spread out so you have some space. I'm going to give each person a different "strength" that you have to use to help others succeed at challenges.

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Some of you will be "Encouragers", your job is to cheer people on when they're struggling. Some will be "Problem Solvers", you can give one helpful hint when someone is stuck. Some will be "Spotters", you can stand next to someone to help them feel safe trying something hard. And some will be "Connectors", you can introduce people who might help each other.

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The challenge is that everyone has to successfully complete three different tasks: balance on one foot for 10 seconds, do 5 jumping jacks, and high-five 3 different people. BUT, and here's the important part, you can only use your special strength to help others. You can't complete the challenge just by yourself.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like Paul's situation, some people are strong in different ways, and the goal isn't to show off your strength or just take care of yourself. The goal is to use your strength so everyone succeeds.

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

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Start the challenges! At first, watch how some kids try to complete their own tasks without using their helper role. Let this go for about a minute, some will struggle, some will succeed individually, but they'll start to realize they're supposed to be helping others.

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As they encounter the real challenge, helping others while accomplishing their own goals, coach them toward collaboration. Watch for kids who get focused on their own completion versus helping others succeed.

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Use coaching phrases like: "I notice some people are struggling with balance, who has encouragement to offer?" "I wonder if the problem solvers see anyone who needs a helpful hint?" "Connectors, are there people who could help each other if they knew about each other?"

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Celebrate the breakthrough moments when kids realize that helping others actually makes their own tasks easier, when encouragement helps everyone balance better, when problem-solving helps the whole group, when connecting people creates new friendships and partnerships.

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Once everyone has succeeded (or come close), have them notice how different the room feels compared to when they were just trying to complete tasks individually. Point out how using their strengths to help others made everyone more successful.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to encourage another person instead of focusing on their own jumping jacks, this is the physical representation of bearing with others' failings.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you focused on your own tasks versus when you used your strength to help others? Did using your helper role make the room feel different? This is exactly what Paul was talking about, when strong people use their strengths to build others up instead of just pleasing themselves, everyone gets stronger and the whole community becomes better.

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

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Here's what we learned today: when you're good at something, that's not just for you, that's your superpower for helping other people. Being strong at reading means you can help friends who struggle with words. Being good at making friends means you can include people who feel left out. Being brave means you can stand up for people who are scared.

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This doesn't mean you have to be perfect or help everyone all the time. It means when you notice someone struggling with something you're good at, you remember that your strength is meant to build them up, not just make your own life easier.

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The amazing result is that when we use our strengths to help others, we actually become even stronger. And the people we help feel safer to learn and grow because they know someone cares about their success.

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

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Notice one thing you're good at that someone else struggles with. Instead of getting impatient or avoiding them, try using your strength to help them succeed. It might be helping a sibling with homework, teaching a friend a game, or being patient with someone who's learning something you already know. See how it feels to be a "strength builder" for someone else.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for making us good at different things. Help us remember that our strengths are meant to help others, not just ourselves. When we feel frustrated with people who are learning, help us be patient like Jesus was patient with his disciples. Help us use our strengths to build others up. 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 strong people help others instead of only thinking about 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
  - **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 strong people to big kids helping little kids learn to tie shoes, then ask "How do big kids help little kids?"

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about helping others or using our gifts. Suggestions: "We Are the Church," "I Can Help," or "Love One Another." Use movements: point to yourself during "I can," reach out to others during "help," and hold hands during "together" lyrics.

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Great singing, everyone! Now sit down in our special story horseshoe so we can hear about some people who learned how to help each other. Today's story is about being strong helpers!

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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 confused when talking about the arguing people, sound wise and calm when sharing Paul's advice.

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Today we're going to meet some people who went to church together a long, long time ago!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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In this church, some people felt very smart about God. They said, "We can eat any food! We can celebrate any day!" These were the strong people.

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*[Use confident voice and stand up tall]*

---

But other people were still learning about God. They said, "We're not sure about that food. We're not sure about those days." These were the people who were still learning.

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

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Uh oh! The strong people started getting frustrated. They said, "Why don't they just eat the food? Why are they worried about everything?"

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*[Move to center, speak with authority like Paul]*

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A man named Paul heard about this problem. Paul loved God very much, and he wanted to help. So Paul wrote them a letter with very important words.

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*[Move to side, speak like Paul giving advice]*

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Paul said, "Strong people should help weak people! Don't just think about yourselves. Help others learn and grow!"

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**Romans 15:1-2 (NIV)**

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*"We who are strong ought to bear with the failings of the weak and not to please ourselves. Each of us should please our neighbors for their good, to build them up."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you think the strong people wanted to help? At first, maybe not! They wanted to do their own thing!

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

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But then Paul told them about Jesus. Jesus was the strongest person ever, but he didn't just think about himself.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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Jesus came from heaven to help people who were weak and sad and needed help. Jesus was patient with people who made mistakes.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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So the strong people said, "If Jesus helped weak people, we should help weak people too!" They started being kind and patient.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what happened? Everyone started feeling better! The weak people felt safe to ask questions. The strong people felt happy to help.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

---

Paul taught them that God makes us good at different things so we can help each other, not just ourselves!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we're good at things that other people find hard. Maybe you're good at reading and your friend is still learning. Maybe you're good at sharing and someone else forgets.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When that happens, you can be like the strong people in Paul's story. You can help instead of getting frustrated! You can be patient like Jesus!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God gave you good things so you can help others. That's what 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 one question to talk about. You'll have about one minute. 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.

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### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think the learning people felt when the strong people were frustrated with them?
  2. What's something you're good at that might be hard for someone else?
  3. How do you feel when someone helps you learn something new?
  4. What would you do if your friend kept making mistakes in a game?
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5. How did the church change when people started helping each other?

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6. Why do you think God makes people good at different things?

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7. What did Jesus do to help people who needed help?

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8. How can you help someone at school who is learning something you already know?

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9. How can you help someone at home who needs help with something?

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10. Who is someone who has been patient with you when you were learning?

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11. Why is it sometimes hard to help people who make mistakes?

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12. What's a nice way to help someone who is struggling?

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13. How does God help us when we make mistakes?

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14. What does it mean to be patient with someone?

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15. How can strong people help weak people feel safe?

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16. What can you remember from Paul's letter?

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17. How do you feel when someone is kind to you when you mess up?

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18. What would happen if strong people only thought about themselves?

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19. How can you be like Jesus when you help others?

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20. What's the best way to use something you're good at?

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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 helping or being kind. Suggestions: "Helper Song," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Helping Hands." Include movements: reach hands up during "strong," reach hands out during "help," and hug yourself during "love."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Remember to sit crisscross and fold your hands quietly.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for making us good at different things.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to use what we're good at to help other people, not just to make ourselves happy.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*When someone needs help with something we know how to do, help us be patient and kind like Jesus.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for loving us and helping us when we make mistakes. Help us love others the same way. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "Help me be nice to my brother" or "Thank you for making me good at reading."

Remember, strong people help others! Have a wonderful week using your special gifts to help the people around you. You're going to be great helpers!

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