

Living in Community

Volume 12

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Living in Community

Volume 12

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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

Walls Come Down

Christ's Work of Peace, Why do walls keep going back up?

Ephesians 2:11-22

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Ephesians 2:11-22 (NIV)

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands), 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his

household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

Context

Paul is writing to a church in Ephesus made up of both Jewish and Gentile believers. The cultural divide between these groups was enormous, Jews saw Gentiles as unclean outsiders, and Gentiles often resented Jewish exclusivity. The Temple in Jerusalem literally had a wall separating the Court of the Gentiles from the inner courts, with death penalties for Gentiles who crossed the boundary. This wasn't just theological difference; it was deep ethnic hostility backed by religious law.

Paul has just explained that salvation comes by grace through faith, not works, so no one can boast. Now he turns to the social implications: if both groups are saved the same way, what happens to the divisions between them? This passage addresses the most explosive social issue of the early church, whether Jew-Gentile unity was truly possible or necessary.

The Big Idea

Christ's death didn't just save individuals, it actively destroyed the walls of hostility between groups, creating one new humanity where ethnic and religious divisions have been put to death.

This isn't about gradual progress toward unity or learning to get along better. Paul uses violent destruction language: barriers destroyed, hostility killed, walls torn down. The work is finished, what remains is living into the accomplished reality that often doesn't match our experience.

Theological Core

- **Christ as Peace.** Jesus isn't just a peacemaker, he IS our peace, embodying the end of hostility in his own person and work.
 - **Destruction Imagery.** The language is violent and decisive, barriers destroyed, hostility put to death, walls torn down, showing this is accomplished fact, not ongoing process.
-

- **One New Humanity.** Neither group absorbs the other; Christ creates something entirely new that transcends both original ethnic identities.
 - **Hostility's Death.** The cross doesn't just forgive individual sins, it kills the enmity itself, ending the categories that create division.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Christ's cross work actively destroyed ethnic and religious hostility, creating one new humanity
 - The gap between accomplished theological reality and lived experience creates tension requiring faith and intentional community
 - Maintaining divisions contradicts and re-erects what Christ tore down
 - Living into unity requires recognizing when we perpetuate the very hostilities Christ put to death
-

Grades 4, 6

- God actively tears down walls that separate people from each other
 - Our choices to include or exclude others matter to God and reflect whether we're building or tearing down walls
 - Excluding others because they're different hurts both them and God
 - Sometimes doing the right thing means including people even when it feels uncomfortable or different
-

Grades 1, 3

- Jesus loves all people exactly the same, no matter what they look like or where they come from
-

- God's family includes everyone who loves Jesus
 - We can choose to include others and make God happy
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Treating this as gradual improvement.** Paul's language is violent and decisive, barriers destroyed, hostility killed. This is accomplished fact, not ongoing process requiring our help.
 - **Minimizing the law-setting-aside language.** Paul specifically addresses law as dividing wall, not law's complete abolition. The point is ethnic barriers, not moral guidelines.
 - **Making it about individual prejudice only.** This addresses systemic ethnic hostility and structural barriers, not just personal bias or hurt feelings.
 - **Spiritualizing away practical implications.** The unity is theological reality that must be lived out in concrete community practices, not just internal heart attitudes.
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Handling Hard Questions

"If hostility is 'put to death,' why do we still see racism and division everywhere?"

That's exactly Paul's tension. Christ's work is finished, hostility has been killed, but we live in the gap between accomplished reality and full experience. It's like D-Day (victory is certain) and V-E Day (victory is experienced). Our job isn't to create unity but to live into the unity Christ already accomplished, refusing to rebuild walls he tore down.

"Does this mean all religions are the same, or that rules don't matter anymore?"

Paul isn't saying all religions are equal, but that in Christ, ethnic and religious barriers to belonging are removed. The law-setting-aside specifically refers to laws that created dividing walls, not moral guidance. Christ creates one new humanity through the cross, not through eliminating distinctions between truth and falsehood.

"How do we balance unity with standing against actual wrong behavior or beliefs?"

Unity doesn't mean accepting everything or avoiding difficult conversations. The passage addresses ethnic hostility and barrier-building, not the need for wisdom in community life. The question is whether our boundaries reflect Christ's wall-tearing work or recreate the divisions he destroyed. We can have standards while refusing to build walls based on ethnicity, economics, or cultural background.

The One Thing to Remember

Christ's cross didn't just save individuals, it killed hostility itself, and maintaining divisions re-erects what he tore down.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between Christ's accomplished work of tearing down dividing walls and their lived experience of ongoing division. Help them explore what it means to live into theological reality that doesn't match current experience.

The Tension to Frame

If hostility is "put to death" and walls are "destroyed," why do they keep going back up? How do we live into accomplished reality that often doesn't feel real?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their observations about ongoing division, they're not imagining it, and it's not evidence that Paul was wrong
 - Honor the gap between theology and experience rather than rushing to easy answers or spiritual platitudes
 - Let them wrestle with implications rather than lecturing about what they should think or do
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about your school cafeteria for a minute. Even though there are no assigned seats, you probably know exactly where different groups sit. The athletes have their tables, the theater kids have theirs, different grade levels cluster together. Maybe it's the same group of kids who always sit alone. Now imagine the principal announced that starting tomorrow, all the invisible barriers were gone, no more separate tables, no more in-groups and out-groups. How do you think that would actually work out?

Here's what's weird: most people would probably nod and say "That sounds nice," then head straight to their usual table the next day. Even if they wanted things to be different, the patterns are so strong. The invisible walls would still be there, even if someone declared them gone. You'd have this gap between the official policy and what actually happens day to day.

Today we're looking at one of the most explosive social issues in the early church, whether the massive ethnic and religious divisions between Jews and Gentiles could actually be ended. Paul claims something radical: that Christ's death didn't just save individual people, but actively destroyed the walls between groups. Except here's the thing, those walls had a way of going back up.

As we read, notice Paul's language about barriers and walls. Pay attention to whether he's talking about gradual improvement or something more dramatic. And ask yourself: if this work is really finished, why doesn't it feel finished?

Open your Bibles to Ephesians 2, verse 11. We're going to read silently through verse 22, and I want you to sit with the tension of what Paul claims versus what you see around you.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This is heavy theological content, give them space to think. If someone finishes early, encourage them to reread and think about what surprises them most. Watch for confusion about the law-setting-aside language.

As You Read, Think About:

- What words does Paul use to describe what happened to the barriers between groups?
 - What was the situation like before Christ, and what does Paul claim changed?
 - What's surprising or hard to believe about Paul's claims?
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- Where do you see gaps between what Paul describes and what you experience?
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Ephesians 2:11-22 (NIV)

11 Therefore, remember that formerly you who are Gentiles by birth and called "uncircumcised" by those who call themselves "the circumcision" (which is done in the body by human hands), 12 remember that at that time you were separate from Christ, excluded from citizenship in Israel and foreigners to the covenants of the promise, without hope and without God in the world. 13 But now in Christ Jesus you who once were far away have been brought near by the blood of Christ.

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility, 15 by setting aside in his flesh the law with its commands and regulations. His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace, 16 and in one body to reconcile both of them to God through the cross, by which he put to death their hostility.

17 He came and preached peace to you who were far away and peace to those who were near. 18 For through him we both have access to the Father by one Spirit. 19 Consequently, you are no longer foreigners and strangers, but fellow citizens with God's people and also members of his household, 20 built on the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the chief cornerstone. 21 In him the whole building is joined together and rises to become a holy temple in the Lord. 22 And in him you too are being built together to become a dwelling in which God lives by his Spirit.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Choose confident readers for the complex theological language. Let students pass if needed. This isn't narrative, it's dense theology that requires clear delivery.

Reader 1: Verses 11-13 (The separation and exclusion) **Reader 2:** Verses 14-16 (The wall-destroying work) **Reader 3:** Verses 17-22 (The resulting unity and building)

Listen for the contrast between "formerly" and "now." This is before-and-after theology, not gradual-improvement theology.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups and help stuck groups with "What confuses you most?" or "What seems too good to be true?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4 people. Your job is to come up with 1 or 2 real questions about what we just read, not questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually curious or confused about. For example: "If the wall is destroyed, why does it feel like it's still there?" or "What does 'setting aside the law' actually mean?" You have 3 minutes. Ask about what genuinely puzzles you.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. Don't lecture. Guide them to discover the tensions Paul himself acknowledges. Let them wrestle with the gap between theology and experience.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around the gap between accomplished reality and current experience. Start with observational questions.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What words does Paul use to describe what happened to the barriers? How violent or gentle is his language?"
 - "Paul says Christ 'destroyed' the wall and 'put to death' hostility. Does this sound like gradual improvement or something more dramatic?"
 - "If this work is finished, why do we still see ethnic and religious hostility everywhere?"
 - "What's the difference between saying 'Christ is working toward unity' versus 'Christ IS our peace'?"
-

- "Paul talks about 'one new humanity.' What happens to ethnic identities, do they disappear, or something else?"
- "Where do you see modern examples of walls that divide people? What would it look like if those walls were truly 'destroyed'?"
- "What if Paul is wrong and the walls aren't really destroyed? What if he's right and they are?"
- "How do you live into a reality that's theologically true but doesn't match your daily experience?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul isn't giving us a to-do list for creating unity. He's announcing that the work is finished, hostility has been killed, walls destroyed, one new humanity created. But we live in the tension between accomplished reality and experienced reality. The question isn't whether we can tear down walls, but whether we'll keep rebuilding what Christ already destroyed.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see the wall-building happening? Not just obvious racism, but the subtle ways groups separate themselves from other groups. Think about school, social media, your neighborhood, even your church. Where are the invisible barriers?

Real Issues This Connects To

- School cafeteria tables and friend group exclusivity
 - Family attitudes toward people from different backgrounds or economic levels
 - Church comfort with certain types of people but not others
 - Social media echo chambers that reinforce us-versus-them thinking
 - Community divisions based on race, economics, politics, or religion
 - Personal decisions about who's worth getting to know versus who to avoid
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix them. Some situations are complex and don't have easy solutions. Help them think about what walls they might be maintaining rather than giving blanket advice about tearing everything down.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen examples of walls actually coming down between different groups?"
- "What would help you recognize when you're rebuilding walls Christ tore down?"
- "How do you discern between wise boundaries and hostile barriers?"
- "What's the difference between unity and uniformity, do people have to become the same to be one?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Christ's cross work wasn't just about individual salvation, it actively killed hostility itself and tore down dividing walls. The work is finished. What's not finished is our learning to live into that reality. Sometimes that gap between accomplished reality and daily experience will frustrate you. That's normal. You're living in the tension Paul himself acknowledged.

This week, pay attention to the walls, both visible and invisible. Notice when you're tempted to rebuild barriers based on differences that Christ's work has already addressed. You don't have to fix everything, but you can choose not to participate in the wall-building. That's harder than it sounds, and more revolutionary than it looks.

You did good thinking today. These are the kinds of questions worth wrestling with for the rest of your lives. Keep asking them. Keep noticing the gaps. And keep believing that Christ's wall-destroying work is real, even when the evidence seems mixed.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God actively tears down walls that separate people, and that our choices to include or exclude others matter to God and reflect his heart for unity.

If Kids Ask "Why do people still act mean to people who are different?"

Say: "That's exactly why God's work is so important. Even though Jesus fixed the big problem, people sometimes forget and build walls again. God wants us to remember and tear down walls instead of building them up."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been picked last for a team. Keep it up if you've ever not been invited to something that lots of other kids were invited to. Now raise your hand if you've ever been the one doing the not-inviting or the picking last. It's okay, most of us have been on both sides of this.

Now here's a harder question: think about a time when you had to choose between including someone new or sticking with your usual group. Maybe there was a new kid at lunch and you had to decide whether to invite them over or just stick with your regular friends. Part of you thinks "I should include them," but another part thinks "But what if my friends think it's weird?" or "What if they don't fit in?"

Those feelings make total sense. Including people can feel risky, especially when they seem different from you or your group. It's natural to want to stick with people who feel familiar and safe. Nobody wants to make their friends uncomfortable or deal with awkward situations.

It's like that movie Luca, where the sea monster kids have to hide who they really are to fit in with the town kids. Remember how scared everyone was of anyone who seemed different? Or in Encanto, how the family stays separate from the town because they're afraid their gifts make them too different to belong.

The tricky part is figuring out when to risk including people who seem different, and when it's okay to have your own group. How do you know when keeping people out is the right thing to do versus when it hurts people and makes God sad?

Today we're going to hear about the biggest wall problem in the entire Bible. There were two groups of people who absolutely could not stand each other. They thought God wanted them to stay separate

forever. But then Jesus did something that changed everything. Let's find out what happened when the biggest wall in the world came crashing down.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to exclusion experiences. Some may share specific stories. Acknowledge them quickly ("That sounds hard") and keep moving toward the Bible story to maintain momentum.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture the biggest, strongest wall you've ever seen. Maybe it's a brick wall around a school or a tall fence around a house. Now imagine a wall ten times stronger and a hundred times taller. That's what it felt like between two groups of people in Jesus's time: the Jewish people and everyone else, called Gentiles.

The Jewish people believed they were God's special chosen family. And they were! God had picked them out of all the nations to be his people. But over time, some of them started thinking that meant God didn't love anyone else. They built invisible walls to keep other people out. They had rules about not eating with non-Jewish people, not going to their houses, not even talking to them if they could help it.

The non-Jewish people, the Gentiles, felt hurt and angry. They could see that the Jewish people had something special, they knew the real God, they had prayers and songs and stories about God's love. But they were told "You can't have this. You don't belong. God doesn't want you." Imagine how that would feel. Imagine being told you could never, ever be part of God's family just because of who you were born to be.

Picture a huge playground where one group of kids has all the best equipment, the swings, the slide, the monkey bars, and they've put up a fence with a sign that says "Keep Out. You Don't Belong Here." The other kids have to watch through the fence, wishing they could play but knowing they're not allowed. That's what it felt like.

Both groups learned to stay away from each other. Both groups learned to think mean thoughts about the other side. Both groups built the walls higher and stronger year after year. Jewish people thought, "Those Gentiles are dirty and don't love God." Gentile people thought, "Those Jewish people think they're better than everyone." The wall was so strong that nobody believed it could ever come down.

But then something happened that nobody expected. A Jewish man named Jesus came, and he started acting like the walls weren't even there. He talked to Gentiles. He ate with them. He healed their kids when they were sick. He told stories about God loving everyone, not just Jewish people.

The Jewish leaders got really mad. "What are you doing? You can't break the rules! God wants us to stay separate!" But Jesus kept tearing down walls. When a non-Jewish woman asked him to heal her daughter, he did it. When a Roman soldier asked for help, Jesus said the soldier had more faith than anyone in Israel.

People started to think, "Maybe the wall doesn't have to be there forever." But most people still believed the wall was too big and too strong to ever really come down. Then Jesus was killed on a cross, and for a few days, everyone thought the wall would just get stronger again.

But then Jesus came back to life! And his friend Paul started explaining what had really happened on that cross. It wasn't just that Jesus died for people's sins. Something else happened too, something amazing.

Ephesians 2:14 (NIV)

14 For he himself is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall of hostility.

Did you hear that word "destroyed"? Not "started working on" or "made a little crack in." Destroyed. Like a wrecking ball smashing through a brick wall. Paul said that when Jesus died, he took all the hostility, all the anger and hatred and mean feelings, and killed them. The wall didn't just get shorter. It got completely destroyed.

But here's the really amazing part. Jesus didn't just tear down the wall so the two groups could visit each other sometimes. He did something even more incredible.

Ephesians 2:15 (NIV)

15 His purpose was to create in himself one new humanity out of the two, thus making peace.

One new humanity! That means Jesus didn't just say "Jewish people, be nice to Gentiles" and "Gentiles, be nice to Jewish people." He created something totally new, one family where both groups belonged

completely. Nobody had to stop being who they were, but now they were all part of the same family.

It's like if two schools that hated each other suddenly became one big school where everyone belonged equally. You might still remember which school you came from, but now you're all on the same team. You all have the same teachers, the same principal, the same goal of learning and growing together.

Paul said that all the barriers and walls and "keep out" signs had been destroyed. All the rules that said "You can't belong because you're different", gone. All the reasons for the two groups to hate each other, killed on the cross with Jesus.

Now both groups could come to God the same way. Both groups were equally loved. Both groups were equally welcome. Both groups were equally part of the family. The playground fence was gone, and everyone could play together.

Some people were so happy they cried. Others were confused, "Wait, does this really mean the wall is gone?" And some people were upset because they liked having the wall. They liked feeling special and separate. They didn't want to share their playground.

But Jesus had done the work. The wall was destroyed. The hostility was dead. The family was now one big family with room for everyone who loved Jesus.

Sometimes people still try to build walls again. They forget that Jesus tore them down. They start making new rules about who can belong and who can't. But every time they do that, they're trying to rebuild something Jesus already destroyed.

God's heart broke every time his children built walls to keep other children out. And God's heart sings every time his children remember that the walls are gone and choose to live like one big family.

Sometimes in our lives, we see people building walls, at school, in neighborhoods, even in churches. People sometimes still think God loves some people more than others. But that's not true anymore. Jesus made sure of that. When Jesus died and came back to life, he made it so that anyone who loves him can be part of God's family.

We get to choose: do we help build walls that separate people, or do we live like the walls are gone? Do we act like some people don't belong, or do we remember that Jesus destroyed the barriers and made room for everyone?

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine you're one of the Gentile kids watching the Jewish kids play on their playground, and there's a big fence keeping you out. Day after day, you see them having fun and being told they're God's favorites, while you're told you don't belong. How do you think that would feel? What emotions would build up inside you over time?

Listen For: "Sad," "Mad," "Left out," "Jealous," "Angry." Affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. Being excluded really hurts, especially when it feels unfair."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Now imagine you're a Jewish kid who's been taught your whole life that the fence is important and that God wants your group to stay separate. Then Jesus comes along and starts tearing down the fence. Part of you might be excited, but another part might be scared. What would be scary about the fence coming down?

If They Say: "I wouldn't know them," "They might not like me," "It would be different." Respond: "Those fears make sense. Change can be scary even when it's good change."

Question 3: The Surprise

The most surprising thing Jesus did wasn't just tear down the wall, it was create "one new humanity," one new family where both groups belonged completely. Why do you think Jesus didn't just say "Be nice to each other" but instead made them into one new family?

Connect: "This is exactly what made Jesus's solution so amazing, he didn't just fix the fighting, he made everyone equally loved and equally belonging."

Question 4: The Choice

Paul said some people would try to rebuild the walls that Jesus destroyed. In your world, at school, in your neighborhood, even at church, what do modern wall-building and wall-tearing look like? What would it look like to live like the walls are really gone?

If They Say: Examples of exclusion or inclusion at school. Affirm their observations: "You're noticing exactly the kind of walls Jesus cares about tearing down."

You're seeing the pattern here. Jesus didn't just teach about unity, he destroyed the walls that separated people and made one new family where everyone belongs. Now we get to choose whether we'll live like the walls are gone or try to build them back up.

4. Activity: Wall Breakers (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces God's heart for tearing down walls by having kids physically experience the movement from separation to unity. Success looks like kids discovering that walls keep people apart unnecessarily and that breaking them down creates something better than what either side had alone.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Wall Breakers. I'm dividing you into two groups, Group A and Group B. Group A, stand over here, and Group B, stand over there. You're going to stand in two lines facing each other with your arms linked tightly, creating a human wall between the groups.

Here's the challenge: Group A has something Group B needs, let's say they're holding the key to a treasure. Group B has something Group A needs, the map to find the treasure. But there's a wall of people between you, and the wall's job is to keep you apart. The wall people should stand strong and not let anyone through.

The tricky part is that you can't go around the wall or over it, you have to figure out how to get the wall itself to help you. And here's the key: the wall people are also part of this game. They want the treasure too, but they've been told their job is to keep the groups separate.

We're doing this because it's exactly like the Jewish and Gentile situation, both groups needed each other, but the wall was keeping them apart, even though the wall was made up of people who could have been part of the solution.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

At first, watch as the groups try to push through or convince the wall to move. Let them struggle with the separation for about a minute. You'll see frustration building as they realize they can't reach their goal while the wall stays up.

As they get stuck, start coaching the wall people: "Wall people, you also want the treasure, right? I notice you need the map and the key just as much as the other groups. I wonder if there's a way for everyone to get what they need..." Don't give the answer, just point out that their interests might be more aligned than they think.

Keep coaching all groups: "What if instead of the wall keeping people apart, the wall people became part of the solution? What if instead of two separate groups, you became one group working together?" Guide them toward realizing that the wall can choose to join rather than separate.

Celebrate the moment when the wall people realize they can step aside or join one of the groups to work together! This is the physical representation of Jesus destroying the barrier and creating one new humanity.

Once they're working together as one group, point out how much more they can accomplish together than they could when the wall kept them separate. Let them experience the success of unity for a moment.

Watch For: The moment when the wall people realize they don't have to stay in separating mode, they can choose to join the cooperation. This is the physical representation of walls being destroyed and one new humanity being created.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when the wall was keeping you apart versus when you all worked together? At first, everyone was frustrated because the wall was stopping the groups from getting what they needed. But once the wall people realized they could be part of the solution instead of part of the problem, everyone could succeed together. That's exactly what Jesus did, he took the barriers that were

keeping people apart and destroyed them so everyone could be part of God's family working together.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God actively tears down walls that separate people from each other. When Jesus died on the cross, he didn't just forgive sins, he destroyed the barriers that kept people apart and created one new family where everyone who loves Jesus belongs equally.

This doesn't mean we have to be best friends with everyone or that there are no rules or boundaries. But it does mean we should never exclude people just because they're different from us or because they don't fit into our usual group. God's heart breaks when his children build walls to keep other children out.

The amazing result is that when walls come down, everyone wins. Nobody has to lose for someone else to belong. God's family is big enough for everyone, and it gets stronger when more people are included, not weaker.

This Week's Challenge

Pay attention to walls in your world, places where people are excluded or kept out just for being different. Look for one opportunity to be a wall-breaker instead of a wall-builder. Maybe sit with someone new at lunch, include someone in a game who usually gets left out, or speak up when someone is being excluded unfairly.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for tearing down the walls that kept people apart. Help us remember that your family includes everyone who loves Jesus. When we're tempted to exclude people or build walls, help us choose to include and welcome instead. Help us be wall-breakers like Jesus. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that Jesus loves all people exactly the same, and God's family includes everyone who loves Jesus.

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 the wall to a playground fence that keeps some kids out, then ask "How would Jesus want everyone to play together?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love for everyone. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "God's Love is So Wonderful," or "We Are Family in God's House." Use movements: spread arms wide during "everyone," point to different children during "all the children," make big gestures during "God's love."

Great singing! That song reminds us that God loves all his children. Now sit down in our story horseshoe, we're going to hear about the biggest family problem that ever got fixed!

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 sad when talking about separation, excited when talking about Jesus's solution, and happy when talking about the family coming together.

Today we're going to meet some people who had a really big problem!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

On this side, we have God's special family, the Jewish people. God loved them so much! He gave them special songs and prayers and stories.

[Make a sad face and walk to the other side]

But on this side, we have all the other people in the world. They felt really sad because they thought God didn't love them. They thought they could never be in God's family.

[Stand in the middle, make pushing motions with your hands]

There was like a big invisible wall between them. The wall said "You can't be together! You can't be friends! You have to stay apart!"

[Move to center, speak warmly]

But God looked down and saw his children separated by this wall, and it made him very sad. God wanted ALL his children to be in one big happy family!

[Speak with excitement, gesturing widely]

So God sent Jesus! And Jesus did something amazing!

Ephesians 2:14 (NIV)

14 Jesus is our peace, who has made the two groups one and has destroyed the barrier, the dividing wall.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Did you hear that word "destroyed"? Jesus smashed down that wall! Do you think the people were surprised? Yes!

[Make smashing motions with your arms]

Jesus didn't just make a little crack in the wall. He destroyed the whole thing! CRASH!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, speaking gently]

When Jesus died on the cross and came back to life, he made it so both groups could be in God's family. Nobody had to stay outside anymore. Everyone who loves Jesus can belong!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Now both groups could come to God! Both groups were loved the same amount! Both groups could be in the same family!

[Speak with excitement, bringing hands together]

Jesus made them into one big family! No more wall! No more "you can't belong!" Everyone who loves Jesus is welcome!

[Pause dramatically]

God loves all people exactly the same. It doesn't matter what you look like or where you come from. If you love Jesus, you're in God's family!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or on the playground, people still try to build walls. They say "You can't play with us" or "You're different, so you can't be our friend." But that makes God sad because Jesus already tore down those walls!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone tries to leave people out just because they're different, you can remember: Jesus loves everyone the same! You can choose to include people instead of leaving them out!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God's family is so big that there's room for everyone! And when we include people instead of leaving them out, it makes God's heart very happy!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the people felt when the wall came down?
 2. What does it mean that Jesus loves all people the same?
 3. Have you ever felt left out? How did it feel?
 4. What would you do if someone was being left out at recess?
 5. Why do you think Jesus wanted to tear down the wall?
 6. What are some ways people are the same even when they look different?
 7. How can you include someone who seems different from you?
 8. What makes God happy about how we treat other people?
 9. How big is God's family?
 10. What would happen if everyone remembered that Jesus loves all people?
 11. When might it be hard to include someone new?
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12. What could you say to someone who feels left out?

13. How do you know if someone wants to be included?

14. What games can everyone play together?

15. How can we be like Jesus with our friends?

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

17. Who can be in God's family?

18. What should we remember about the wall?

19. How can we help other people feel welcome?

20. What makes you feel happy about God's big family?

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 a song about unity or inclusion. Suggestions: "We Are One in the Spirit," "All God's Children," or "Jesus Wants All Children." Include movements: hold hands during unity songs, point to different children during "all," make welcoming gestures during inclusive lyrics.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer and remember what we learned about God's big family.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you that Jesus loves all people exactly the same...

[Pause]

Help us remember that your family includes everyone who loves Jesus. When someone feels left out, help us include them and make them feel welcome...

[Pause]

Thank you for tearing down the wall and making one big family. Help us choose to include people instead of leaving them out. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about including others. Examples: "Help me be kind to new kids" or "Thank you that everyone can be in God's family."

Remember, Jesus tore down the wall so everyone could be in God's family! This week, look for ways to include people and make them feel welcome. Have a wonderful week!

Choosing Peace

When Having Power Means Giving It Up, Does generosity enable poor choices?

Genesis 13:1-18

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

Genesis 13:1-18 (NIV)

1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2 Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. 3 From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD.

5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 But the land could not support them while they lived together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7 And quarreling arose between Abram's herders and Lot's herders. (The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.)

8 So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. 9 Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

10 Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) 11 So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: 12 Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. 13 Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

14 The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. 15 All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. 16 I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. 17 Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." 18 So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.

Context

Abram has just returned from Egypt with increased wealth, having survived a famine but nearly losing his wife through deception. He's back in the Promised Land with his nephew Lot, both now prosperous enough that their combined herds are straining the land's capacity. This isn't poverty driving conflict, it's the problems that come with abundance. The Canaanites and Perizzites already inhabit the land, making grazing space even more precious and making family conflict more dangerous to their survival.

Quarreling has erupted between the herders, not between Abram and Lot themselves, but between their employees. This is the kind of escalating tension that typically destroys family businesses and splits extended families permanently. As the elder and original leader of their journey, Abram holds clear authority to make decisions about land use. Yet conflict threatens both their relationship and their witness before the watching Canaanites.

The Big Idea

Those who hold superior positions can preserve relationships by sacrificing their material advantage, but this generosity becomes complicated when it enables others' harmful choices.

Abram's counter-intuitive response, giving Lot first choice instead of asserting his rightful authority, demonstrates how relationship preservation can motivate material sacrifice. However, Lot's choice toward Sodom raises troubling questions about whether generous peace-making sometimes enables poor decisions that generous peace-makers never intended to support.

Theological Core

- **Superior Position Sacrifice.** Those with legitimate authority can choose to surrender advantage for relationship preservation, reversing the natural pattern where power takes what it wants.
 - **Conflict Prevention Initiative.** Abram acts before quarreling escalates beyond repair, recognizing that early intervention through generosity costs less than later reconciliation through force.
 - **Faith-Enabled Generosity.** Abram's trust in God's promises allows him to let go of immediate advantage, knowing his future security doesn't depend on getting the best land now.
 - **Relationship-Motivated Decision Making.** "We are close relatives" becomes the driving factor in Abram's choice, demonstrating how family bonds can reshape economic decisions when we let them.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Those in superior positions can initiate peace by voluntarily surrendering material advantage for relationship preservation
 - Generous peace-making becomes morally complex when it potentially enables others' harmful decisions
 - Faith in God's promises can free us from needing to maximize immediate advantage in every situation
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- Discerning when to sacrifice for peace versus when to maintain boundaries requires wisdom about consequences
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Grades 4, 6

- When you have power or advantage, you can choose to give others first choice to prevent fighting
 - Sometimes preventing fights matters more than getting the best stuff for yourself
 - Family relationships can be more important than winning, even when you deserve to win
 - You can feel frustrated about giving up what you deserve and still choose to do it anyway
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to choose sharing over fighting, even when we could get the best stuff
 - God helps people be generous when they love their families
 - We can let others go first to stop fighting
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Presenting generosity as always good without nuance.** Abram's generosity enables Lot's move toward Sodom, raising questions about when sacrificial peace-making crosses into harmful enabling. Help students wrestle with the complexity rather than offering simple formulas.
 - **Ignoring the faith foundation for sacrifice.** Abram can afford to be generous because he trusts God's promises about his future. Without that foundation, his choice appears either foolish or manipulative. Connect sacrifice to trust in God's provision.
 - **Making this only about individual virtue.** This is about power dynamics and resource distribution, not just personal character. Help students see how social position affects moral choices and responsibilities.
 - **Assuming peace-making always works.** Sometimes generous initiatives fail to prevent conflict or enable worse outcomes. Acknowledge that choosing sacrifice doesn't guarantee positive results,
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but can still be faithful obedience to God's call.

Handling Hard Questions

"Did Abram mess up by letting Lot choose Sodom?"

This is the heart of the passage's tension. Abram acted generously to preserve their relationship and prevent escalating conflict, but Lot's choice led him toward Sodom's wickedness. The text doesn't condemn Abram's generosity, but it also doesn't pretend the outcome was ideal. Sometimes faithful choices lead to unintended consequences. Abram couldn't control Lot's decision, only his own response to their conflict. We're called to act faithfully even when others might use our generosity poorly.

"Why should people with power give up their advantages?"

The text suggests that power creates responsibility, not just opportunity. Abram could have claimed the best land and been legally justified, but his superior position also gave him the capacity to create peace through sacrifice. Those with advantages often have more ability to absorb loss without devastation. The goal isn't self-punishment but using privilege to create flourishing for others when possible. Relationship preservation sometimes justifies economic sacrifice.

"How do you know when to sacrifice and when to stand firm?"

The passage doesn't give us a formula, but it shows factors to consider: the importance of the relationship ("we are close relatives"), the availability of alternatives ("Is not the whole land before you?"), and trust in God's provision for the future. Sometimes firm boundaries are more loving than endless accommodation. Wisdom involves discerning when sacrifice serves genuine peace versus when it enables harmful patterns.

The One Thing to Remember

Those with power can choose to preserve relationships through sacrifice, even knowing that generosity might enable others' poor choices.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the moral complexity of generous peace-making, when does sacrificing advantage serve genuine peace versus enabling harmful choices? Help them discover how faith in God's promises can free us from needing to maximize advantage in every situation.

The Tension to Frame

Does generous peace-making sometimes enable the very problems we're trying to solve? How do we discern when to sacrifice for relationship versus when to maintain boundaries?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of both generous and boundary-setting responses to conflict
- Honor the complexity, there's no simple formula for when to sacrifice versus when to hold firm
- Let them wrestle with the Lot question rather than rushing to defend Abram's choice

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You're the team captain, and two of your friends want the same position. They start arguing during practice, making sarcastic comments, undermining each other's plays. The coach is getting annoyed and everyone else is uncomfortable. You know you could settle it by just picking one person, you have that authority. But you also know that whoever doesn't get picked will probably be hurt and resentful.

Part of you thinks, "I should just decide and they'll have to deal with it." Another part worries that making the call will damage your friendship with whoever loses. The easy solution feels like using your power to make everyone else absorb the consequences of your choice. But avoiding the decision isn't making things better either.

Today we're looking at Abram, who faced something similar except the stakes were much higher, family livelihood, land rights, and survival in hostile territory. His response challenges everything we assume about how people with power should use it. Instead of claiming his rights, he gives them away.

As we read, pay attention to two things: first, what motivates Abram's unexpected choice, and second, whether his generosity actually solves the problem or creates new ones. The ending might surprise you in uncomfortable ways.

Turn to Genesis 13 and start reading silently from verse 1. We're looking at the whole chapter to see how this story unfolds.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage has economic and political complexity that might confuse them. Help with geography questions, but let them wrestle with the moral tensions. Watch for students who finish early and guide them to reread verses 8-13.

As You Read, Think About:

- What caused the conflict between Abram and Lot's people?
- Why does Abram choose to give Lot first choice instead of claiming his rights as the elder?
- What's surprising or troubling about how this story ends?
- How would you feel if you were in Abram's position when Lot makes his choice?

Genesis 13:1-18 (NIV)

1 So Abram went up from Egypt to the Negev, with his wife and everything he had, and Lot went with him. 2 Abram had become very wealthy in livestock and in silver and gold. 3 From the Negev he went from place to place until he came to Bethel, to the place between Bethel and Ai where his tent had been earlier 4 and where he had first built an altar. There Abram called on the name of the LORD. 5 Now Lot, who was moving about with Abram, also had flocks and herds and tents. 6 But the land could not support them while they lived together, for their possessions were so great that they were not able to stay together. 7 And quarreling arose between Abram's

herders and Lot's herders. (The Canaanites and Perizzites were also living in the land at that time.) **8** So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. **9** Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left." **10** Lot looked around and saw that the whole plain of the Jordan toward Zoar was well watered, like the garden of the LORD, like the land of Egypt. (This was before the LORD destroyed Sodom and Gomorrah.) **11** So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: **12** Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. **13** Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD. **14** The LORD said to Abram after Lot had parted from him, "Look around from where you are, to the north and south, to the east and west. **15** All the land that you see I will give to you and your offspring forever. **16** I will make your offspring like the dust of the earth, so that if anyone could count the dust, then your offspring could be counted. **17** Go, walk through the length and breadth of the land, for I am giving it to you." **18** So Abram went to live near the great trees of Mamre at Hebron, where he built an altar to the LORD.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can handle the narrative flow. Let students pass if they're not confident. Choose someone who can bring energy to Abram's speech in verses 8-9.

Reader 1: Verses 1-7 (Setting up the prosperity problem) **Reader 2:** Verses 8-13 (Abram's offer and Lot's choice) **Reader 3:** Verses 14-18 (God's response to Abram)

Listen for the emotional undertones here, this isn't just business negotiation, it's family drama with economic consequences that could affect their survival.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

or Lot's response?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not "What does this mean?" but questions you're actually curious about. Like "Why did Abram do that?" or "What would have happened if...?" Focus on asking what you're genuinely 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 lecturing. Write their questions on the board and look for patterns.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board, look for themes about power, generosity, consequences, and relationships. Start with questions most students will connect to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence shows that Abram had the authority to make this decision differently?"
- "What do you think motivated Abram to give Lot first choice instead of claiming the best land?"
- "Was Abram's generosity morally good even though it led Lot toward Sodom?"
- "How do you think Abram felt when he saw where Lot chose to go?"
- "When is it wise to sacrifice for peace versus when should you maintain your position?"
- "Where do you see this same tension in families, schools, or friend groups today?"
- "What might have happened if Abram had just claimed the best land for himself?"
- "Why does God reaffirm his promises to Abram after Lot leaves, what's the significance of that timing?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Abram reverses the expected pattern, instead of power taking what it wants, power sacrifices for relationship preservation. He says "we are close relatives" as his reason for giving up advantage. But then Lot's choice complicates everything. Abram's generosity

enables a decision that leads Lot toward wickedness. Sometimes faithful peace-making doesn't guarantee the outcomes we hoped for.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about times when you have some kind of advantage or authority, in your family, at school, in friend groups, online spaces, even in part-time jobs. When do you face choices between claiming what you deserve and sacrificing for relationship peace?

Real Issues This Connects To

- When you're the stronger student in a group project but letting others lead might mean worse grades
 - Family inheritance or resource decisions where being generous might enable a sibling's poor choices
 - Friend group conflicts where you could use your social influence to "win" but choose not to
 - Social media situations where you could expose someone's hypocrisy but choose privacy instead
 - Economic justice scenarios where those with more resources face decisions about redistribution
 - Relationship conflicts where you have more power to hurt the other person but choose vulnerability instead
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations legitimately call for different responses. Help them think through discernment criteria rather than giving blanket advice about always sacrificing or always maintaining boundaries.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone with power choose generosity over self-interest in a way that actually helped?"
 - "What would help you discern when to sacrifice advantage versus when to maintain your position?"
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- "How do you decide whether someone is taking advantage of your generosity or genuinely needs your sacrifice?"
- "What's the difference between peace-making and people-pleasing in these kinds of situations?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Those with power can choose to preserve relationships through sacrifice, even knowing that generosity might enable others' poor choices. Abram's faith in God's promises freed him from needing to maximize advantage in every situation. He could afford to be generous because his security didn't depend on getting the best land, it depended on God's faithfulness.

This week, pay attention to moments when you have some kind of advantage or power in a situation. Notice the choice points between claiming what you deserve and sacrificing for peace. Experiment with asking "What would preserve the relationship here?" alongside "What would get me the best outcome?" Sometimes those answers align, sometimes they don't.

You asked incredibly thoughtful questions today about some of life's most complex moral terrain. Keep wrestling with these tensions, that's exactly what wisdom looks like. There's no simple formula, but there is a God who provides for those who choose faithfulness over self-protection.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that people with power or advantage can choose to give others first choice to prevent fighting, even when it feels unfair to them.

If Kids Ask "But what if the other person makes bad choices with what you give them?"

Say: "That's exactly what happened with Abram and Lot. Sometimes being generous doesn't fix everything, but we can only control our own choices, not other people's choices."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been the oldest kid in a situation where younger kids wanted the same thing you wanted, maybe the front seat in the car, the last piece of pizza, or the best spot to sit. Keep your hands up if the adults expected you to give in because you were older and "should know better."

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever been in charge of something, maybe planning a game, choosing teams, or deciding what to watch, and you realized you could use that power to get exactly what you want, but it would probably make someone else upset or left out.

Part of you probably thought "This is my chance to get what I want for once," but another part might have worried about hurt feelings or making things unfair. Sometimes having power feels good until you realize that using it might damage friendships or hurt people you care about.

This is like when Anna in Frozen could have used her royal power to get her way, but instead chose what would help her relationship with Elsa. Or when characters in your favorite shows have to choose between winning and keeping their friendships.

The tricky part is figuring out when you should use your advantage and when you should give it up for peace. It's especially hard when you feel like you deserve to get your way this time.

Today we're going to hear about Abram, who had every right to claim the best land for himself, but made a surprising choice instead. His decision teaches us something important about what to do when we have power. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to sibling dynamics and fairness concerns. Acknowledge their frustrations briefly ("That does feel unfair sometimes") but keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Our story starts with Abram and his nephew Lot coming back from a trip to Egypt. Both of them had become very wealthy, we're talking huge herds of sheep, goats, cattle, and lots of silver and gold.

Abram was the older relative, the one who had originally left home and brought Lot with him. According to the customs of their time, Abram was clearly the leader. Think of it like Abram was the boss of a family business and Lot was his junior partner.

But success created a problem. Their animals needed so much grass and water that the land couldn't support both family groups living together. It was like trying to fit two huge families in a house that was only big enough for one.

Imagine how crowded and competitive things got. Picture hundreds of animals all trying to drink from the same water source, all trying to eat grass from the same fields. The herders, the employees who took care of the animals, started getting frustrated with each other.

"Your sheep are drinking all our water!" one group would complain. "Your goats are eating all the good grass!" another group would shout back. Pretty soon, the arguing escalated into daily conflicts.

This wasn't just about convenience. In that time and place, water and grazing land were matters of survival. Without them, the animals would die, and without the animals, the families would starve. Plus, there were other people groups living in the area who might take advantage of any family fighting.

Abram could see the problem getting worse every day. The quarreling between their workers was creating tension between him and Lot, and it was making their whole family look bad to their neighbors.

Now here's where the story gets interesting. Abram had every right to just make a decision. He was older, he was the original leader, and according to their culture, Lot should respect whatever choice Abram made about how to divide up the land.

Genesis 13:8-9 (NIV)

So Abram said to Lot, "Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left."

Did you catch what just happened? Instead of using his authority to claim the best land, Abram gave Lot first choice! This was completely backwards from how these situations usually worked. The person with more power was supposed to take the better deal.

Abram said "we are close relatives" as his reason for being so generous. Family relationship mattered more to him than getting the absolute best land for himself.

But here's where the story takes an uncomfortable turn. Lot looked around and saw the Jordan River valley, it was green, well-watered, beautiful. It looked like paradise compared to the rocky hill country.

Genesis 13:11-13 (NIV)

So Lot chose for himself the whole plain of the Jordan and set out toward the east. The two men parted company: Abram lived in the land of Canaan, while Lot lived among the cities of the plain and pitched his tents near Sodom. Now the people of Sodom were wicked and were sinning greatly against the LORD.

Lot took the best land and moved toward Sodom, a city known for wickedness and cruelty. Abram's generous offer enabled Lot to make a choice that would eventually lead him into danger and moral compromise.

How do you think Abram felt when he realized where Lot was heading? He had tried to preserve their relationship through sacrifice, but Lot's choice led him toward people who opposed everything Abram believed about God and goodness.

But then something amazing happened. After Lot left, God spoke to Abram and renewed all his promises about the land and the future. God assured Abram that his generosity hadn't cost him anything that really mattered, God would still provide everything Abram needed.

Abram's willingness to give up immediate advantage showed his trust in God's long-term provision. He could afford to let Lot have first choice because his security didn't depend on getting the best land right now, it depended on God's faithfulness.

Sometimes in our lives we face similar choices. We can use our advantage to get what we want, or we can give others first choice to preserve peace and show love. Like Abram, we might discover that choosing relationships over immediate gain is actually the path to God's blessing.

What we learn from Abram is that those with power can choose peace over personal advantage. Family and friendship matter more than getting the best stuff. And when we trust God to provide for us, we can afford to be generous even when it costs us something we wanted.

The core truth is this: God honors those who choose love over selfishness, even when the other person doesn't make the best choices with our generosity.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Unfair Feelings

Imagine you're in Abram's position. You're the leader, you've been taking care of your younger relative, and now there's conflict over resources. You could just decide what's best and everyone would have to accept it. But instead, you choose to let the other person pick first. How would that feel in your gut, even if you knew it was the right thing to do?

Listen For: "Unfair," "frustrated," "angry", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Your brain is telling you that you earned the right to choose."

Question 2: The Relationship Priority

Abram said "we are close relatives" as his reason for giving Lot first choice. Think about your own family and close friends. Can you imagine a situation where preserving that relationship would matter more to you than getting your way, even when you had the power to claim what you wanted?

If They Say: "I can't think of any", respond: "What about if your choice would hurt someone you really love? Sometimes love changes what we're willing to give up."

Question 3: The Disappointing Outcome

When Lot chose the land near Sodom, Abram's generosity didn't lead to the happy ending he probably hoped for. Lot moved toward a wicked city instead of being grateful and making wise choices. How do you think Abram felt when he realized his sacrifice had enabled Lot's poor decision?

Connect: "This is exactly what makes generous choices so hard and so brave, you can't control what other people do with your kindness."

Question 4: The Trust Factor

God promised Abram that he would still get everything he needed, even after letting Lot take the best land. If you really believed that God would provide for you no matter what, how might that change your willingness to let others have first choice in conflicts?

If They Say: "I'd still want the best stuff", respond: "That's honest! Trust is hard even when we know God loves us. What would help you trust more?"

What's amazing about this story is that Abram chose love over advantage even though he couldn't guarantee the outcome. That's what real generosity looks like, giving without controlling what happens next.

4. Activity: The Switching Game (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of choosing cooperation over individual advantage by having kids physically experience how giving others first choice can create better outcomes for everyone. Success looks like kids discovering that voluntary sacrifice can prevent conflict and build trust even when it feels unfair initially.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play The Switching Game. Everyone find a partner and stand on opposite sides of the room. I'm going to call out something desirable, like "The person closest to the window gets to be the line leader for the next activity."

Here's the challenge: Both partners want that advantage, but only one can have it. However, there's a twist, if both partners can agree on who gets the advantage without any arguing, fighting, or negotiating that lasts longer than 10 seconds, then BOTH partners get a bonus privilege.

But if you argue past 10 seconds, then neither person gets anything, even if you eventually decide. We're doing this because it's exactly like Abram's situation, he could have claimed his rights and caused ongoing conflict, or he could sacrifice immediate advantage for long-term relationship benefit.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First round: "The person wearing more blue gets to choose our closing song." Watch them navigate the initial tension, some will immediately compete, others will immediately defer. Most will struggle with

the time pressure.

As they encounter the challenge, notice who argues past 10 seconds and loses everything versus who finds quick ways to decide. "I'm noticing that some pairs are discovering that neither person getting the privilege feels worse than one person sacrificing for both to benefit."

Second round: "The person whose name comes first alphabetically gets to sit in the front row." Coach with phrases like: "Remember, you have 10 seconds to decide without conflict. I wonder if there's a generous choice that could benefit you both..."

Celebrate the breakthrough when pairs start automatically offering the advantage to their partner because they've learned it results in both people winning. "Did you see that? They chose cooperation over competition!"

Final round: "The person who can hop on one foot longest gets to choose where we sit for story time next week." By now, most pairs should be quickly sacrificing for mutual benefit rather than competing.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to give their partner the advantage because they've learned it benefits both people, this is the physical representation of Abram's wisdom.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you fought for your rights versus when you chose to let your partner have first choice? Most of you discovered that giving up immediate advantage actually led to better outcomes for both people. That's exactly what Abram understood, sometimes sacrifice creates more blessing than competition does.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: People with power or advantage can choose to give others first choice to prevent fighting, even when it costs them something they wanted. Family relationships and friendships can be more important than getting the best stuff for yourself.

This doesn't mean you should let people walk all over you or that you have to give up everything you want. Abram still trusted God to provide for him. But it does mean that sometimes preserving peace and showing love matters more than winning.

The amazing result is that when we trust God and choose generosity over selfishness, God often blesses us in ways we never expected. Abram ended up with God's renewed promises and peace in his heart.

This Week's Challenge

This week, look for one moment when you have some kind of advantage or power in a situation, maybe with siblings, friends, or classmates. Instead of automatically using that advantage to get what you want, try asking "What would be most loving here?" and see what happens.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us through Abram's story that love is more important than getting our way. Help us choose generosity over selfishness, even when it's hard. When we have power or advantages, remind us to use them to help others and build peace. Help us trust you to provide everything we really need. 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 choose sharing over fighting, even when we could get the best stuff.

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 Abram's choice to letting your little brother pick the game to play, then ask "How do you think that would make your brother feel?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about sharing or being kind. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God's Love Is So Wonderful." Use movements: stretch arms wide during "love," point to friends during "one another," and give themselves hugs during words about God's care.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape so I can tell you an amazing story about someone who chose to share when he could have kept the best for himself.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when you talk about the fighting, sound generous when you're Abram, sound confident when you're God.

Today we're going to meet a man named Abram who had to make a very hard choice about sharing!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Abram lived a long, long time ago with his family. He had lots of sheep and goats and cows. His nephew Lot lived with him and also had lots of animals.

[Use worried voice and furrowed brow]

But there was a big problem! The animals needed grass to eat and water to drink, but there wasn't enough for all of them in the same place.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look upset]

The people who took care of the animals started fighting with each other. "Your animals are eating our grass!" they said. "Your animals are drinking our water!" Arguments every single day!

[Move to center, speak with authority but kindness]

Abram was older and the leader, so he could have said "I get to pick the best land and you get what's left over, Lot." That's what most people would do.

[Move to side, sound like Abram speaking kindly]

But instead, Abram said something surprising! He said "Lot, let's stop all this fighting. We're family! You can pick first which land you want, and I'll take whatever is left."

Genesis 13:8-9 (NIV)

Let's not have any quarreling between you and me, or between your herders and mine, for we are close relatives. Is not the whole land before you? Let's part company. If you go to the left, I'll go to the right; if you go to the right, I'll go to the left.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think Abram felt happy about letting Lot pick first? Maybe part of him wanted the best land! But he chose to be loving instead of selfish.

[Move to center, speak matter-of-factly]

So Lot looked around and picked the most beautiful, green land with lots of water. He took the best stuff and left Abram with the rocky hills.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

But you know what? God saw what Abram did! God saw that Abram chose love over getting his way. And God was so happy with Abram's kind heart!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

God told Abram, "I'm going to bless you and give you more land than you ever imagined. I'm going to take care of you because you were generous and loving."

[Speak with excitement]

And do you know what happened? God kept his promise! Abram ended up with wonderful land and God's special blessings because he chose sharing over fighting.

[Pause dramatically]

God loves it when we choose to be kind instead of selfish. God helps people like Abram who put love first.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives we get to choose between getting the best for ourselves or letting someone else go first. Maybe at home with toys, or at school with games, or even with treats.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is fighting with you over something, you can choose to let them have it first, just like Abram did. That stops the fighting and shows God's love.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God will help you be generous like Abram. And just like God took care of Abram, God will take care of you when you choose love over getting your way!

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'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think Abram felt when he let Lot pick first?

2. When is it hard for you to let someone else go first?

3. Why do you think Abram chose to be nice instead of grabbing the best land?

4. What would you do if someone wanted the same toy you wanted?

5. How did God feel about Abram's choice to share?

6. When someone is mean to you, is it easy or hard to be nice back?

7. What happened to Abram because he was generous?

8. When have you let someone else have something you wanted?

9. How do you think Lot felt when Abram let him choose first?

10. What would happen if everyone always tried to get the best stuff for themselves?

11. Why does God like it when we share?

12. When is it easy to be generous with your stuff?

13. What does God give us when we choose love over fighting?

14. Do you trust God to take care of you like he took care of Abram?

15. What would you tell a friend who didn't want to share?

16. How can you be like Abram this week?

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

18. How would you pray about sharing with others?

19. What would happen if Abram had been selfish instead?

20. How can families stop fighting and choose love instead?

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

Select a song about God's provision or generosity. Suggestions: "God Will Take Care of You," "Give Me Oil in My Lamp," or "God Is So Good." Use movements: point up to heaven during "God," hug themselves during "care," and stretch arms wide during "good."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer and remember what God taught us about choosing love over fighting.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for Abram's story and how he chose sharing over fighting...

[Pause]

Help us be like Abram when we want to keep the best things for ourselves. Give us generous hearts that want to share with others, especially our families and friends...

[Pause]

Help us remember that when we choose love instead of selfishness, you are happy with us and you will take care of us just like you took care of Abram...

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and teaching us how to love others. Help us choose peace over fighting 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 sharing or being generous. Examples: "Help me share my toys," "Thank you for taking care of us," or "Help me be nice when I'm mad."

Remember this week: God helps us choose sharing over fighting, just like he helped Abram! Have a wonderful week showing God's love to others.

Spur One Another

Intentional Encouragement, How can encouragement become manipulation?

Hebrews 10:19-25

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

Hebrews 10:19-25 (NIV)

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Context

The book of Hebrews was written to Jewish Christians facing persecution and the temptation to abandon their faith. They were considering returning to Judaism to avoid social rejection and physical danger. The author has spent nine chapters arguing that Jesus is superior to every aspect of the old covenant, angels, Moses, the priesthood, and the sacrificial system. Chapter 10 climaxes this argument by showing that Christ's sacrifice has opened direct access to God's presence.

This passage serves as the practical hinge between theological argument and ethical application. Having established what Christ has done, the author now calls readers to live in light of this reality. The immediate context shows believers wavering in their commitment, with some already abandoning regular fellowship. The author recognizes that doctrinal arguments alone won't solve this crisis, the community needs to actively encourage one another toward love and good deeds.

The Big Idea

Because Christ has opened the way to God, believers must actively and thoughtfully encourage one another toward love and good deeds, especially in times of spiritual discouragement.

This "spurring" requires intentional consideration, thinking carefully about how to motivate others. It's not generic encouragement but targeted help toward specific goals: love and good deeds. The Greek word for "spur" suggests the sharp prod used to motivate animals, indicating that sometimes gentle nudging isn't enough. Yet this must be done with wisdom to avoid manipulation or pressure that drives people away.

Theological Core

- **Mutual Accountability.** The Christian life is inherently communal, requiring believers to take active responsibility for one another's spiritual health and growth.
 - **Intentional Encouragement.** Effective motivation requires thoughtful consideration of individual needs and circumstances, not one-size-fits-all approaches.
 - **Love and Good Deeds as Antidotes.** When faith wavers, practical expressions of love and service often provide more stability than intellectual arguments alone.
 - **Strategic Community.** Regular fellowship isn't just for personal benefit but creates the relational foundation necessary for meaningful encouragement and accountability.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Believers have responsibility to actively encourage others toward love and good deeds through intentional consideration
 - Healthy spurring requires wisdom to distinguish between motivation and manipulation
 - Love and good deeds provide better stability in faith crises than arguments or pressure
 - Community fellowship creates the relational foundation necessary for meaningful encouragement
-

Grades 4, 6

- We should think carefully about how to help our friends make good choices
 - Encouraging others means helping them love people and do good things
 - Sometimes helping friends requires more than just being nice, it takes courage and creativity
 - Even when we feel discouraged, we can still help others do the right thing
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to help our friends be kind and do good things
 - We can think of ways to help our friends make good choices
 - Being together with other people who love God helps us all be better
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Turning spurring into nagging.** The goal is motivation toward love and good deeds, not compliance with personal preferences. Avoid teaching this as license to criticize or control others' behavior.
 - **Ignoring the persecution context.** These believers faced real external pressure to abandon their faith. Don't reduce this to generic encouragement when the stakes involve spiritual survival.
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- **Making it one-directional.** The text emphasizes mutual spurring, everyone both gives and receives encouragement. Avoid creating hierarchy where some people do the spurring and others just receive it.
 - **Minimizing the need for intentionality.** The word "consider" indicates deliberate thought about how to encourage each person. This isn't casual or random but requires wisdom and planning.
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Handling Hard Questions

"How do you know when encouragement becomes manipulation?"

Healthy spurring focuses on helping people grow in love and good deeds, which benefits them and others. Manipulation seeks to control people for your benefit or comfort. Ask yourself: Am I trying to help this person flourish in their relationship with God, or am I trying to get them to do what makes me comfortable? Healthy encouragement also respects the person's freedom to choose, even when you disagree with their decision.

"What if someone doesn't want to be encouraged or spurred?"

The passage assumes a community of believers who have committed to mutual accountability. If someone consistently resists encouragement, it may indicate deeper issues requiring pastoral care rather than peer intervention. Sometimes the most loving thing is to back off and pray, while maintaining relationship. Remember that spurring should draw people toward love and good deeds, not drive them away from community.

"Isn't this just telling people what to do?"

True spurring helps people discover what love and good deeds look like in their unique situation, rather than imposing external rules. It's more like asking good questions, sharing observations, or creating opportunities than giving commands. The goal is to help people grow in wisdom and motivation, not just compliance. Sometimes this requires challenging someone, but always with their spiritual growth as the primary concern.

The One Thing to Remember

We have both the privilege and responsibility to thoughtfully help one another grow in love and good deeds, especially when faith feels difficult.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between healthy encouragement and unhealthy pressure. Help them discover what it means to actively consider how to motivate others toward love and good deeds without becoming controlling or manipulative.

The Tension to Frame

How can we tell the difference between helpful spurring that draws people toward love and good deeds versus pressure that drives them away from faith and community?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of both helpful and harmful "encouragement" from others
 - Help them see that the passage requires wisdom and intentionality, not just good intentions
 - Let them work through the complexity rather than giving them simple formulas
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about the last time someone tried to motivate you to do something, maybe a parent pushing you to study, a coach encouraging you to practice harder, or a friend trying to get you to make a different choice. Some of that motivation probably felt helpful and supportive. But other times, it might have felt like pressure or manipulation, making you want to resist even more.

This gets complicated because most people who pressure us think they're helping. Your parents really do want you to succeed. Your coach really does want you to improve. Your friends really do care about you. But good intentions don't automatically make someone's approach helpful. Sometimes the way

people try to motivate us actually makes things worse.

Today we're looking at someone writing to a group of people who were facing serious pressure to abandon their faith. Instead of just giving them more arguments or making them feel guilty, the author suggests something different: they should actively encourage each other toward love and good deeds. But that raises a crucial question about motivation.

As we read, pay attention to what makes this kind of encouragement different from pressure or manipulation. Notice the specific goals the author mentions and the kind of community this requires. Also watch for clues about why this approach might work better than other forms of motivation.

Open your Bibles to Hebrews 10, verses 19 through 25. We'll read this silently first, then talk about what you notice.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Some students may need help with vocabulary like "unswervingly" or understanding the temple imagery. Let them feel the weight of this community facing real persecution and temptation to give up.

As You Read, Think About:

- What situation are these people facing, and why might they need encouragement?
 - What specific things does the author tell them to do for each other?
 - What seems different about this kind of motivation compared to pressure or guilt?
 - How would you feel if you were part of this community right now?
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Hebrews 10:19-25 (NIV)

19 Therefore, brothers and sisters, since we have confidence to enter the Most Holy Place by the blood of Jesus, 20 by a new and living way opened for us through the curtain, that is, his body, 21 and since we have a great priest over the house of God, 22 let us draw near to God with a sincere heart and with the full assurance that faith brings, having our hearts sprinkled to cleanse us from a guilty conscience and having our bodies washed with pure water. 23 Let us hold

unswervingly to the hope we profess, for he who promised is faithful. 24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who feel confident reading aloud. Let students pass if they prefer not to read. Choose readers who can handle the more complex theological language with confidence.

Reader 1: Verses 19-21 (the theological foundation) **Reader 2:** Verses 22-23 (the personal application)

Reader 3: Verses 24-25 (the community responsibility)

Listen for the shift from what God has done to what we should do. This isn't just information, it's a call to action for people facing real spiritual pressure.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

Get into groups of three or four. You have three minutes to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How do you..." or "What's the difference between..." Don't worry about whether your questions are "smart", ask what you're honestly wondering about. Time starts now.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions while 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 community, encouragement, pressure, and motivation. Start with questions most students will relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that these people were struggling with their faith?"
 - "Why do you think the author focuses on 'love and good deeds' instead of just telling them to believe harder?"
 - "What's the difference between 'spurring' someone and pressuring them?"
 - "How do you 'consider' how to encourage someone, what would that actually look like?"
 - "Why might some people have been 'giving up meeting together,' and how does that connect to encouragement?"
 - "Can you think of times when love and good deeds helped someone's faith more than arguments would have?"
 - "What would it look like if someone tried to spur you in an unhealthy way versus a helpful way?"
 - "Why does this kind of community matter when people are facing pressure to abandon their beliefs?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Instead of just lecturing these discouraged believers or making them feel guilty for wavering, the author gives them something to do for each other. He's saying, "The way through this discouragement is to actively help one another live out love and good deeds." It's almost like the act of encouraging others strengthens your own faith while helping theirs too.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about your relationships, family, friends, teams, school, social media. When have you experienced helpful spurring that drew you toward good things, and when have you felt pressure that made you want to resist or pull away?

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a friend is making choices that hurt themselves or others, how do you help without being preachy?
 - Family dynamics where parents' attempts to motivate feel more like control than support
 - Friend groups where peer pressure masquerades as encouragement
 - Social media culture where "calling people out" is sometimes helpful accountability and sometimes just bullying
 - School environments where competition can either motivate people to excellence or create toxic pressure
 - Church or youth group situations where encouragement toward spiritual growth becomes judgmental pressure to conform
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Help them see that different situations call for different approaches. Focus on helping them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone successfully encourage another person toward love or good deeds? What made it work?"
 - "What would help you know how to encourage a specific person in your life right now?"
 - "How can you tell whether your motivation to help someone is actually about them or about your own comfort?"
 - "What's the difference between wise spurring and enabling someone to avoid consequences?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you from this discussion: You have both the privilege and responsibility to thoughtfully encourage others toward love and good deeds. This isn't about fixing people or controlling their choices, it's about creating the kind of community where everyone can flourish in their relationship with God. That requires wisdom, intentionality, and genuine care for the

other person's growth.

This week, pay attention to how people try to motivate you and how you try to motivate others. Notice what draws people toward love and good deeds versus what creates resistance or resentment. Pick one person in your life and spend some time actually considering, thinking carefully about, how you might encourage them in a way that helps them flourish.

I'm proud of how thoughtfully you wrestled with these questions today. Keep asking hard questions about what healthy community looks like. The world needs people who can encourage others without manipulating them, and you're learning how to be those people.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that we can think carefully about how to help our friends make good choices and show love to others, even when they're feeling discouraged or tempted to give up.

If Kids Ask "What if my friend doesn't want help?"

Say: "Sometimes the best way to help is to be a good friend and show them love through your actions. You can't force someone to make good choices, but you can make it easier for them by being encouraging."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had a friend who was feeling really discouraged or sad, and you wanted to help them feel better but didn't know what to say or do. Keep your hands up, I see most of you have experienced this. It's hard to know how to help sometimes, isn't it?

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever had a friend who was making choices that weren't good for them, maybe being mean to someone, or doing something that could get them in trouble, or just giving up on something important. Part of you wanted to help them make better choices,

but another part of you worried about sounding bossy or like you were judging them.

Those feelings make complete sense. When we care about someone, we want to help them, but we also don't want to hurt our friendship or make them feel bad. Sometimes when people try to help us, it feels good and encouraging. But other times, it can feel like they're trying to control us or make us feel guilty.

This reminds me of stories like Finding Nemo, where Marlin wants to protect Nemo but sometimes his help feels more like control, or in Toy Story when Woody tries to help other toys but has to learn the difference between leading and being bossy. The tricky part is figuring out how to care about someone without making them feel pressured.

The tricky part is figuring out how to help our friends make good choices and feel encouraged without being pushy or making them feel bad about themselves. It takes wisdom to know when to speak up, when to just be there, and how to do it in a way that actually helps.

Today we're going to hear about a group of people who were facing really hard times and feeling discouraged about following God. Some of them were even thinking about giving up completely. But instead of lecturing them or making them feel guilty, someone gave them a different idea about how to help each other. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids may share specific examples of friends in trouble. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" or "You care about good friendship." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

A long time ago, there was a group of people who had decided to follow Jesus, but they were facing some really hard times. Other people were making fun of them for believing in Jesus. Some were losing their jobs or getting kicked out of places because of their faith.

Imagine how discouraging that would be. You try to do the right thing and follow God, but everything seems to get harder instead of easier. Some of these believers were starting to think, "Maybe I should just give up and go back to my old life. This is too difficult."

Some of them had even stopped meeting together with other believers. They thought, "What's the point? This isn't working out like I hoped." Have you ever felt like giving up on something that was hard, even though you knew it was important?

There was a wise teacher who cared deeply about these discouraged believers. Instead of scolding them for feeling weak or giving them a long lecture about why they should try harder, he wrote them a letter with a different kind of advice.

First, he reminded them about something amazing. He said, "Because of what Jesus did for us, we can come directly to God anytime we want. We don't have to be afraid or feel like God doesn't want to see us. Jesus made a way for us to be close to God."

Then he said something that might surprise you. Instead of telling them to just try harder or believe more, he gave them a job to do for each other. He said we should think carefully about how to help each other love people and do good things.

The word he used was interesting, he said we should "spur" each other on. Do you know what a spur is? It's a little pointed tool that cowboys use to gently encourage their horses to keep going when the horse is tired or wants to stop. It's not mean or harsh, but it gives the horse the little push it needs to keep moving forward.

But here's the important part: he didn't say we should spur people toward anything we want. He specifically said we should encourage each other toward love and good deeds. Not toward doing what makes us happy, or toward being the way we want them to be, but toward loving others and doing good things.

Hebrews 10:24-25 (NIV)

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. 25 Not giving up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but encouraging one another, and all the more as you see the Day approaching.

Notice that word "consider", that means to think carefully about it. This teacher was saying, "Don't just randomly try to help people. Think about what that person specifically needs. Think about what would actually encourage them toward love and good deeds."

He also said something really important about not giving up on meeting together. When people are discouraged, sometimes they want to hide or stay away from others. But he said, "Keep spending time together. Keep encouraging each other."

This was brilliant advice, because when people are feeling weak or discouraged about their faith, sometimes what helps isn't more rules or more pressure to believe harder. What helps is seeing love in action and having opportunities to do good things for others.

Think about it: if you're feeling sad or discouraged, what makes you feel better, someone lecturing you about being more positive, or someone showing you kindness and giving you a chance to help someone else? Usually, it's the second one.

When these believers started focusing on how to help each other love people and do good things, something wonderful happened. Instead of just thinking about their own problems and discouragement, they started thinking about how to care for each other. And when you're caring for others, it's hard to stay focused on your own worries.

The people who were thinking about giving up found new strength when they had a purpose, helping their friends stay strong. And the people who were already doing well got even stronger because they were looking out for others.

It became like a positive cycle: when someone helped another person show love or do good deeds, it strengthened both of them. The helper felt good about making a difference, and the person being helped felt supported and encouraged.

The community became stronger because everyone was both giving and receiving encouragement. No one person had to carry all the weight of being strong all the time. When one person was struggling, others could help lift them up. When someone else was struggling, the first person could help them.

Sometimes in our lives, we face situations that make us want to give up on doing the right thing or being kind to others. Maybe kids at school are being mean, or family situations are hard, or we feel like nobody notices when we try to do good things.

What we learn from this story is that God wants us to help each other keep loving people and doing good things, especially when it feels hard. We can think carefully about what would encourage our friends and family members, and we can be the kind of people who help others stay strong.

The amazing thing is that when we focus on helping others love people and do good deeds, we usually end up feeling stronger and more hopeful ourselves. It's like God designed us to grow stronger when we're helping others grow stronger too.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Discouragement

Imagine you have a friend who usually tries to be kind and helpful, but lately they've been giving up on things and not being as nice to people. Maybe they're facing something really hard at home, or kids at school have been mean to them, so they're starting to think, "What's the point of trying to be good?" How do you think that friend would be feeling inside?

Listen For: "Sad," "angry," "tired," "like nobody cares", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense when life feels unfair or too hard."

Question 2: The Wrong Kind of Help

Now imagine someone tried to help that discouraged friend by saying things like, "You just need to try harder," or "Stop being so negative," or "Other people have it worse than you." How do you think your friend would feel about that kind of help? Would it make them want to try harder or make them feel worse?

If They Say: "It would make them feel worse", respond: "Exactly! Even when people mean well, sometimes their help doesn't actually help."

Question 3: The Better Way

The wise teacher in our story said we should think carefully about how to encourage people toward love and good deeds. What do you think that would look like with your discouraged friend? What are some ways you could help them without being preachy or making them feel bad about themselves?

Connect: "Those are great ideas! You're thinking like the wise teacher, about what would actually help your friend."

Question 4: The Results

The story said that when people focused on helping each other love others and do good deeds, it made the whole community stronger. Why do you think helping someone else do good things would make you feel stronger too? What happens inside you when you help someone else succeed at something?

If They Say: "It makes you feel good" or "proud", respond: "Yes! There's something about helping others that makes us feel stronger and happier too."

I love your thoughts about this. You're understanding that helping people isn't about making them do what we want, it's about helping them be the best, most loving version of themselves. And somehow, when we do that, we become stronger too.

4. Activity: The Encouragement Chain (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces mutual encouragement by having kids physically experience how supporting others creates a chain of strength that benefits everyone. Success looks like kids discovering that when everyone focuses on helping the person next to them, the whole group becomes stronger and can accomplish more together.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do something called the Encouragement Chain. Everyone stand up and form a large circle, then sit down on the floor. I want you to scoot back until you're sitting between the legs of the person behind you, like a big circle train.

Here's your challenge: everyone lean back against the person behind you at the same time. If it works, you should all be supported and comfortable. But here's the twist, it only works if everyone is both supporting the person in front of them AND being supported by the person behind them.

What we're doing is exactly like the lesson. Each person has to think about how to support someone else, but you also need to receive support from others. Nobody can do it alone, but when everyone focuses on helping someone else, everyone gets helped.

We're doing this because it's exactly like how the believers in our story learned to help each other, by focusing on supporting others toward love and good deeds, they all became stronger together.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First, let them try to figure it out on their own. Some will lean too far back, others won't lean enough. Let them experience the instability when people aren't both giving and receiving support.

As they struggle to find the balance, watch for moments when someone tries to support themselves instead of trusting the person behind them, or when someone forgets to support the person in front of them.

Coach with phrases like: "I notice that everyone needs to support AND be supported. What happens when someone tries to hold themselves up instead of trusting the chain?" Help them discover they need each other.

When someone gets the idea of mutual support, celebrate it: "Look at that! When [name] trusted the person behind them AND supported the person in front, it worked better for everyone around them!"

Once they achieve the stable circle, have them notice how it feels different from trying to support themselves alone. "Feel how much easier this is when everyone is both giving and receiving support."

Watch For: The moment when kids realize they have to trust others to support them while also actively supporting someone else, this is the physical representation of mutual encouragement.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were trying to support yourself versus when you were both supporting someone and being supported? Just like in our Bible story, when everyone focuses on helping someone else, everyone gets the help they need. You couldn't have done this alone, but when you worked together to support each other, it became strong and stable for everyone.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to think carefully about how to help our friends and family members love others and do good things, especially when they're feeling discouraged or want to give up. We're not trying to control people or make them do what we want, we're trying to help them be

loving and kind.

This doesn't mean we have to fix everyone or that it's our fault if someone makes bad choices. We can't force people to love others or do good deeds. But we can be encouraging, we can be good examples, and we can create opportunities for people to experience love and kindness.

The amazing result is that when we focus on helping others stay strong and loving, we usually become stronger and more loving ourselves. It's like God designed us to grow when we help others grow too.

This Week's Challenge

Pick one person in your life who seems discouraged or is having a hard time being kind to others. Think carefully about one specific way you could encourage them toward love or good deeds this week. It might be inviting them to help you with something kind for someone else, or just showing them extra kindness yourself.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us how to help each other love people and do good things. Help us be the kind of friends who make it easier for others to be kind and loving. When we feel discouraged, help us remember that we can encourage others and that will help us feel stronger 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 help our friends be kind and do good things.

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 friends make good choices to being a good teammate who helps others do their best in a game.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about helping friends or loving others. Suggestions: "Make Me a Blessing," "They'll Know We Are Christians by Our Love," or "Love One Another." Use movements: point to friends during verses about helping, give hugs during verses about love, and march in place during verses about being strong.

Great singing, everyone! That song was about helping and loving others, which is exactly what our Bible story is about today. Let's sit down in our horseshoe shape and get ready to hear about some people who learned how to help their friends be kind and good.

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 sad when talking about discouragement, sound wise and kind when sharing the solution.

Today we're going to meet some people who loved God but were having a really hard time.

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

Some people were being mean to them because they followed Jesus. They felt sad and tired. Some of them even stopped going to see their friends who loved God too.

[Use a discouraged voice]

They were thinking, "This is too hard. Maybe I should just give up." Have you ever felt like giving up when something was really hard?

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

But there was a wise teacher who loved these people. He didn't want them to give up. So he wrote them a letter with a very special idea.

[Move to center, speak with warm authority]

The wise teacher said, "I have an idea that will help everyone feel better. Instead of just trying to be strong by yourselves, help each other be kind and do good things!"

[Walk around the horseshoe with excitement]

He said, "Think about your friends. Think about what would help them be loving and good. Then help them do those things!"

Hebrews 10:24 (NIV)

24 And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what "spur" means? It means to help someone keep going when they want to stop. Like when you cheer for your friend in a race!

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

The teacher said, "Don't give up meeting together. Keep being with your friends who love God. Help each other!"

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

When people help their friends be kind and do good things, something wonderful happens. The friend feels better, and the helper feels better too!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So the people started thinking, "How can I help my friend be kind today? How can I help them do something good?" And they tried it!

[Speak with excitement]

When they helped their friends be loving and kind, everyone felt stronger and happier! The friends who were sad started feeling better, and the helpers felt good about helping!

[Pause dramatically]

God loves it when we help our friends be kind and do good things. It makes everyone stronger!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, our friends might feel sad or want to give up being kind. We can think about how to help them feel better and do good things!

[Move closer to the children]

When your friend is sad, you can be extra kind to them. When they want to help someone, you can help them do it. When they're being good, you can say, "Good job!"

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God made us to help each other be loving and kind. When we do that, everyone feels better and God is happy!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing them. I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just 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 were sad and wanted to give up?
2. What makes you feel better when you're having a hard day?
3. How do you think the people felt when others started helping them be kind?
4. What would you do if your friend was feeling really sad?
5. What changed when people started helping each other?
6. Why do you think God wants us to help our friends be kind?
7. What good things do you like to do for other people?
8. How do you help your friends at school be kind?
9. How do you help people in your family do good things?
10. Who in your life helps you be kind to others?
11. Why is it good to meet together with friends who love God?
12. How do you feel when you help someone else do something good?
13. What does it mean to love other people?
14. How can we help friends who want to give up on being good?
15. What would happen if everyone helped everyone be kind?
16. How can you tell when someone needs help being kind?
17. What good deeds do you like to do?

18. How do you pray for your friends?

19. What would happen if no one helped anyone else?

20. How can you be like the wise teacher who helped people?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about kindness and helping others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Love Is Something If You Give It Away." Include movements: reach out arms during verses about helping, point to heart during verses about love, and clap hands during verses about sharing.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Sit cross-legged in your rows, fold your hands, and bow your heads. Let's thank God for teaching us how to help our friends.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for the wise teacher who helped people learn to help each other...

[Pause]

Please help us think of ways to help our friends be kind and do good things. When our friends feel sad or want to give up, help us know how to make them feel better...

[Pause]

Help us remember that when we help others, it makes everyone feel better and stronger. Thank you that you made us to help each other...

[Pause]

Thank you that you love us and want us to love each other. Help us be good helpers 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 helping friends. Examples: "Help me be kind to my friend at school" or "Thank you for friends who help me."

Remember, God wants us to help our friends be kind and do good things. Look for ways to help someone this week! Have a wonderful week, and I'll see you next time!

Second Chances

Restoration After Failure, When do we write someone off for good?

John 21:1-25

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 21:1-25 (NIV)

1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: *2* Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. *3* "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

4 Early in the morning, Jesus stood on the shore, but the disciples did not realize that it was Jesus. *5* He called out to them, "Friends, haven't you any fish?" "No," they answered. *6* He said, "Throw your net on the right side of the boat and you will find some." When they did, they were unable to haul the net in because of the large number of fish.

7 Then the disciple whom Jesus loved said to Peter, "It is the Lord!" As soon as Simon Peter heard him say, "It is the Lord," he wrapped his outer garment around him (for he had taken it off) and jumped into the water. *8* The other disciples followed in the boat, towing the net full of fish, for they were not far from shore, about a hundred yards. *9* When they landed, they saw a fire of burning coals there with fish on it, and some bread. *10* Jesus said to them, "Bring some of the

fish you have just caught." **11** So Simon Peter climbed back into the boat and dragged the net ashore. It was full of large fish, 153, but even with so many the net was not torn. **12** Jesus said to them, "Come and have breakfast." None of the disciples dared ask him, "Who are you?" They knew it was the Lord. **13** Jesus came, took the bread and gave it to them, and did the same with the fish. **14** This was now the third time Jesus appeared to his disciples after he was raised from the dead.

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs." **16** Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." **17** The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep." **18** Very truly I tell you, when you were younger you dressed yourself and went where you wanted; but when you are old you will stretch out your hands, and someone else will dress you and lead you where you do not want to go. **19** Jesus said this to indicate the kind of death by which Peter would glorify God. Then he said to him, "Follow me!"

20 Peter turned and saw that the disciple whom Jesus loved was following them. (This was the one who had leaned back against Jesus at the supper and had said, "Lord, who is going to betray you?") **21** When Peter saw him, he asked, "Lord, what about him?" **22** Jesus answered, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you? You must follow me." **23** Because of this, the rumor spread among the believers that this disciple would not die. But Jesus did not say that he would not die; he only said, "If I want him to remain alive until I return, what is that to you?" **24** This is the disciple who testifies to these things and who wrote them down. We know that his testimony is true. **25** Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were recorded, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written.

Context

This scene unfolds weeks after Jesus's resurrection, yet Peter remains haunted by his spectacular failure during Jesus's arrest and trial. When the pressure mounted, Peter denied even knowing Jesus, not once,

but three times, each denial more vehement than the last. The man who had declared his willingness to die for Jesus had instead publicly disowned him to save his own skin. Now, despite Jesus's resurrection appearances, Peter seems unsure of his standing and has returned to his old trade of fishing.

The breakfast by the sea appears casual, but it's actually a carefully orchestrated restoration. Jesus doesn't ignore what happened or pretend the betrayal was insignificant. Instead, he creates an opportunity for Peter to publicly reaffirm his love three times, matching the three denials. The repetition isn't accidental but intentional, providing a pathway back from spectacular failure to renewed commission.

The Big Idea

Jesus restores Peter after his triple denial with a triple commission, demonstrating that dramatic failure doesn't disqualify us from future service but can become the foundation for deeper commissioning.

This restoration isn't cheap grace that ignores the failure's impact. Peter's hurt reveals that the process addresses the pain honestly. Yet Jesus refuses to let past failure be the final word, instead transforming it into preparation for leadership. The very intensity of Peter's failure becomes matched by the intensity of his restoration.

Theological Core

- **Restoration Over Condemnation.** Jesus's approach prioritizes healing and recommission rather than punishment or permanent exclusion from service.
 - **Intentional Correspondence.** The three questions directly mirror Peter's three denials, showing that genuine restoration confronts failure rather than ignoring it.
 - **Commission Despite Failure.** Peter receives not just forgiveness but renewed responsibility, demonstrating that past mistakes need not determine future usefulness.
 - **Pain as Part of Healing.** Peter's hurt indicates that restoration involves genuine acknowledgment of wrongdoing rather than superficial absolution.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Dramatic failure can be followed by restored commissioning when approached with intentional restoration processes
 - Genuine restoration involves pain and direct confrontation of the failure rather than pretending it didn't happen
 - Discernment is required to determine when restoration is appropriate versus when exclusion might be necessary for safety
 - Past failures don't automatically disqualify from future service but can become preparation for greater effectiveness
-

Grades 4, 6

- Big mistakes don't make you a bad person or worthless to God and others
 - Making things right involves acknowledging what you did wrong, not just saying "sorry"
 - When you hurt someone's trust, rebuilding it takes time and proves through actions, not just words
 - It's normal to feel sad about your mistakes, but that feeling can help you become stronger
-

Grades 1, 3

- Jesus loves us even when we make big mistakes
 - Jesus gives us new chances to do the right thing
 - When we mess up, we can tell Jesus about it and he'll help us try again
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Cheap Grace Trap.** Don't present restoration as automatic or painless. Peter's hurt shows that genuine restoration involves acknowledging the real damage caused by failure.
- **Permanent Condemnation.** Avoid suggesting that certain failures permanently disqualify someone from service. The passage shows Jesus actively seeking to restore rather than exclude.
- **Ignoring Boundaries.** While restoration is possible, don't suggest that all failures should lead to identical restoration processes or that safety concerns should be dismissed.
- **Individual Focus Only.** Remember that Peter's failure affected not just his relationship with Jesus but his standing among the disciples and his effectiveness in ministry to others.

Handling Hard Questions

"What about people who keep making the same mistakes over and over?"

Jesus's restoration of Peter doesn't guarantee against future failures, in fact, Peter makes significant mistakes later in ministry. The pattern suggests ongoing restoration opportunities while also requiring wisdom about boundaries and accountability structures. Chronic patterns may require different approaches than single dramatic failures, including professional help, supervision, or temporary removal from certain responsibilities.

"How do we know when someone has really changed versus just saying what we want to hear?"

Notice that Jesus doesn't just accept Peter's words but gives him concrete opportunities to demonstrate his commitment through service. Genuine restoration typically involves not just verbal acknowledgment but behavioral changes over time. Look for consistency between words and actions, willingness to accept accountability, and evidence of learning from the failure.

"What about failures that hurt other people badly, don't some things disqualify you permanently?"

This passage doesn't address every possible scenario, and wisdom requires acknowledging that some failures may permanently disqualify from certain roles for the protection of others. The principle of restoration doesn't override the need for safety and justice. However, even when certain positions are permanently closed, the possibility of restoration to relationship and other forms of service may remain

open.

The One Thing to Remember

Jesus transforms Peter's spectacular failure into the foundation for renewed leadership, showing that our worst moments don't write the final chapter of our story.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between justice and restoration when people fail dramatically. Help them discover Jesus's model of confronting failure honestly while refusing to let it be the final word.

The Tension to Frame

When do we write someone off for good versus when do we invest in restoration? How do we balance protecting others with offering second chances?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their instincts about justice and safety, these concerns are legitimate and wise
 - Honor the complexity that restoration isn't always safe or appropriate, requiring discernment
 - Let them wrestle with scenarios rather than providing easy answers to complex situations
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you're on a sports team and your star player chokes in the championship game, not just missing a shot, but actively helping the other team win because they're so rattled. Or think about a friend who promises to keep your deepest secret but then blasts it on social media when you have a disagreement. Or consider a student leader who gets caught cheating on the exact test they're supposed to be tutoring

others on.

Your first instinct is probably "They're done. They lost their chance." And that makes sense, trust broken, reputation destroyed, team chemistry ruined. Why should someone get another opportunity when they've proven they'll crumble or betray when it matters most? The safe, logical response is to move on and find someone reliable.

Today we're looking at someone who failed more spectacularly than any of these scenarios, a man who publicly denied even knowing his best friend to save his own skin. Three times. With increasing vehemence. And yet what happens next challenges everything we think we know about second chances and when to write someone off.

As we read, notice two things: how Jesus handles the failure directly rather than ignoring it, and what he chooses to do with someone who has proven unreliable at the worst possible moment.

Turn to John 21 and let's see what restoration looks like when the failure is public, painful, and seemingly unforgivable.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words. Let early finishers reread verses 15-19. Watch for students who seem affected by the emotional weight of restoration.

As You Read, Think About:

- What Peter might be feeling throughout this conversation
 - Why Jesus asks the same question three times
 - What's surprising about Jesus's response to Peter's answers
 - How you would feel if you were in Peter's position
-

John 21:1-25 (NIV)

1 Afterward Jesus appeared again to his disciples, by the Sea of Galilee. It happened this way: *2* Simon Peter, Thomas (also known as Didymus), Nathanael from Cana in Galilee, the sons of

Zebedee, and two other disciples were together. 3 "I'm going out to fish," Simon Peter told them, and they said, "We'll go with you." So they went out and got into the boat, but that night they caught nothing.

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3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers for these dramatic sections. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers who can handle the emotional weight.

Reader 1: Verses 1-8 (Setting and recognition) **Reader 2:** Verses 9-14 (Breakfast preparation) **Reader 3:** Verses 15-19 (The restoration conversation)

Listen for the tension and emotion in this story. This isn't just information, it's drama about trust, failure, and what happens when someone who let you down asks for another chance.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. If groups get stuck, ask "What surprised you most about how Jesus handled this?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Don't ask questions you think I want to hear, ask what you're actually curious about. Good questions might start with "Why did...?" or "How come...?" or "What if...?" You have three minutes to discuss and come up with your best questions.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes. Start with questions that most students will connect with emotionally.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do you notice about the structure, three denials, three questions? Is that coincidence?"
- "Why do you think Peter was 'hurt' by the third question? What does that tell us about restoration?"
- "What's Jesus giving Peter here, just forgiveness, or something more?"
- "How do you determine when someone deserves a second chance versus when it's time to move on?"
- "What's the difference between restoration that's safe versus restoration that's dangerous?"
- "Can you think of examples where this pattern might apply today, or where it definitely shouldn't?"
- "What if Peter had denied knowing Jesus again after this conversation? Would there be a fourth chance?"
- "Why might Jesus address this publicly rather than in private? What does that accomplish?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus doesn't pretend the failure didn't happen or minimize its impact. But he also refuses to let it be the final word. He creates a pathway from failure to renewed commission, matching the three denials with three opportunities to recommit. The hurt Peter feels shows this isn't cheap grace, genuine restoration involves facing the pain honestly.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension playing out? Think about relationships, team dynamics, school leadership, family trust. Where have you or people you know faced the choice

between restoration and exclusion?

Real Issues This Connects To

- A friend who betrayed your trust and wants back in your inner circle
 - A family member who keeps making the same destructive choices
 - A teammate who choked in a big game and wants another chance at leadership
 - Someone in student government who was caught lying and wants to stay in office
 - A dating relationship where someone cheated and claims they've changed
 - Your own failures and wondering if you're permanently damaged goods
-

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen restoration work well? What made the difference?"
 - "What would help you discern when to trust again versus when to protect yourself?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between genuine change and someone just telling you what you want to hear?"
 - "What's the difference between forgiveness and restoration, are they the same thing?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus shows us that our worst failures don't have to write the final chapter of our story. But restoration isn't automatic or painless, it requires honesty about the damage done and intentional steps toward rebuilding. Peter's hurt reminds us that genuine healing involves facing the reality of our failures, not glossing over them.

This week, pay attention to your instincts about second chances. Notice when you're quick to write someone off versus when you're too quick to trust again. Both responses make sense in different situations. The wisdom is learning to discern the difference and being willing to invest in restoration

when it's appropriate.

I'm proud of how thoughtfully you engaged with these hard questions today. Keep wrestling with them. The world needs people who can hold both justice and mercy, safety and restoration. You're learning to think like leaders, and that matters.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that big mistakes don't make them worthless and that Jesus believes in giving people chances to make things right through their actions, not just their words.

If Kids Ask "What if Peter messed up again after this?"

Say: "Jesus knew Peter might make more mistakes, but he also knew Peter's heart and gave him work to do. Sometimes giving someone a job helps them become the person they're meant to be."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been the person who dropped the ball in a group project and let your whole team down. Keep your hand up if you've ever promised to keep a secret and then accidentally told someone. Keep it up if you've ever said you'd do something important and then totally forgot or got too scared to follow through.

Now here's a harder question: How do you feel when that happens? Part of you probably feels terrible and wants to hide. Part of you wants to explain why it wasn't really your fault. And part of you wonders if people will ever trust you with anything important again. Those are all normal feelings when you've really messed up something that mattered.

The worst part is when you want to make it right, but you don't know how. Saying "I'm sorry" feels too small for what happened. And even if people say they forgive you, you wonder if they're just being nice but secretly think you're not reliable anymore.

This reminds me of movies like Moana, where Maui loses his hook and feels like he can't be a hero anymore, or like Buzz Lightyear realizing he's "just a toy" and feeling completely useless. Sometimes when we fail, we feel like we've lost who we're supposed to be.

The tricky part is figuring out how to rebuild trust and prove you can be counted on again. How do you show people that one big mistake doesn't define everything about you?

Today we're going to hear about a man named Peter who made the biggest mistake of his life at the worst possible time. But what happened next will surprise you. Let's find out what it looks like when someone gets a chance to prove they're more than their worst moment.

What to Expect: Kids may share personal examples of failure. Acknowledge them briefly: "That sounds really hard" or "I bet that felt terrible." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Peter was one of Jesus's best friends. They had spent three years together, and Peter had seen Jesus do amazing miracles, healing sick people, feeding thousands with just a few fish and loaves of bread, even bringing dead people back to life.

Peter had promised Jesus that he would stick with him no matter what happened. "Even if everyone else runs away," Peter had said, "I'll never leave you. I'd rather die first!" He really meant it when he said it.

But then came the night when soldiers came to arrest Jesus. Peter watched them grab his friend, and suddenly everything felt scary and dangerous. This wasn't just playground trouble, this was the kind of trouble where people could get killed.

Imagine how terrifying that must have been. One minute you're hanging out with your best friend, and the next minute armed soldiers are dragging him away and you don't know what they might do to anyone who was with him.

Peter followed the soldiers at a distance, trying to see what would happen to Jesus. He ended up in the courtyard where they were holding a trial, warming himself by a fire with other people who were watching.

Then someone looked at Peter closely and said, "Hey, weren't you with that Jesus guy?" Peter's heart started pounding. If they knew he was Jesus's friend, would they arrest him too?

"No," Peter said quickly. "I don't know what you're talking about. I've never seen him before." But his voice was shaking.

A little while later, another person said, "I'm sure I saw you with him. You're definitely one of his followers." Peter got more scared and said even louder, "No! I told you, I don't know him!"

Then a third person said, "You have to be one of them. You even talk like you're from the same place he is." By now Peter was panicking. He started cursing and shouting, "I swear I don't know this man you're talking about! Leave me alone!"

Just then, Jesus was being led past the courtyard. He looked right at Peter. And Peter realized what he had just done, he had denied knowing his best friend three times, getting louder and meaner each time.

John 21:15 (NIV)

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

Peter ran away crying. He felt like the worst friend in the world. Even when he was trying to protect himself, he knew he had broken his promise to Jesus in the worst way possible.

Then Jesus died, and Peter thought he would never get a chance to make things right. How do you apologize to someone who's dead? How do you fix a friendship when the person isn't there anymore?

But then something amazing happened, Jesus came back to life! He appeared to his disciples several times, but Peter still felt terrible about what he had done.

One morning, Peter decided to go fishing. Maybe going back to his old job would help him feel normal again. Some of the other disciples came with him, but they didn't catch anything all night.

When the sun came up, they saw someone standing on the beach calling to them. "Did you catch any fish?" the person asked. "No," they called back. "Try throwing your net on the other side of the boat," the person said.

When they did, the net filled up with so many fish they could barely pull it in. Then John said, "That's Jesus!" As soon as Peter heard that, he jumped into the water and swam to shore as fast as he could.

When they got to the beach, Jesus had already started a fire and was cooking fish. "Come and have breakfast," he said. It felt like old times, except Peter was still worried about whether Jesus was mad at him.

After breakfast, Jesus turned to Peter and asked, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter said, "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." Jesus said, "Then feed my lambs, take care of the people who want to learn about me."

John 21:16-17 (NIV)

16 Again Jesus said, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" He answered, "Yes, Lord, you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep." 17 The third time he said to him, "Simon son of John, do you love me?" Peter was hurt because Jesus asked him the third time, "Do you love me?" He said, "Lord, you know all things; you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my sheep."

But then Jesus asked the same question again: "Peter, do you love me?" Peter answered the same way: "Yes, Lord, you know I love you." And Jesus said, "Take care of my sheep."

When Jesus asked the third time, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter felt hurt. Why did Jesus keep asking the same question? Didn't he believe Peter's answer?

But then Peter realized what was happening. Jesus wasn't asking three times because he didn't believe Peter. He was giving Peter three chances to say he loved Jesus, one for each time Peter had said he didn't know him.

Peter had denied knowing Jesus three times. Now Jesus was letting him declare his love three times. It was like Jesus was washing away each denial with a new promise.

But Jesus didn't just forgive Peter. He gave him a job to do: "Take care of my people. Teach them. Help them grow. Be a leader." Jesus was saying, "I trust you with the most important work there is."

Peter went on to become one of the most important leaders in the early church. He preached to thousands of people and helped spread the message about Jesus all over the world. His one terrible night didn't ruin his whole life.

Sometimes in our lives, we make mistakes that feel enormous. We might betray a friend's trust or give up when we should have been brave or fail when people were counting on us.

What we learn from Peter's story is that our worst mistakes don't have to define us forever. Jesus believes in giving people chances to prove they're more than their failures.

The key is that restoration isn't just about saying you're sorry. Peter had to show through his actions, by taking care of Jesus's people, that he really had changed.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Scary Moment

Put yourself in Peter's shoes during that scary night. You're in a courtyard full of strangers, and soldiers just arrested your best friend. Someone looks at you suspiciously and asks if you know him. Your heart is pounding because you're afraid they might arrest you too. How would you want to respond?

Listen For: "Run away," "Lie to protect myself," "Be brave and tell the truth", affirm: "Those all make sense. Your brain would be trying to keep you safe, but your heart would want to be loyal."

Question 2: The Guilt Feelings

After Peter realized what he'd done, he probably felt terrible about himself. Have you ever done something that made you feel like you were a bad friend or a bad person? What does that guilt feel like, and what makes it hard to believe someone would still want to be your friend?

If They Say: "It feels like everyone will hate you", respond "That's exactly what Peter was probably feeling. It's hard to believe someone could still love you after you've let them down."

Question 3: The Restoration

Jesus didn't just say "It's okay, don't worry about it." He asked Peter three times if he loved him and gave him three important jobs to do. Why do you think Jesus handled it this way instead of just telling

Peter everything was fine?

Connect: "This is exactly what made Jesus's forgiveness so powerful and healing for Peter."

Question 4: The Second Chance

Jesus gave Peter really important work to do, leading other people and teaching them about God. What do you think would have happened if Jesus had said, "I forgive you, but I can't trust you with important things anymore"? How might that feel different from what actually happened?

If They Say: "Peter would feel like Jesus didn't really trust him", acknowledge "Exactly. Sometimes the most healing thing is when someone gives you meaningful work to do, not just forgiveness."

What we see here is that Jesus believes in restoration, not just forgiving our mistakes, but helping us become who we're meant to be. Sometimes the people who've failed and learned from it become the strongest leaders because they understand how much grace means.

4. Activity: The Trust Bridge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of broken trust being rebuilt through actions, not just words. Kids physically experience the journey from broken connection to restored relationship with increased responsibility. Success looks like kids discovering that rebuilding trust requires proving yourself through consistent actions over time.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Trust Bridge. Everyone find a partner. One person is the "Bridge Builder" and one is the "Trust Giver." Bridge Builders stand on one side of the room, Trust Givers on the other side.

Trust Givers have something valuable (imagine it's your most important secret or your phone or your lunch money) that they need to get to the other side of the room. The only way across is if your Bridge

Builder makes a safe path for you by lying down and becoming a human bridge.

But here's the catch, at some point, I'm going to call out "Bridge Collapse!" When that happens, all the Bridge Builders have to roll away quickly, leaving the Trust Givers stranded. After that happens, Trust Givers have to decide if they'll trust their partner to be a bridge again.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Peter's situation, trust was broken at a critical moment, and the question became whether it could be rebuilt.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round one: Bridge Builders, lie down and make bridges. Trust Givers, start crossing carefully. (After about 30 seconds, call "Bridge Collapse!" and have Bridge Builders roll away.) How does that feel, Trust Givers?

Now Bridge Builders have to convince their Trust Givers to try again. But this time, Trust Givers, you get to set the conditions. You can ask your Bridge Builder to make it wider, stronger, or prove themselves first by being a bridge for someone else.

I notice some of you are asking for proof before you'll trust again. Some of you are saying "Show me you're stronger first" or "Let me see you help someone else." This is exactly what healthy restoration looks like, trust rebuilt through demonstrated actions.

Final round: Bridge Builders, meet whatever conditions your Trust Giver set. Trust Givers, if they've proven themselves, try crossing again. Notice how this crossing feels different from the first one.

Look around at everyone who made it across safely this time. The Bridge Builders who had failed became even more trustworthy because they had to work to earn trust back.

Watch For: The moment when Trust Givers start setting conditions for trusting again, this is the physical representation of healthy boundaries during restoration.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when your bridge collapsed versus when they proved they could be trusted again? The Bridge Builders who failed first had to work harder to show they were reliable, just like Peter had to prove his love through actions, not just words. Sometimes the strongest

relationships are the ones that have been broken and rebuilt carefully.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Big mistakes don't make you worthless. Jesus believes in giving people chances to prove they're more than their worst moments. But restoration isn't just about saying "sorry", it's about showing through your actions that you've learned and grown.

This doesn't mean we should trust people blindly or ignore it when someone keeps making the same mistake. Just like in our activity, it's smart to ask people to prove they've changed before giving them important responsibility again.

The amazing result is that people who've failed and learned from it often become the most trustworthy leaders because they understand how precious trust is and they don't take it for granted.

This Week's Challenge

Think of someone you've written off because they let you down. Ask yourself: "Is this a Peter situation where they deserve a chance to prove they've changed?" If so, consider what they could do to rebuild your trust. If not, that's okay too, but give it some thought.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Jesus, thank you for believing in Peter even after he messed up really badly. When we make big mistakes, help us remember that you still love us and want to use us for good things. Help us learn how to rebuild trust with others and how to give second chances when it's wise and safe. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids know that Jesus loves them even when they make big mistakes and gives them new chances to do good things.

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 Peter's denials to saying "I don't know you" about your best friend when other kids are watching, then ask "How would that feel?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or forgiveness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God's Love is So Wonderful," or "Amazing Grace (My Chains Are Gone)" simple version. Use movements: point to yourself during "me," spread arms wide during "love," hug yourself during "wonderful."

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our special story shape. We're going to hear about a friend of Jesus who made a very big mistake, but Jesus loved him anyway and gave him important work to do.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound worried when you're Peter, sound kind when you're Jesus.

Today we're going to meet Peter, one of Jesus's very best friends.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Peter loved Jesus so much. He followed Jesus everywhere and saw him do amazing things like heal sick people and feed thousands of people with just a little bit of food.

[Use excited voice]

Peter promised Jesus, "I will always be your friend! I will never leave you!" He really, really meant it when he said that.

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

But then something scary happened. Some mean soldiers came and arrested Jesus. Peter was so afraid! He didn't know what to do!

[Move to center, speak with authority]

Peter followed the soldiers, but he was trying to hide. He warmed his hands by a fire with other people who were watching.

[Move to side, sound nervous like Peter]

Then someone said to Peter, "Hey, aren't you friends with Jesus?" Peter got scared and said, "No! I don't know him!"

John 21:15 (NIV)

15 When they had finished eating, Jesus said to Simon Peter, "Simon son of John, do you love me more than these?" "Yes, Lord," he said, "you know that I love you." Jesus said, "Feed my lambs."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think Peter really didn't know Jesus? No! He was just scared! But saying that made him feel terrible inside.

[Move to center, speak sadly]

Two more times, people asked Peter if he knew Jesus. And two more times, Peter said, "No, I don't know him!" Peter felt worse and worse each time.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

When Peter realized what he had done, he cried and cried. He felt like the worst friend ever. How could he say he didn't know Jesus?

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

But then Jesus came back to life! And do you know what Jesus did? He didn't stay mad at Peter.

[Speak with excitement]

Jesus cooked breakfast for Peter and asked him, "Peter, do you love me?" Peter said, "Yes! You know I love you!" Then Jesus said, "Take care of my people."

[Pause dramatically]

Jesus asked Peter the same question three times. Three times Peter said "I don't know Jesus," and three times Jesus let Peter say "I love you!"

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes we make mistakes that feel really big. We might be mean to a friend or lie to our parents or do something that makes us feel bad about ourselves.

[Move closer to the children]

But Jesus loves us even when we mess up. He gives us new chances to do the right thing, just like he gave Peter a new chance.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

Jesus made Peter a leader who helped lots of people learn about God's love. Peter's big mistake didn't ruin his whole life!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll give each pair one question to talk about. You'll have about one minute, and there are no wrong answers!

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 Peter felt when he said he didn't know Jesus?

2. Have you ever been scared to tell the truth about something?

3. Why do you think Peter was crying after he said he didn't know Jesus?

4. What would you have wanted to say to Peter when he was feeling bad?

5. How do you think Peter felt when Jesus asked if he loved him?

6. Why do you think Jesus asked the question three times?

7. What does it mean that Jesus gave Peter important work to do?

8. When someone hurts your feelings, how do you want them to make it better?

9. How do you feel when someone gives you a second chance?

10. What's something kind you could do to show someone you love them?

11. When do you feel scared to do the right thing?

12. How does it feel when someone believes you can do something good?

13. What makes you feel loved even when you've made a mistake?

14. Who is someone who always gives you second chances?

15. How can we be like Jesus and forgive our friends?

16. What would you tell someone who feels bad about a mistake they made?

17. How do we show Jesus that we love him?

18. What's the difference between feeling sorry and making things better?

19. What if Peter had said he didn't know Jesus four times instead of three?

20. How can we help other people feel loved by Jesus?

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

Choose songs about second chances or God's forgiveness. Suggestions: "Create in Me a Clean Heart," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "God's Great Grace." Include movements: hands on heart during "clean heart," point to others during "children," spread arms wide during "grace."

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

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear Jesus, thank you for loving Peter even when he made a big mistake.

[Pause]

When we mess up and feel bad about ourselves, help us remember that you still love us and want to use us for good things.

[Pause]

Help us be kind to our friends when they make mistakes, just like you were kind to Peter.

[Pause]

*Thank you for giving us new chances every day to love you and love others. In Jesus's name,
Amen.*

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about second chances. Examples: "Thank you for loving me when I mess up" or "Help me be kind to friends who make mistakes."

Remember, Jesus loves you even when you make mistakes, and he gives you new chances every day to do good things. Have a wonderful week!

When Good People Fight

Community Reconciliation, How public should reconciliation efforts be?

Philippians 4:1-9

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

Philippians 4:1-9 (NIV)

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! 2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

Context

Paul writes from prison to the church in Philippi, a community he deeply loves and has partnered with in gospel ministry for years. This letter overflows with joy and affection, but it also addresses real tensions within the church. The Philippians face external pressure from their Roman neighbors who

view their allegiance to Jesus as potentially subversive, while internal divisions threaten their witness and unity.

Just before this passage, Paul has urged the church to "stand firm in one spirit, striving together as one for the faith of the gospel" (1:27). Now he gets specific about what's fragmenting their unity: a conflict between two women who have been faithful ministry partners but are no longer "of the same mind." This isn't theoretical advice about hypothetical conflicts, Paul names names and calls for concrete action.

The Big Idea

Even faithful, devoted Christians sometimes come into conflict, and when they do, the community must actively help them reconcile rather than allowing division to fester.

Paul's approach reveals both the urgency of reconciliation and its complexity. He doesn't minimize the conflict by saying the women should just "get over it," nor does he take sides. Instead, he pleads with both parties and recruits others to help. The public nature of his appeal, naming individuals in a letter that will be read aloud, suggests that some conflicts require community intervention, though this raises delicate questions about appropriate transparency in church disputes.

Theological Core

- **Faithful Service Doesn't Exempt From Unity Demands.** Euodia and Syntyche had "contended at Paul's side" in gospel ministry, yet their past faithfulness didn't excuse them from present reconciliation requirements.
 - **Community Responsibility for Reconciliation.** Paul doesn't leave conflicted parties to work things out alone, he explicitly asks others to help, acknowledging that reconciliation sometimes requires outside assistance and mediation.
 - **Named Conflict Requires Careful Handling.** Paul's decision to name specific individuals reflects both the seriousness of division and the courage required to address conflict directly rather than allowing it to remain in shadows.
 - **Pleading Over Commands.** Paul's repeated "I plead" language shows that reconciliation works through persuasion and care rather than authoritarian demands, acknowledging the relational nature of genuine peace.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Faithful, respected people sometimes have serious conflicts that require outside intervention
 - There's a tension between respecting privacy and addressing division that threatens community
 - Helping others reconcile requires wisdom about when to speak up and when to stay silent
 - Sometimes pleading and persistence work better than commands and quick fixes
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Grades 4, 6

- Even people who love God and work hard for good things can have disagreements
 - When friends are in conflict, other friends can help them work things out
 - Some conflicts are serious enough that they need help from others to resolve
 - It's okay to feel upset about conflict, but we should work toward peace
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Grades 1, 3

- Sometimes good people don't agree and need help becoming friends again
 - God wants us to help friends who are fighting
 - We can ask grown-ups or other friends to help when people are mad at each other
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Assuming All Conflict Is Sin.** Paul doesn't condemn Euodia and Syntyche or suggest they've done something wrong, sometimes faithful people simply disagree. Avoid implying that conflict
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itself indicates spiritual failure or lack of maturity.

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- **Making Privacy Absolute.** While we should respect confidentiality, Paul's public naming shows that some conflicts affect the whole community and require transparent intervention. Don't suggest that all relationship issues should remain private.
 - **Demanding Instant Resolution.** Paul pleads rather than commands, acknowledging that reconciliation takes time and patience. Avoid implying that conflicts should be quickly fixed or that people who struggle to reconcile lack faith.
 - **Ignoring Power Dynamics.** We don't know whether this conflict involved differences in status, resources, or influence. Be careful not to assume all conflicts are between equals or that the same intervention approach works in every situation.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Isn't naming people in their conflict kind of mean or embarrassing?"

Paul's public appeal suggests that some conflicts become serious enough to require community intervention, even at the cost of some embarrassment. The fact that he honors both women's faithful service while addressing their disagreement shows he's not trying to shame them but to motivate reconciliation. Sometimes private attempts fail and broader accountability becomes necessary, though this should always be done with care and respect for the people involved.

"What if one person is clearly right and the other is clearly wrong?"

Paul's approach is remarkable because he doesn't take sides, he pleads with both Euodia and Syntyche equally. This suggests that reconciliation isn't always about determining who's right but about restoring relationship and unity. Even when someone has clearly done wrong, the goal is restoration rather than punishment. However, this doesn't mean ignoring serious harm or pretending all disagreements are equivalent.

"How do we know when to get involved in other people's conflicts?"

Paul's intervention seems motivated by the conflict's impact on the church's unity and witness. When personal disagreements begin affecting the broader community or undermining important work,

intervention becomes necessary. The key is approaching with humility, recognizing that we might not understand the full situation, and focusing on restoration rather than taking sides or forcing solutions.

The One Thing to Remember

Sometimes the most faithful people need help reconciling, and the community that loves them must be brave enough to assist even when it's awkward or uncomfortable.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between respecting others' privacy and taking responsibility for community peace. Help them explore when and how to intervene in conflicts that affect the groups they belong to.

The Tension to Frame

How do we balance respecting people's privacy with taking responsibility when their conflict affects everyone else?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their instinct to stay out of others' business, that's often wise
 - Acknowledge the complexity of knowing when intervention helps versus when it makes things worse
 - Let them wrestle with the dilemma rather than providing quick answers about when to intervene
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you're part of a group project team that's been working really well together. Two of your teammates, both reliable, hardworking people, suddenly stop talking to each other. They won't sit

together, they communicate through others, and the tension is making everyone uncomfortable. The work is starting to suffer because they can't coordinate their parts.

Your first instinct might be to stay out of it, after all, it's their business, right? And usually that's good advice. Most of the time, getting involved in other people's conflicts just makes things messier. But this situation is different because their personal conflict is affecting the whole team's ability to function.

Now imagine that instead of classmates, these are two respected leaders in your church or youth group. Instead of a school project, their conflict is undermining important ministry work. The stakes feel higher, but the dilemma is the same: when does someone else's conflict become everyone's problem?

Today we're looking at a moment when the apostle Paul faced exactly this situation. Two faithful ministry partners were in conflict, and Paul had to decide whether to intervene publicly. Notice how he handles the tension between respecting their dignity and protecting the community's unity.

Open your Bibles to Philippians chapter 4. As you read, pay attention to Paul's tone and strategy, he's walking a very delicate line here.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with unfamiliar words like "contended" or "petition." Watch for students who finish early and encourage them to reread, especially verses 2-3. Let them sit with the surprise of Paul naming specific people.

As You Read, Think About:

- Who's involved in this conflict and what do we know about them?
 - Why might Paul have chosen to address this so publicly?
 - What's surprising about how Paul handles this situation?
 - How would you feel if you were Euodia, Syntyche, or the "true companion"?
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Philippians 4:1-9 (NIV)

1 Therefore, my brothers and sisters, you whom I love and long for, my joy and crown, stand firm in the Lord in this way, dear friends! 2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life. 4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near. 6 Do not be anxious about anything, but in every situation, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God. 7 And the peace of God, which transcends all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus. 8 Finally, brothers and sisters, whatever is true, whatever is noble, whatever is right, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is admirable, if anything is excellent or praiseworthy, think about such things. 9 Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me, put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read with expression. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the direct appeal in verses 2-3, this needs to sound personal and urgent.

Reader 1: Verse 1 (Paul's affection for the church) **Reader 2:** Verses 2-3 (The conflict and appeal for help) **Reader 3:** Verses 4-9 (Instructions for peace and unity)

Listen for the emotion in Paul's voice, this isn't a detached command but a personal, urgent plea from someone who cares deeply.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for each group to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help any that get stuck with "What surprised you most about Paul's approach?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Don't worry about whether they're

"good" questions. Ask about whatever caught your attention. For example, you might wonder about Paul's strategy, the women's relationship, or why this conflict mattered so much. You've got three minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Build on their curiosity to explore the passage's tensions.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around conflict, intervention, and community responsibility. Start with questions most students can relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do we have about who Euodia and Syntyche were and why their conflict mattered?"
 - "Why do you think Paul chose to name them specifically rather than addressing the conflict privately?"
 - "What's the difference between pleading with someone and commanding them?"
 - "How does Paul balance honoring these women while also addressing their conflict?"
 - "What might it mean that they 'contended at his side' for the gospel?"
 - "When might a personal conflict become the community's business?"
 - "What if Euodia and Syntyche had refused to reconcile, what then?"
 - "How does this connect to the rest of Paul's instructions about peace and unity?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul isn't treating this as a private matter between two individuals. He's recognizing that when respected leaders are in conflict, it affects the whole community's ability to function. But rather than taking sides or demanding immediate resolution, he pleads with both parties and asks others to help. He's modeling how to intervene in conflict without shaming people or forcing outcomes.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see this same tension playing out? You've got situations where people's personal conflicts start affecting the groups you care about, friend groups, teams, clubs, youth group, even your family.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When two friends in your friend group stop speaking and everyone else has to pick sides or feel awkward
 - When divorced parents' conflict makes family gatherings tense and uncomfortable for everyone
 - When team captains or group leaders have beef with each other and it's affecting the team's performance
 - When conflicts between youth group members start undermining activities or making newcomers uncomfortable
 - When teachers or coaches who need to work together clearly don't get along and students can feel the tension
 - When roommates or housemates have ongoing conflict that makes shared spaces uncomfortable for everyone
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Acknowledge that some situations call for different approaches. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about when to intervene.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone successfully help others reconcile without taking sides?"
 - "What would give you courage to address conflict that's affecting your group?"
 - "How do you decide whether to speak up or mind your own business?"
 - "What's the difference between helpful intervention and making drama worse?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: sometimes the most faithful, well-intentioned people end up in conflict, and when their personal disputes start affecting communities you care about, you might need to courageously intervene. This isn't easy, it requires wisdom about when to speak up, humility about what you might not understand, and patience with messy relational processes.

This week, pay attention to conflicts around you that might be affecting others. You don't need to fix everything or become the relationship police. But notice when personal conflicts start undermining group dynamics, and ask yourself: "Is there a way I could help that honors everyone involved while protecting what we're trying to accomplish together?"

You did great thinking today about these complex situations. Keep wrestling with these questions, the wisdom to know when and how to intervene in conflict is something you'll need throughout your life.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that even good people sometimes have conflicts, and when they do, friends can help them work things out instead of letting the fighting continue.

If Kids Ask "Why were Euodia and Syntyche fighting?"

Say: "The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what they disagreed about, but it does show us how Paul tried to help them become friends again."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had two friends who got in a fight with each other, and suddenly you felt stuck in the middle. Maybe they both wanted you to agree that the other one was wrong, or they stopped hanging out together so group activities became awkward.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever wanted to help two friends make up, but you weren't sure if it was your place to get involved. Part of you thinks, "They should work it out themselves," but another part thinks, "Someone should do something because this is affecting everyone."

That feeling makes complete sense. It's genuinely hard to know when to help friends who are fighting and when to stay out of it. Sometimes getting involved makes things better, but sometimes it makes things worse. And nobody wants to be seen as nosy or pushy.

This is like what happens in movies when the hero's two best friends have a big argument. Think about how in stories like Toy Story, when Woody and Buzz were fighting, it affected the whole toy community. Or in friendship movies where the friend group splits apart because of one conflict.

The tricky part is figuring out when someone else's fight becomes everyone's problem. When is it okay to speak up and try to help? And how do you help friends make peace without taking sides or making them feel bad?

Today we're going to hear about a time when Paul, one of the first Christian leaders, had to deal with exactly this situation. Two women who worked really hard for God's kingdom were having a disagreement, and it was starting to affect their church. Let's find out what Paul decided to do about it.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to feeling stuck between fighting friends. Acknowledge their examples briefly ("That sounds really hard") and keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Paul was in prison, but he wasn't sitting around feeling sorry for himself. Instead, he was writing letters to churches he cared about, churches full of people he loved like family.

One of those churches was in a city called Philippi, and Paul had a special relationship with them. They had helped him with money when he needed it, they had sent people to encourage him, and they had worked alongside him to tell others about Jesus.

But Paul had heard some news that worried him. Two women in the Philippian church, women who had been his ministry partners and had done amazing work for God, were having a serious disagreement.

Imagine you had two really good friends who both helped you with important projects at school or in your neighborhood. These aren't just casual acquaintances, these are people you count on, people who have proven themselves to be reliable and caring.

Their names were Euodia and Syntyche. These weren't troublemakers or lazy people. Paul specifically says they had "contended at his side in the cause of the gospel." That means they had worked hard, probably faced difficult situations, and had been faithful partners in important work.

But now something had gone wrong between them. They weren't "of the same mind" anymore. The Bible doesn't tell us exactly what they were fighting about, but it was serious enough that other people in the church knew about it.

Picture what this might have felt like for everyone else in the church. When two respected leaders can't get along, it creates tension for everyone. People might start choosing sides, or meetings might become awkward, or important work might suffer because the leaders can't coordinate.

Paul could have ignored it and hoped it would blow over. He could have written to just one of them privately. He could have sent someone else to deal with it. But instead, he decided to address it directly in his letter to the whole church.

This is what Paul wrote, and remember, this letter would be read out loud to the entire church, so everyone would hear these names mentioned.

Philippians 4:2-3 (NIV)

2 I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord. 3 Yes, and I ask you, my true companion, help these women since they have contended at my side in the cause of the gospel, along with Clement and the rest of my co-workers, whose names are in the book of life.

Notice that Paul doesn't say, "Euodia, you're wrong," or "Syntyche, you need to apologize." He pleads with both of them equally. The word "plead" means he's asking urgently, like when you really, really want something important to happen.

Paul honors both women by reminding everyone how faithful they've been. He doesn't embarrass them or make them sound like bad people. Instead, he talks about their good work and how their names are

"in the book of life," which means God knows and values them.

But here's the really interesting part: Paul doesn't expect them to work it out all by themselves. He specifically asks someone else, his "true companion", to help them. He's basically saying, "This is too important to leave to chance. I need someone I trust to step in and help these women reconcile."

Paul understood something important: sometimes good people have conflicts, and sometimes those conflicts need help from outside to get resolved. It doesn't mean the fighting people are bad or weak, it means reconciliation can be hard work that requires support.

And Paul had a good reason for caring so much about their relationship. Right after asking for help with their conflict, he gives instructions to the whole church about living in peace and unity.

Philippians 4:4-5 (NIV)

4 Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice! 5 Let your gentleness be evident to all. The Lord is near.

Paul wanted the church to be a place where people could rejoice together and show gentleness to everyone. But that's hard to do when respected leaders are in conflict with each other.

Paul realized that Euodia and Syntyche's personal conflict was affecting the whole church's ability to be the kind of loving community God wanted them to be. Their disagreement wasn't just their private business anymore, it was impacting everyone.

So Paul took a risk. He addressed the conflict publicly, but he did it in a way that honored both women and recruited help for them. He was willing to make things a little awkward in the short term in order to restore peace in the long term.

We don't know exactly how this story ended, but we do know that Paul's letter was preserved and that the Philippian church continued to thrive. Paul's approach, addressing conflict directly but gently, honoring people while seeking reconciliation, became a model for how Christians should handle similar situations.

Sometimes in our lives, we see friends or family members who are in conflict, and their fighting starts affecting everyone around them. Paul's example shows us that it's okay to help people make peace, especially when their conflict is hurting the groups we care about.

What we learn from this story is that conflict between good people doesn't mean anyone is bad or wrong. But it does mean that sometimes others need to step in and help, especially when the conflict affects a whole community.

The core truth is this: when people we care about are in conflict, and that conflict is affecting others, we can be peacemakers who help them find their way back to friendship and cooperation.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

How do you think Euodia and Syntyche felt when they heard Paul's letter read out loud to the whole church, with their names mentioned and everyone knowing about their conflict? Would you feel embarrassed, motivated to make up, angry that it was made public, or something else?

Listen For: "Embarrassed," "Mad," "Ashamed", affirm: "Those feelings make sense. Having conflict made public is uncomfortable, even when it's done with good intentions."

Question 2: The Helper's Position

Imagine you're the "true companion" Paul asked to help Euodia and Syntyche reconcile. You know both women, you respect them both, but now you're supposed to help them work things out. What would be the hardest part about being asked to help with someone else's conflict?

If They Say: "Not knowing what to say" or "Worried about taking sides", respond: "That's exactly why Paul asked someone he trusted, helping people reconcile requires wisdom and care."

Question 3: The Community Impact

Why do you think Paul cared so much about these two women getting along? After all, it was their disagreement, not his. What difference would it make to the rest of the church whether they reconciled or just stayed out of each other's way?

Connect: "This shows how much Paul understood that leaders' relationships affect everyone, just like in your friend groups or teams."

Question 4: The Approach

Paul could have handled this differently, he could have taken one person's side, or told them privately to stop fighting, or just ignored it. What do you think was wise about the way he actually chose to address their conflict?

If They Say: "He was fair to both of them" or "He got help", affirm: "Paul showed that reconciliation works best when everyone's dignity is respected and when helpers are involved."

You've identified something really important: sometimes when good people have conflicts that affect others, the loving thing to do is to step in and help them reconcile. It's not about taking sides or deciding who's right, it's about restoring peace so everyone can flourish together.

4. Activity: Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the lesson by having kids physically experience how conflicts create distance and how others can help bridge that distance. Success looks like kids discovering that reconciliation often requires help from others and that everyone benefits when conflicts are resolved through cooperation.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Bridge Builders." I need two volunteers to be Euodia and Syntyche, they're going to stand on opposite sides of the room facing away from each other, representing their conflict.

Everyone else will start in the middle of the room. Your job is to create a "bridge" between Euodia and Syntyche using only your bodies, no talking, just working together to form a physical connection that could help them reach each other.

Here's the twist: Euodia and Syntyche can't move toward each other until they can see a clear, stable bridge made of people. And the bridge has to be strong enough that both of them feel confident they could "cross" it safely.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul was asking his "true companion" to do, create a way for two people in conflict to reconnect with each other safely.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Let them start building their human bridge. Initially, they'll probably form a line between the two people, but it might be wobbly or incomplete. Give them about a minute to try their first approach.

As they encounter the challenge of creating something stable, watch for kids who start organizing others or suggesting improvements. This represents the community working together to help with reconciliation.

Use coaching phrases like: "I notice your bridge might not feel safe to cross yet. I wonder if there are ways to make it stronger?" or "What would help Euodia and Syntyche trust this bridge enough to use it?"

Celebrate when they realize they need to work together more cooperatively, perhaps by holding hands, creating multiple support points, or coordinating their positions. This is the breakthrough moment, realizing reconciliation requires community effort.

Once they've created a stable bridge and both "conflicted" people have successfully "crossed" to meet in the middle, have them notice how everyone's position changed from the beginning to the end.

Watch For: The moment when kids start cooperating more intentionally to support the bridge, this is the physical representation of community members working together for reconciliation.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were all working separately versus when you started cooperating to build something stable? The bridge only worked when you supported each other, just like reconciliation works best when the community works together to help people reconnect. You physically experienced how helping others reconcile requires teamwork and creates benefit for everyone involved.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: even really good people who love God and work hard sometimes have disagreements. When that happens, especially when their conflict affects other people, friends and community members can help them work things out.

This doesn't mean you should get involved in every argument you see, or that every disagreement needs outside help. But it does mean that when conflicts between people you care about start affecting your family, friend group, class, or team, it's okay to try to help them make peace.

The amazing result is that when conflicts get resolved, everyone benefits. The relationship between the people who were fighting gets stronger, and the whole community becomes more peaceful and cooperative.

This Week's Challenge

This week, pay attention to conflicts around you, in your family, at school, or in your friend group. If you see a situation where two people's conflict is affecting others, ask a trusted adult for advice about whether and how you might be able to help them work things out.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for showing us how to help people make peace with each other. Help us be brave enough to help our friends and family members when they're in conflict, and give us wisdom to know when and how to help. Make us peacemakers in our schools, families, and communities. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Teach kids that when friends are fighting, we can help them be friends again.

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 friends make up to being a helper when someone gets hurt on the playground, sometimes friends need help fixing problems they can't fix alone.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about friendship or helping others. Suggestions: "Make New Friends," "The More We Get Together," or "Love One Another." Use movements: hold hands during choruses, point to friends during verses about friendship, use helping motions (reaching out, hugging gestures) during lyrics about caring for others.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our story formation, make a horseshoe shape on the floor. We're going to hear about a time when some friends needed help being friends again.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound concerned when talking about the conflict, sound caring when Paul speaks, sound hopeful when talking about making up.

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who really cared about his friends.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Paul had friends in a faraway city who loved God very much. These friends worked together to help other people learn about Jesus.

[Use hand gestures to show working together]

Two of Paul's friends were named Euodia and Syntyche. They were good friends who helped Paul tell people about God's love.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change to concerned expression]

But something sad happened. Euodia and Syntyche started having an argument. They weren't getting along anymore.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

When Paul heard about this, he felt worried. These were his good friends, and he wanted them to be happy together again.

[Move to side, sound like Paul caring about his friends]

So Paul wrote them a letter. But instead of being mad at them, Paul asked them nicely to make up.

Philippians 4:2 (NIV)

I plead with Euodia and I plead with Syntyche to be of the same mind in the Lord.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what "plead" means? It means asking very nicely for something important. Paul really, really wanted his friends to stop fighting!

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

But Paul did something very smart. He didn't just tell them to make up. He also asked other friends to help them!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Paul knew that sometimes when friends are mad at each other, they need other friends to help them remember how to be nice to each other again.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Paul told another friend, "Please help these women. They've been good helpers, and I want them to be friends again."

[Speak with excitement]

Paul believed that friends could help friends make up and be happy together again!

[Pause dramatically]

The big truth Paul learned was that when friends are fighting, we can help them be friends again!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we see friends who are mad at each other, maybe at school or in our neighborhood. We might see our parents having an argument, or kids on the playground not being nice.

[Move closer to the children]

When that happens, you can be a helper! You can ask a grown-up for help, or you can remind friends about being kind, or you can pray for them.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we help friends make up and be happy together again. You can be a peacemaker helper, just like Paul was!

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 together. I'll give each pair a question to talk about for 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.

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think Euodia and Syntyche felt when they were mad at each other?
2. Have you ever had a friend get mad at you?
3. What would you do if two of your friends were fighting?
4. How do you think Paul felt when he heard his friends were arguing?
5. What changed when Paul asked for help?
6. Why did Paul care about his friends getting along?
7. How do friends make up after they fight?
8. Have you ever seen friends fighting at school?
9. What can you do when your family members are upset with each other?
10. Who could you ask for help when friends are fighting?
11. Why is it good when friends make up?
12. How do you feel when your friends are fighting?
13. What does God want when friends have problems?
14. How can you be a helper like Paul was?
15. What would happen if friends never made up?

16. How can you help friends remember to be kind?

17. What should you remember when friends are mad?

18. Who helps you when you're upset?

19. What if someone doesn't want to make up?

20. How can you be a peacemaker at school?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about helping or peace. Suggestions: "Helper Song," "Peace Like a River," or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: helping actions (reaching out, patting backs) during helper songs, peaceful gestures (gentle swaying, hands on heart) during peace songs.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Sit crisscross on the floor and fold your hands.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about helping friends make up...

[Pause]

Help us be good helpers when our friends are sad or mad at each other. Show us how to be kind and help people be friends again...

[Pause]

Help us remember that you want friends to love each other and be happy together. Thank you for loving us and helping us be good friends...

[Pause]

Thank you for people like Paul who show us how to help others. Help us be helpers too. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping friends. Examples: "God, help me help friends make up" or "Thank you for friends who help me."

Remember, when friends are fighting, you can be a helper! Have a wonderful week being a peacemaker like Paul!

Unity's Goodness

The Value of Together, When is unity worth the cost?

Psalm 133:1-3

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Psalm 133:1-3 (NIV)

1 A song of ascents. Of David. How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

Context

This psalm is one of the "Songs of Ascents" (Psalms 120-134) that Jewish pilgrims sang while traveling to Jerusalem for religious festivals. Imagine thousands of families from different tribes, regions, and social classes converging on the city for Passover or the Feast of Tabernacles. These weren't always harmonious gatherings, tribal rivalries, economic differences, and regional tensions could create friction among God's people.

David's psalm celebrates those moments when the divisions melt away and God's people truly function as one family. The historical context shows this isn't naive idealism, David knew about civil war, tribal conflict, and political division. This makes his unqualified celebration of unity even more significant. He's not saying unity is easy; he's saying it's precious when it happens.

The Big Idea

Unity among God's people is inherently good and pleasant, valuable for its own sake, not just for what it accomplishes.

This isn't unity at any cost or unity for convenience. David declares that when God's people genuinely live together in unity, something intrinsically beautiful occurs. The challenge lies in discerning when pursuing unity serves God's purposes versus when it might compromise truth or enable injustice.

Theological Core

- **Intrinsic value.** Unity isn't just a strategy for effectiveness, it has worth in itself because it reflects God's character and design for community.
 - **Divine blessing.** God's blessing flows particularly where His people live in genuine unity, creating a cycle of goodness that multiplies beyond human effort.
 - **Motivated pursuit.** Recognizing unity's inherent goodness creates motivation to work through difficulties rather than defaulting to division when relationships get hard.
 - **Pleasant experience.** True unity feels good, it satisfies both moral and emotional needs, creating environments where people flourish rather than merely survive.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Unity among believers has inherent value beyond its practical benefits
 - The tension between maintaining unity and standing for truth requires wisdom and discernment
 - Pursuing unity often means working through conflicts rather than avoiding them
 - True unity isn't uniformity, it can embrace diversity while maintaining core commitments
-

Grades 4, 6

- Unity makes everyone feel better and helps groups accomplish more together
 - Sometimes you have to choose to work for peace even when you don't want to
 - Good things happen when groups stick together instead of falling apart
 - Your feelings about someone might be hurt, but doing the right thing anyway leads to better outcomes
-

Grades 1, 3

- God is happy when His people are kind to each other and work together
 - God helps families and friends who try to get along
 - We can choose to be helpers instead of fighters
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Unity at any cost.** Don't suggest that peace-keeping always trumps truth-telling. David's psalm doesn't address what to do when unity conflicts with justice, so acknowledge this complexity rather than oversimplifying.
 - **Conflict avoidance.** Unity isn't the absence of disagreement, it's maintaining relationship through disagreement. Help students distinguish between destructive division and healthy tension that leads to growth.
 - **Forced harmony.** Genuine unity can't be manufactured through external pressure. Focus on creating conditions where unity can emerge naturally rather than demanding it.
 - **Uniformity requirement.** Don't equate unity with sameness. Unity can embrace diversity of opinion, background, and approach while maintaining shared core commitments and mutual respect.
-

Handling Hard Questions

"What if unity means going along with something wrong?"

This psalm celebrates genuine unity among God's people, not compliance with wrongdoing. When unity seems to require compromising truth or enabling harm, it's not the kind of unity David describes. True unity among believers includes mutual accountability and commitment to God's standards. Sometimes loving unity means having difficult conversations rather than avoiding them.

"Why should I work for unity with people who hurt me?"

The psalm doesn't require you to ignore harm or instantly trust people who've broken your trust. Unity isn't the same as vulnerability. It might start with simply choosing not to seek revenge or spread division, then gradually building toward reconciliation as appropriate. The goal is maintaining community while establishing healthy boundaries.

"Isn't unity just giving in to keep the peace?"

Authentic unity often requires more courage than division does. It means staying engaged with difficult people and situations rather than walking away. Sometimes it means speaking truth that others don't want to hear. The pleasant feeling of unity that David describes comes from working through problems together, not from avoiding them.

The One Thing to Remember

Unity among God's people is both good and pleasant, worth pursuing even when it's difficult, but requiring wisdom to discern what true unity looks like.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the inherent value of unity while honestly exploring the tensions that arise when unity seems to conflict with other important values like truth or justice.

The Tension to Frame

When is unity worth the cost, and how do we discern the difference between healthy unity and false peace?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate experiences of both beautiful unity and toxic "unity" that silenced important voices
 - Honor the complexity, there aren't always clear answers about when to prioritize unity versus other values
 - Let students explore the tension rather than rushing to resolve it with simple answers
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about a time when you were part of a group that was really working together, maybe a sports team during a great season, a friend group that had each other's backs, or a family that pulled together during a crisis. You could feel it, couldn't you? That sense of "we've got this" when everyone was on the same page.

But then think about those other times when someone says "we need to stick together" and something in your gut says "wait, this doesn't feel right." Maybe it's when your friend group wants you to go along with excluding someone, or when family members pressure you to keep quiet about something that bothers you. Unity sounds good, but sometimes it feels like giving up your voice.

Today we're looking at someone who wrote about unity in a way that's been quoted for thousands of years. David was a king who'd lived through civil wars and political divisions, so he knew both the beauty of genuine unity and the cost of its absence. But here's what's interesting, he calls unity both "good" and "pleasant."

As we read, notice that David doesn't give us a strategy manual or a list of when unity is appropriate. He just makes this bold declaration about its value. That raises some questions we'll need to wrestle with about when unity is worth pursuing and when it might not be.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 133. We'll start by reading it silently, then explore what David might have meant and what it means for us.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This psalm is short but rich, let them read it multiple times. Help anyone who asks about "Songs of Ascents" or the imagery. Watch for early finishers and encourage them to think about the reflection questions.

As You Read, Think About:

- What words or phrases stand out to you most?
 - Why do you think David uses both "good" and "pleasant", what's the difference?
 - What do the comparisons to oil and dew suggest about unity?
 - When have you experienced something like what David describes?
-

Psalm 133:1-3 (NIV)

1 A song of ascents. Of David. How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity! 2 It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. 3 It is like the dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion. For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read verses 1, 2, and 3 respectively. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the poetic imagery sections.

Reader 1: Verse 1 (the main declaration) **Reader 2:** Verse 2 (oil imagery) **Reader 3:** Verse 3 (dew imagery and conclusion)

Listen for the tone and emotion, this isn't just information, it's poetry expressing something David found deeply meaningful.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for groups to develop 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you most?" or "What makes you curious?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about, not things you already know the answer to. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "What if..." or "How do you..." You've got three minutes. Go.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive the discussion with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guiding discovery rather than lecturing. Write their questions on the board and look for themes.

Collecting Questions: I'll write your questions on the board, then we'll explore them together. Let's hear what you came up with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do you think David means by the difference between 'good' and 'pleasant'?"
 - "Why do you think he chose oil and dew as his comparisons, what do those things do?"
 - "What's the difference between unity and everyone just agreeing about everything?"
 - "When might pursuing unity actually be harmful or wrong?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between healthy unity and pressure to conform?"
 - "What are some examples of unity in your life that felt both good and pleasant?"
 - "What if David had written 'when God's people agree about everything', how would that change the meaning?"
 - "Why do you think God's blessing is connected to unity in verse 3?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? David isn't giving us a strategy or telling us how to create unity. He's making a value statement, declaring that unity among God's people has worth in itself, not just because of what it accomplishes. It's like saying chocolate cake is delicious, not just nutritious. That raises the question: if unity is inherently valuable, how do we pursue it wisely?

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see the tension between wanting unity and dealing with situations where "getting along" might mean compromising something important? Think about school dynamics, family situations, friend groups, online communities, even church contexts.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Friend groups that pressure members to exclude or gossip about others
 - Family situations where "keeping the peace" means staying quiet about harmful behavior
 - School environments where speaking up about injustice might create conflict
 - Social media situations where calling out problematic content might damage relationships
 - Church or youth group dynamics where conformity is valued over authentic faith questions
 - Decisions about whether to maintain relationships with people whose values differ significantly from yours
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to provide answers. Acknowledge that different situations call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen unity work really well, where people maintained relationship despite differences?"
 - "What would help you discern when to work for unity versus when to accept that division might be necessary?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between pursuing peace and avoiding necessary conflict?"
 - "What's the difference between biblical unity and just going along to get along?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Unity among God's people is both good and pleasant, it has value in itself, not just as a strategy for getting things done. But recognizing its value doesn't mean pursuing it blindly. Sometimes genuine love requires difficult conversations or even separation.

This week, pay attention to moments when you face the choice between easy peace and harder unity. Notice the difference between avoiding conflict and working through it. Experiment with asking "What would genuine unity look like here?" instead of "How do I keep everyone happy?"

I'm proud of how you wrestled with hard questions today. Keep thinking deeply about what it means to live in community while maintaining integrity. These aren't easy tensions to navigate, but you're developing the wisdom to handle them well.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that unity feels good and works well, but sometimes requires choosing to work together even when it's hard or you don't feel like it.

If Kids Ask "What if someone in the group is doing something wrong?"

Say: "Unity doesn't mean pretending wrong things are okay. Sometimes helping your group means speaking up about problems so you can fix them together."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been part of a team or group that was working really well together, maybe a sports team, a school project group, or even your family working together on something. When everyone was helping instead of fighting, how did that feel? I see those smiles, it feels great, doesn't it?

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've been in a group where people started fighting or not getting along, and it made everything harder and less fun. That doesn't feel very good, does it? Sometimes you want to help fix it, but sometimes you just want to give up and walk away.

Here's the tricky part: sometimes when your group isn't getting along, part of you thinks "Well, it's not my fault, so why should I be the one to fix it?" And another part of you thinks "But things would be so much better if we could all work together again." Both of those feelings make sense, and it's genuinely hard to know what to do.

This reminds me of movies like Toy Story when the toys have to choose between fighting each other or working together to help Andy. Remember how much better everything worked when they stopped competing and started cooperating? They had to make that choice over and over again.

The tricky part is figuring out when it's worth the effort to try to bring people back together, especially when you might be the one who has to take the first step. What if they don't respond the way you hope? What if it's awkward?

Today we're going to hear about a king named David who wrote a song about what happens when God's people choose to work together instead of fighting. He discovered something amazing about what unity does, not just for getting things done, but for how it makes everyone feel. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will likely share examples of both successful teamwork and group conflict. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds like it was really hard" or "I can tell that felt amazing," then keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

King David had experienced just about everything you can imagine when it comes to groups of people. He had led armies into battle, where trusting each other could mean the difference between life and death. He had been part of a royal court with lots of jealousy and competition.

David had also lived through a civil war where the nation of Israel split apart and fought against itself. Imagine how heartbreaking that must have been, seeing people who were supposed to be on the same team hurting each other instead of helping each other.

But David had also experienced those amazing moments when everyone came together for something bigger than themselves. Times when thousands of people from different tribes and backgrounds traveled

to Jerusalem for festivals, and somehow all their differences melted away as they worshiped God together.

Think about what that would be like, imagine your school, your neighborhood, and several other communities all coming together for one big celebration. At first it might feel a little awkward because you don't know everyone, but then you realize you're all there for the same reason.

One day, David was thinking about those beautiful moments of unity, and he was so moved by how good it felt that he wrote a song about it. This wasn't just a pretty poem, this was David saying "This thing is so valuable that I need to write it down and help people remember it."

David started by making a declaration that was both an observation and a celebration. He had seen it happen, he had felt it happen, and he wanted everyone to know what he had discovered.

Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

Notice that David uses two words, "good" and "pleasant." Good means it's the right thing, it's helpful, it's what God wants. Pleasant means it feels nice, it's enjoyable, it makes you happy. Unity isn't just something we do because we're supposed to, it actually feels wonderful.

David was so excited about this discovery that he didn't stop there. He wanted to help people understand just how amazing unity is, so he used two comparisons that would have made perfect sense to people in his time.

Psalm 133:2-3a (NIV)

It is like precious oil poured on the head, running down on the beard, running down on Aaron's beard, down on the collar of his robe. It is like the dew of Hermon falling on Mount Zion.

Now, the oil part might sound a little weird to us, but in David's time, having special oil poured on your head was a sign of blessing and celebration. It was like getting a medal or having a party thrown in your honor. The oil didn't just stay in one place, it spread everywhere, covering the person with goodness.

The dew was something even more special. In Israel, which can be very dry, morning dew was like a gift that made everything fresh and alive. David is saying that unity is like that, it spreads blessing everywhere it goes, and it brings life to situations that might have been dry and difficult.

But here's the most amazing part of what David discovered. He realized that when God's people choose to live in unity, something supernatural happens. It's not just that things work better, though they do. It's that God shows up in a special way.

Psalm 133:3b (NIV)

For there the Lord bestows his blessing, even life forevermore.

God loves it so much when His people work together that He pours out extra blessing on those situations. It's like God says, "I see you choosing to love each other even when it's hard. I see you working together instead of fighting. I'm going to bless that."

Think about what this means for your life. When your family chooses to help each other instead of argue, when your class works together on a project instead of complaining, when your friend group includes people instead of excluding them, those aren't just good choices. They're choices that God celebrates.

But David wasn't naive. He knew that unity doesn't just happen automatically. Sometimes you have to choose it when you don't feel like it. Sometimes you have to be the first person to apologize or to include someone who's been left out. Sometimes you have to work really hard to understand people who are different from you.

The amazing thing David discovered is that when we make those hard choices to pursue unity, the result is both good and pleasant. We end up feeling better, the group works better, and God blesses the whole situation.

So David wrote this song not just to describe something beautiful, but to encourage all of us to choose unity even when it's difficult. Because when God's people live together in unity, everybody wins.

Sometimes in our lives, we get to choose between fighting and cooperating, between excluding and including, between giving up on difficult people and working harder to understand them. David's song reminds us that choosing unity isn't just nice, it's one of the best choices we can make.

What we learn from David's experience is that unity among God's people is worth working for because it creates something beautiful that benefits everyone involved. When we choose to work together instead of against each other, we discover what David discovered, it's both good and pleasant.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine you're on a team where everyone is arguing and not getting along, maybe for a school project or a sports team. Then imagine the same team when everyone is working together and helping each other. How do those two situations feel different in your body and in your heart?

Listen For: "Angry," "frustrated," "tired" versus "happy," "excited," "energetic", affirm: "Your body and heart can tell the difference, can't they?"

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Think about a time when your family or friend group was having problems getting along. You could choose to make it worse, ignore it, or try to help fix it. What makes it hard to choose to help fix it, even when you know that would be better?

If They Say: "What if they don't care" or "What if it doesn't work", respond "Those are real risks. What do you think David would say about taking that chance anyway?"

Question 3: The God Connection

David says God gives special blessings when His people live in unity. Why do you think God cares so much about whether we get along with each other? What do you think makes God happy about seeing His people work together?

Connect: "This shows us something about what God is like, He loves it when His family loves each other."

Question 4: The Ripple Effect

David compared unity to oil that spreads everywhere and dew that makes things grow. What do you think happens to other people when they see a group that's really working well together? How might it affect people who aren't even part of the group?

If They Say: "It makes them want to join" or "It makes them feel good too", affirm "Unity is contagious in the best way."

David discovered something that we can experience too, when we choose to work for unity instead of against it, everyone benefits. It's not always easy, but it's always worth it. Now let's experience what that feels like.

4. Activity: The Unity Bridge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces David's message by having kids physically experience the movement from separation to unity. Success looks like kids discovering that working together accomplishes what no one could do alone, and that the process feels both good and pleasant.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to create something called the Unity Bridge. I need everyone to spread out around the room so you're standing by yourself, not touching anyone else. Now, your challenge is that each person needs to get from where you are to the opposite side of the room.

But here's the catch: you can only move when you're connected to someone else. That means holding hands, linking arms, or somehow staying physically connected to another person. If you let go, you have to freeze until you connect again.

The twist is that you all need to end up on the opposite sides from where you started, which means you'll have to cross paths in the middle. You'll need to figure out how to help each other get where you're going without getting tangled up or stuck.

We're doing this because it's exactly like David's psalm, you can't create the good and pleasant feeling of unity by yourself. It only happens when people choose to connect and help each other, even when it gets complicated.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Watch as they initially form pairs and try to move across. They'll quickly realize that pairs can't easily pass each other while staying connected, especially when everyone's trying to cross at once.

As they encounter the challenge of crossing paths, observe who starts problem-solving and who gets frustrated. Let them struggle for about a minute before offering any coaching.

When you see frustration building, coach with: "I notice you need to get past each other... I wonder if there are ways to stay connected while letting people through... What if some people connected into larger groups?"

Celebrate when someone suggests forming a large connected group that moves together, or when they figure out ways to "pass through" each other while staying connected. "There it is! You figured out how to help each other instead of competing!"

Once they've successfully gotten everyone across, have them notice how it felt to work together versus the initial confusion when everyone was working separately.

Watch For: The moment when someone realizes they need to help others succeed, not just focus on their own crossing, this is the physical representation of choosing unity.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when everyone was trying to get across separately versus when you figured out how to help each other? Did you feel that shift from frustration to "we can do this together"? That's exactly what David was writing about, the good and pleasant feeling when God's people work in unity instead of against each other.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: When God's people choose to work together in unity, it's both good, meaning it's the right thing to do, and pleasant, meaning it feels wonderful. David discovered this

through his own experiences, and we just felt it ourselves in our activity.

This doesn't mean unity is always easy or that we should ignore problems to keep the peace. Sometimes working toward real unity means having honest conversations about issues. But it does mean that choosing to work together instead of against each other is always worth the effort.

The amazing result is that when we choose unity, God blesses it in special ways. Good things happen that wouldn't have happened if we had stayed separated or kept fighting.

This Week's Challenge

This week, look for one situation where you could choose to work for unity instead of division. Maybe it's including someone who's been left out, helping solve a problem in your family, or being the first person to apologize after an argument. Notice how it feels to make that choice.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us through David's song how much you love it when your people work together. Help us choose unity even when it's hard. Help us be people who bring others together instead of pushing them apart. Bless our families, schools, and friendships with the kind of unity that feels both good and pleasant. 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 is happy when His people are kind to each other and work together.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare God's people working together to puzzle pieces, each piece is important, but the puzzle is most beautiful when all the pieces fit together nicely.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about working together, God's family, or friendship. Suggestions: "We Are Family in God's House," "Love One Another," or "If You're Happy and You Know It" with modifications. Use movements: hold hands during the chorus, give high-fives during verses about helping.

Great singing, everyone! I can see you're ready to learn something exciting. Let's sit in our special horseshoe shape so we can all see each other while we hear today's story about something that makes God very happy.

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 excitement and calm moments, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound excited when talking about unity feeling good, sound warm when talking about God's happiness.

Today we're going to meet King David, who discovered something amazing about God's family!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

King David lived a long, long time ago. He was in charge of taking care of God's people, kind of like how a teacher takes care of her class or how parents take care of their family.

[Look sad and concerned]

Sometimes David felt sad because God's people would fight with each other. They would be mean instead of kind. They would work against each other instead of helping each other. That made David's heart hurt.

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

But sometimes David saw something wonderful! He saw God's people being kind to each other. He saw them helping each other. He saw them working together like a big, happy family.

[Move to center, speak with wonder]

When David saw God's people getting along and being kind, he felt so happy that he wanted to sing about it! So he wrote a special song to help everyone remember how wonderful it is when God's family loves each other.

[Move to side, speak like you're sharing exciting news]

David said, "How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!" That means: "It feels SO good when God's people are kind to each other!"

Psalm 133:1 (NIV)

How good and pleasant it is when God's people live together in unity!

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what "good and pleasant" means? Good means it's the right thing to do. Pleasant means it feels nice and makes everyone happy! Isn't that cool?

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

David was so excited about this that he thought of some pictures to help people understand. He said it was like nice, sweet-smelling oil that makes everything smell wonderful. And like morning dew that

makes flowers grow!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

But here's the most amazing part, David discovered that when God's people are kind and work together, something special happens. God gets really, really happy!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

When God sees His people helping each other instead of hurting each other, when He sees them including each other instead of leaving someone out, when He sees them sharing instead of being selfish, God smiles big and gives them extra blessings!

[Speak with excitement]

So David wrote his song to remind everyone: "When God's family is kind and works together, everybody feels good, and God is happy too!"

[Pause dramatically]

The big truth David learned is this: God loves it when His people love each other. When we choose to be helpers instead of fighters, God celebrates!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we can choose to be kind or mean. We can choose to include someone or leave them out. We can choose to help or to fight. David's song reminds us that when we choose to be kind, everyone wins!

[Move closer to the children]

When your family is working together, when your class is helping each other, when friends are being kind, that makes God so happy. You can choose to make God happy by being someone who brings people together instead of pushing them apart.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God gives you the power to be a unity helper! Every time you choose kindness, every time you include someone, every time you help instead of hurt, you're doing exactly what makes God's heart happy.

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 friend to talk with! I'm going to give each pair of friends a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell each other what you think!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think King David felt when he saw God's people being mean to each other?
 2. How do you feel when your family is getting along really well?
 3. What do you think King David felt when he saw God's people being kind?
 4. When someone is left out at school, what could you do?
 5. What makes God happy about His people working together?
 6. How does it feel when you help someone?
 7. What happens when everyone in your class is being kind?
 8. When have you seen people at school helping each other?
 9. How can you be a helper at home?
 10. Who is someone you could be kinder to?
 11. Why did David write a song about people being kind?
 12. How do you think it makes God feel when you include someone?
 13. What does it mean to be part of God's family?
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14. When is it hard to be kind to someone?

15. How can you help your friends get along better?

16. What did you learn about God from David's song?

17. How can you remember to choose kindness?

18. What would you ask God to help you with?

19. What would happen if everyone at school was kind all the time?

20. How can you be like the kind people in David's song?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines. 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 kindness, helping, or God's love. Include movements like: reach out to pretend to help someone, give yourself a hug when singing about God's love, march in place during verses about being strong helpers.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down in rows for our prayer time. God loves to hear from His children, especially when we talk to Him about being kind to others.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for King David's song that teaches us you love it when we're kind...

[Pause]

Please help us choose to be helpers instead of fighters. Help us include people instead of leaving them out. Help us remember that being kind makes you happy...

[Pause]

Help us remember that we are part of your big family, and families work best when everyone is kind to each other...

[Pause]

Thank you that you love us and help us love others. Thank you for giving us the power to make you happy by being kind. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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

Remember, you can make God happy this week by choosing kindness! Look for ways to help bring people together instead of pushing them apart. Have a wonderful week, unity helpers!
