

# Living in Community

*Volume 9*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Living in Community

*Volume 9*

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## **About This Series**

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

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

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

## **A Note on Scripture Sources**

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

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

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

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

## **How to Use This Book**

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

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

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

### **For Individual Study**

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

### **For Families**

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

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

*The 1611 Press Team*

# Others First

*Radical Love in Action, Can We Really Live for Others?*

**1 Corinthians 10:14-33**

## Instructor Preparation

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

## The Passage

**1 Corinthians 10:14-33 (NIV)**

*14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.*

*18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

*23 "I have the right to do anything," you say, but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything", but not everything is constructive. 24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. 25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."*

*27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. 29 I am referring not to your conscience but to theirs. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?*

*31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Gentiles or the church of God, 33 even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

## **Context**

Paul is addressing the controversial issue of food sacrificed to idols in Corinth, a cosmopolitan city where temple worship and market life intersected daily. Christian converts found themselves navigating complex questions about participating in a society deeply embedded with pagan religious practices. What seemed like simple grocery shopping or social dining could suddenly become a theological minefield.

Immediately before this passage, Paul has warned against overconfidence and reminded the Corinthians that even the Israelites, despite their privileges, fell into idolatry. He's building toward a practical principle that will guide them through these gray areas, a radical reorientation from self-interest to others' welfare that cuts through the complexity.

## **The Big Idea**

The default orientation for Christian living should be others' good rather than personal advantage or rights.

This isn't merely about being nice or occasionally generous. Paul presents an unqualified principle that challenges the fundamental basis of decision-making. The complexity comes in understanding how such radical other-orientation integrates with legitimate self-care and the practical realities of human limitation.

## Theological Core

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- **Other-orientation as default mode.** The starting question shifts from "What do I want?" to "What serves others' good?" This reframes the foundation of ethical decision-making.
  - **Freedom constrained by love.** Personal rights and freedoms exist, but they're governed by their impact on others rather than by what we can get away with.
  - **Community over individualism.** The body of Christ functions as an interconnected whole where individual choices ripple through the entire community.
  - **Glory of God through neighbor love.** Seeking others' good becomes a form of worship that honors God and serves His mission in the world.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- The principle of other-orientation challenges all forms of self-seeking and reframes how we make decisions
  - This radical standard raises complex questions about self-care, boundaries, and human limitation
  - Seeking others' good applies to everything from consumer choices to career decisions to relationship patterns
  - Wisdom involves discerning how to honor this principle while acknowledging our own needs and limitations
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- We can choose to think about what helps others before thinking about what we want
  - Our choices affect other people, even when we don't see it immediately
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- Sometimes doing good for others means giving up something we want, and that's okay
  - It's normal to want good things for ourselves, but we can learn to care about others too
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### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to think about other people and how to help them
  - God loves it when we share and care about others
  - We can ask "How can I help?" instead of just thinking about ourselves
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Ignoring legitimate self-care.** The principle is stated absolutely, but it must be understood within the broader biblical understanding of human responsibility and limitation. Seeking others' good doesn't mean neglecting basic health, safety, or calling.
  - **Creating impossible guilt.** This teaching can become a weapon for manipulation or self-condemnation. The goal is reorientation toward love, not perfectionist self-elimination or burnout.
  - **Missing the context specificity.** Paul applies this principle to food offered to idols, a particular cultural situation. We need wisdom to apply the broader principle to our own cultural contexts without legalism.
  - **Oversimplifying complex decisions.** Real-life applications often involve competing goods or unclear outcomes. The principle guides direction but requires thoughtful discernment in complex situations.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"Doesn't this lead to being a doormat or getting taken advantage of?"**

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This is a legitimate concern that requires nuance. Paul himself set boundaries, confronted sin, and made strategic decisions about his ministry. Seeking others' good sometimes means saying no to their immediate wants in order to serve their deeper needs. It also means maintaining the health and capacity needed to continue serving effectively. The principle reorients our default direction without eliminating wisdom about how love is best expressed in specific situations.

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### **"How can I seek others' good if I don't take care of myself?"**

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The principle assumes we have something to give and are capable of making choices. Basic self-care, physical health, emotional stability, spiritual nourishment, enables sustained other-orientation rather than competing with it. The question becomes whether our self-care is ordered toward greater love and service, or whether it has become an end in itself. Paul himself ate, slept, rested, and maintained friendships while living out this principle.

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### **"What if seeking someone's good conflicts with someone else's good?"**

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This reveals the complexity that the principle navigates but doesn't automatically resolve. Paul acknowledges this tension in the passage itself, what helps one person's conscience might limit another person's freedom. The principle guides our heart orientation and decision-making process, but it doesn't eliminate the need for wisdom, prayer, and sometimes difficult choices between competing goods. The goal is ensuring that self-interest isn't driving our decisions.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Love reshapes the foundation of decision-making from "What's good for me?" to "What's good for others?", a radical reorientation that requires both courage and wisdom.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to grapple with the radical nature of Paul's principle and explore how it might reshape their actual decision-making processes. Help them wrestle with the tension between this ideal and the

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practical realities of self-care and human limitation.

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## **The Tension to Frame**

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Can we actually live seeking others' good rather than our own? What does this look like practically, and how do we handle the complexities it creates?

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## **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their honest concerns about this principle being impossible or impractical
  - Honor the real complexity of balancing self-care with other-orientation without dismissing Paul's challenge
  - Let students wrestle with specific scenarios rather than giving them easy answers
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## **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Imagine you're scrolling through social media and you see a fundraiser for a classmate whose family lost their house in a fire. You've been saving money for months for new gaming equipment you really want, and you have just enough. You could donate some of your savings, but it would mean waiting longer for what you've been looking forward to. Your donation wouldn't even be that significant compared to the total needed.

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Part of your brain immediately calculates whether anyone would know if you didn't donate, whether this is really your responsibility, and how disappointing it would be to delay your purchase. These thoughts feel reasonable, you worked for that money, you've been looking forward to this, and other people can donate too.

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But today we're looking at someone who faced similar questions about personal rights versus others' needs, except he was dealing with something that seemed even more mundane, what to eat for dinner. Paul's conclusion was so radical that it challenges the entire foundation of how we make decisions.

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As we read, notice how Paul frames the basic question that should guide Christian decision-making. Pay attention to what he says should drive our choices and what shouldn't. See if you can spot the principle that cuts through all the complexity.

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Let's open our Bibles to 1 Corinthians 10, verses 14 through 33, and read this silently first.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** This is a longer passage with complex ideas, so give them full time. Walk quietly and help with difficult words or concepts. Watch for students who finish early and guide them to reread verse 24 and think about its implications.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific problem is Paul addressing in Corinth?
- What reasoning do the Corinthians use to justify their behavior?
- What does Paul say should actually guide their decisions?
- How would you feel if someone challenged your decision-making this way?

### 1 Corinthians 10:14-33 (NIV)

*14 Therefore, my dear friends, flee from idolatry. 15 I speak to sensible people; judge for yourselves what I say. 16 Is not the cup of thanksgiving for which we give thanks a participation in the blood of Christ? And is not the bread that we break a participation in the body of Christ? 17 Because there is one loaf, we, who are many, are one body, for we all share the one loaf.*

*18 Consider the people of Israel: Do not those who eat the sacrifices participate in the altar? 19 Do I mean then that food sacrificed to an idol is anything, or that an idol is anything? 20 No, but the sacrifices of pagans are offered to demons, not to God, and I do not want you to be participants with demons. 21 You cannot drink the cup of the Lord and the cup of demons too; you cannot have a part in both the Lord's table and the table of demons. 22 Are we trying to arouse the Lord's jealousy? Are we stronger than he?*

*23 "I have the right to do anything," you say, but not everything is beneficial. "I have the right to do anything", but not everything is constructive. 24 No one should seek their own good, but the good of others. 25 Eat anything sold in the meat market without raising questions of conscience, 26 for, "The earth is the Lord's, and everything in it."*

*27 If an unbeliever invites you to a meal and you want to go, eat whatever is put before you without raising questions of conscience. 28 But if someone says to you, "This has been offered in sacrifice," then do not eat it, both for the sake of the one who told you and for the sake of conscience. 29 I am referring not to your conscience but to theirs. For why is my freedom being judged by another's conscience? 30 If I take part in the meal with thankfulness, why am I denounced because of something I thank God for?*

*31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. 32 Do not cause anyone to stumble, whether Jews, Gentiles or the church of God, 33 even as I try to please everyone in every way. For I am not seeking my own good but the good of many, so that they may be saved.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who are comfortable reading aloud. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the more complex theological sections.

**Reader 1:** Verses 14-22 (The theological foundation about idolatry and communion) **Reader 2:** Verses 23-26 (Rights versus benefit and the key principle) **Reader 3:** Verses 27-33 (Practical applications and Paul's example)

Listen for the tension in this passage, Paul is navigating between freedom and responsibility, between personal rights and community impact. This isn't simple rule-following.

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

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

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by or challenged by. Good questions might start with "How do you..." or "What if..." or "Why does Paul..." Don't come up with questions you think you should ask, ask what you're really wondering about. You have 3 minutes.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Let them wrestle with the hard implications.

**Collecting Questions:** Let me write your questions on the board. Don't worry if they overlap, different groups might approach the same issue differently. We'll start with questions that multiple groups are wrestling with.

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

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- "What evidence do you see that the Corinthians thought they had the right to eat whatever they wanted?"
  - "Paul states this principle pretty absolutely in verse 24. What do you think that looks like in real life?"
  - "How do you think seeking others' good is different from just being nice or polite?"
  - "What makes this principle difficult to live out, based on your own experience?"
  - "How would someone figure out what actually serves another person's good versus just what they want?"
  - "If you actually organized your life around this principle, what would change in your daily decisions?"
  - "What would happen if everyone in your school lived this way versus if no one did?"
  - "Why do you think Paul connects this to bringing glory to God in verse 31?"
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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what Paul is doing here? He's not just giving rules about food, he's rewriting the basic question that drives decisions. Instead of "What can I get away with?" or "What are my rights?" he's

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saying the fundamental question should be "What serves others' good?" That's a completely different starting point that would reshape everything.

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

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Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see this tension between personal wants and others' good playing out? Think about school decisions, family situations, how you spend money or time, social media choices, friend drama, where do you find yourself choosing between what you want and what would help others?

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Choosing classes or activities based on what looks good versus what your family can afford or what serves your genuine growth
  - Social media posts that make you look good but might make others feel worse about themselves
  - Friend group dynamics where you could speak up for someone being excluded but it might cost you social status
  - Spending money on yourself versus contributing to family needs or charitable causes
  - Career and college planning, pursuing dreams versus considering how your choices impact parents, community, or societal needs
  - Time and energy allocation between personal interests and helping others or family responsibilities
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Some situations call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about what they should do.

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#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone actually live this way, putting others' good first? What was the result?"
  - "What would help you remember to ask 'What serves others?' when you're making decisions?"
  - "How do you figure out the difference between others' real good versus just what they want?"
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- "What's the difference between healthy self-care and self-seeking? How do you tell them apart?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Paul isn't asking you to become a doormat or neglect your own basic needs. But he is challenging the default setting of your heart and mind. Instead of starting every decision with "What do I want?" or "What can I get?" he's calling you to start with "What serves others' good?" That's a radical reorientation that changes everything, and it's not easy or simple.

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This week, pay attention to your decision-making process. Notice how often you automatically think about your own benefit first. Try experimenting with asking the other question first: "What would serve others' good here?" See what happens, not as a guilt trip, but as an exploration of what this kind of love might look like in your actual life.

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You've wrestled with some really tough questions today and shown a lot of maturity in thinking through these complexities. Keep wrestling with hard questions, that's how wisdom grows. And remember that this kind of radical love is something God grows in us over time, not something we perfect overnight.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that they can choose to think about what helps others before thinking about what they want, and that this is actually a happier way to live.

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### If Kids Ask "What if I don't want to help others?"

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Say: "That's honest! Sometimes it's hard to want to help. God can help us learn to care about others, and it gets easier with practice. You don't have to feel guilty about wanting good things for yourself."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever really, really wanted something, maybe a toy, a game, money to buy something special, and you were finally about to get it. Keep your hands up. Now raise your other hand if, right at that moment, someone in your family needed help with something important, or you found out about someone who needed that money more than you wanted your thing.

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Now here's the really hard question: you have to choose. You can get the thing you've been wanting and looking forward to, or you can help that other person. You can't do both. Part of you thinks "I've been waiting for this for so long, and I deserve it!" But another part thinks "That person really needs help, and I could actually make a difference."

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Those feelings make total sense. It's normal to want good things for yourself and to feel disappointed when you can't have them. It's also normal to care about other people and want to help them. The tricky part is that sometimes we have to choose between them, and it's hard to know what to do.

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This is kind of like in the movie Encanto when Mirabel has to choose between trying to prove herself and save her own reputation, or helping her family even though it might mean she never gets the recognition she wants. She wants both, but she can't have both.

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The tricky part is figuring out when it's okay to choose what you want, and when choosing to help others is more important. How do you decide? What helps you know what to do when your heart is pulling in two directions?

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Today we're going to hear about someone who gave a very clear answer to this question, an answer that might surprise you and definitely challenged the people who first heard it. Let's find out what happened when some Christians had to make choices between what they wanted and what would help others.

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**What to Expect:** Many will relate to wanting things for themselves. Some might share examples of times they chose to help others. Acknowledge their experiences briefly: "Those are exactly the kinds of choices we're talking about."

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture a big, busy city called Corinth about 2000 years ago. It was kind of like a combination of New York City and Las Vegas, lots of people, lots of business, and lots of different religions everywhere you looked.

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In this city lived some people who had become Christians, they had decided to follow Jesus. But they had a big problem. Everywhere they went to buy food, the meat had been offered to fake gods in temples before it was sold in the market.

So these new Christians were confused. They would think, "I'm hungry and I want to buy some food, but this meat was offered to idols. What am I supposed to do? Am I doing something wrong if I buy it?"

Imagine how frustrated that would feel! It's like if every restaurant in your town had been dedicated to something you didn't believe in, but you still needed to eat. You'd probably think, "This is ridiculous. I don't believe in those fake gods anyway, so it doesn't matter. I can eat whatever I want!"

And that's exactly what some of the Christians in Corinth were saying. They said, "I have the right to eat anything I want! Those fake gods aren't real anyway, so this meat can't hurt me. I'm free to do whatever I think is best!"

Their friend Paul heard about this argument, and he needed to help them understand something important. Paul wasn't worried about the meat itself, he agreed that fake gods weren't real and couldn't hurt anyone.

But Paul was worried about something else. He was worried about how their choices affected other people. Some of the newer Christians still felt scared and confused when they saw people eating temple food.

So Paul wrote them a letter to help them think about their choices differently. He said, "You're right that you have the freedom to eat that food. But here's a more important question..."

### **1 Corinthians 10:24 (NIV)**

*"No one should seek their own good, but the good of others."*

Whoa! Paul wasn't saying "Don't eat the food." He was saying something much bigger: "Don't start with the question 'What do I want?' Start with the question 'What would help other people?'"

Paul knew this was hard to understand, so he explained it more. He said, "Look, you can eat anything sold in the market. That's fine. But if you're at someone's house for dinner and they tell you the food was offered to idols, then don't eat it, not because it will hurt you, but because it might confuse or upset the person who told you."

Then Paul said something amazing about himself: "I try to please everyone in every way. I am not seeking my own good but the good of many people, so that they can be saved and know about Jesus."

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Paul was saying, "When I make decisions, I don't ask 'What do I want?' first. I ask 'What will help others?' first. Even when I have the right to do something, I choose what will help others instead."

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This wasn't just about food anymore. Paul was teaching them a completely new way to think about every choice they made. Instead of "How can I get what I want?" they could ask "How can I help others get what they need?"

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Paul said, "Whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God. Don't cause anyone to stumble, whether they're Jewish, or from other countries, or part of the church."

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The Christians in Corinth had to learn that being free didn't mean doing whatever they wanted. Being free meant being free to choose love first, even when it meant giving up something they wanted.

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Sometimes in our lives, we have to make similar choices. We might want something really badly, but we can ask ourselves, "Would choosing this help other people, or would choosing something else help them more?"

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What Paul discovered is that when we choose to help others instead of just getting what we want for ourselves, something amazing happens. We actually become happier, and we help make the world a better place.

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God loves it when we care about other people and think about how our choices affect them. It doesn't mean we can never have anything good for ourselves, but it means we can learn to care about others just as much as we care about ourselves.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Hard Choice

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Imagine you saved up your allowance for weeks to buy something you really wanted, and you finally have enough money. But then you find out that your friend's birthday is tomorrow and they're really sad because their family can't afford a party or presents. You could use your money to help make their

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birthday special, but then you'd have to wait even longer for your thing. How would you feel about that choice?

**Listen For:** "Sad," "Frustrated," "Torn", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. It would be really hard to give up something you've been waiting for."

### Question 2: The Easy Times

But what about times when helping others doesn't cost you much? Like when you could share your snack with someone who forgot lunch, or help someone with homework when you're already finished with yours. Why do you think those choices are sometimes easier and sometimes still feel hard?

**If They Say:** If they say "It depends on if I like the person", respond: "That's honest! It's easier to help people we already care about. What do you think Paul would say about helping people we don't like as much?"

### Question 3: What Others Need

Paul said to think about "the good of others." How do you figure out what's actually good for someone else? Like, what if they want something that might not be good for them, or what if you don't know what they need?

**Connect:** "This is exactly the kind of thinking Paul wanted people to do, really considering what would truly help someone."

### Question 4: The Results

Paul said he chose to help others instead of just doing what he wanted, and that this helped people learn about Jesus. If everyone in your class or family lived this way, thinking about others' good first, what do you think would be different?

**If They Say:** If they say "Everyone would be happy", respond: "What makes you think that? How do you think it would change the way people treat each other?"

You're thinking about this really well. The Christians in Corinth had to learn that asking "What would help others?" first doesn't mean never getting anything good for yourself. It means caring about others

as much as you care about yourself, and sometimes that changes what you choose to do.

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

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

##### **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces the principle of seeking others' good by having kids physically experience how individual choices to help others create something amazing that benefits everyone. Success looks like kids discovering that when everyone chooses to help instead of just looking out for themselves, the whole group succeeds.

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

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We're going to play Bridge Builders. I need you to split into two groups and line up on opposite sides of the room facing each other. You're two villages that need to build a bridge across a dangerous river to help each other, but you can only use your bodies.

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Here's the challenge: each person can choose to be part of the bridge by getting down on hands and knees, or they can choose to be one of the people who gets to cross the bridge safely. But here's the twist, if too many people choose to cross and not enough people choose to be the bridge, everyone falls in the dangerous river and has to start over.

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You need to figure out how many people are willing to be the bridge so that others can cross safely. No one is required to be the bridge, everyone gets to choose. But your villages need each other, so someone has to make it across.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like Paul's teaching, everyone could choose what they want for themselves, but the group only succeeds if some people choose to help others first.

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

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First, watch what happens when everyone chooses what they want for themselves. Give them 30 seconds to see that if everyone wants to cross, no one can cross because there's no bridge. Let them experience the problem.

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As they start to struggle and realize they need bridge-builders, watch their negotiations and decision-making. Notice who volunteers to be part of the bridge and how they convince others to help.

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When they get stuck, ask guiding questions: "What do the villages need to succeed?" "What happens if everyone chooses the easy job?" "Who could choose to help even though it means not getting what they want?"

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Celebrate the breakthrough when kids start volunteering to be bridge pieces! Say things like "Look what happens when some people choose to help others!" and "Now everyone benefits because some people put others first!"

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Once they've successfully built a human bridge and gotten some people across, have them notice the difference between everyone choosing what they wanted versus some people choosing to help others first.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone says "I'll be part of the bridge" even though crossing would be more fun, this is the physical representation of Paul's principle in action.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when everyone wanted to cross the bridge versus when some of you chose to be bridge-builders? When some people chose to help others instead of just thinking about what they wanted, what happened to the whole group? That's exactly what Paul was talking about, when we choose to seek others' good, everyone benefits, including us!

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

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Here's what we learned today: Paul taught the Christians in Corinth to ask a different question when making choices. Instead of starting with "What do I want?" they could start with "What would help others?" This doesn't mean you can never have anything good for yourself, it means caring about others as much as you care about yourself.

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This doesn't mean you have to give away everything you own or never enjoy anything. God wants you to have good things! But it does mean that when you have a choice, you can think about how your choice affects other people and whether there's a way to help them.

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The amazing result is that when we live this way, we actually become happier people, and we help make the world a better place. God loves it when we care about others, and it makes our friendships and families stronger too.

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

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This week, try asking "How can I help?" before asking "What do I want?" at least once each day. It could be helping at home, sharing with a friend, or being kind to someone at school. Notice what happens when you think about others first, how does it make you feel, and how do other people respond?

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

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*Dear God, thank you for teaching us about caring for others. Help us remember to think about how our choices affect other people. When it's hard to share or help instead of just getting what we want, please help us to choose love. Help us become the kind of people who care about others as much as we care about ourselves. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to think about other people and help them, not just think about ourselves.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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

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Compare thinking about others to sharing toys at playtime, then ask "How do you feel when someone shares with you?"

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about helping others or God's love. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Jesus Loves Me," or "I've Got the Joy." Use movements: point to others during verses about love, hug yourself during verses about God's love, clap hands during chorus.

---

Great singing! Now I want you to sit in a horseshoe shape on the floor so you can see me well. We're going to hear a special story about some people who learned something very important about helping others!

---

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

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound confused when people are confused, sound wise and kind when you're Paul, sound excited when talking about helping others.

---

Today we're going to meet some people who had to learn about sharing and caring for others!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Long, long ago, there were some people who loved Jesus. They lived in a big city where there were lots of stores and lots of different people.

---

*[Look confused and scratch your head]*

---

But these people had a big problem! When they went to buy food, they didn't know if it was okay to buy it because some of the food had been given to fake gods first.

---

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

---

Some of the people said, "I can eat whatever I want! Those fake gods aren't real anyway, so I don't care! I'm going to do what I want to do!"

---

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

---

Their friend Paul heard about this, and he wanted to help them. Paul said, "Wait! I have something important to tell you!"

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*[Move to side, sound like you're listening carefully]*

---

The people listened because Paul was very wise and loved Jesus very much. They wondered what he was going to say.

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### **1 Corinthians 10:24 (NIV)**

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*"No one should seek their own good, but the good of others."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think the people were surprised to hear that? Yes! Paul was saying "Don't just think about what you want. Think about what would help other people!"

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*[Move to center, speak with warmth]*

---

Paul explained it more. He said, "When you're at someone's house and they're worried about the food, don't eat it. Not because it will hurt you, but because it might make them feel scared or sad."

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Paul was teaching them that when we love Jesus, we care about other people's feelings. We think about how our choices will affect our friends and family.

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

Then Paul said something really amazing! He said, "I don't just think about what I want. I think about what will help other people learn about Jesus and be happy!"

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

Paul had learned the secret! When we think about helping others instead of just getting what we want, everyone is happier!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

---

God loves it when we care about other people and think about how to help them. We can ask "How can I help?" instead of just "What do I want?"

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes at school or at home, you have to choose between getting what you want and helping someone else. You can ask God to help you think about others!

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When your little brother needs help, or when someone at school is sad, or when Mom or Dad need you to do something, you can choose to help them even if you wanted to do something else.

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves you so much, and He can help you learn to care about others just like Jesus does!

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

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

---

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

---

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

## Discussion Questions

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

---

1. How do you feel when someone shares their toy with you?

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2. When has someone in your family helped you when you really needed it?

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3. How do you think Paul felt when he chose to help others instead of just doing what he wanted?

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4. What would you do if your friend forgot their lunch and you had extra food?

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5. What happened when Paul taught people to think about others first?

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6. How does God feel when we help other people?

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7. What's the difference between thinking about yourself and thinking about others?

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8. How can you help someone at school this week?

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9. How can you help someone in your family?

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10. Who in your life is really good at helping others?

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11. Why do you think God wants us to care about other people?

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

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13. How can God help us when it's hard to share or help others?

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14. What would happen if everyone in your class helped each other?

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15. When is it hard to think about others instead of yourself?

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16. What did you learn from Paul's story?

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17. How can you remember to ask "How can I help?"

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18. Who can you pray for this week?

---

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

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20. How can you be like Paul and think about others?

---

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

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

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

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Select a song about helping others. Suggestions: "Love is Something You Do," "Be Kind," or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: point to others during words about helping, hug yourself during words about God's love, reach hands up during words about God.

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

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Paul who taught people about helping others.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Please help us remember to think about other people and how we can help them. When we want something for ourselves, help us also think about others.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us be kind and helpful like Jesus. Help us ask "How can I help?" when we see people who need us.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for loving us so much and for teaching us how to love others. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "Help me share with my sister" or "Thank you for my family who helps me."

Remember this week to ask "How can I help?" when you see someone who needs you. God loves it when we care about others, and you can make someone's day better! Have a wonderful week!

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# Love Test

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*True Love Revealed, Can we really love God while hating people we see?*

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**1 John 4:16-21**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**1 John 4:16-21 (NIV)**

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

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

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## Context

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John writes to early Christian communities facing internal conflict and false teaching about the nature of love. Some claimed deep spiritual connection with God while showing hatred toward fellow believers. John exposes this contradiction using practical logic, you cannot claim to love an invisible God while hating visible people made in God's image.

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This passage concludes John's sustained teaching on love throughout chapter 4, moving from God's love for us to our love for others. John uses stark language, calling such people "liars", because this isn't about spiritual immaturity but fundamental self-deception about the nature of love itself.

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## The Big Idea

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**Love for God is inseparably linked to love for people, hatred toward visible brothers and sisters exposes the lie of claimed love for invisible God.**

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This doesn't mean perfect love or never feeling frustrated with others. John addresses deliberate hatred that coexists with religious claims. The logic is straightforward: if we cannot love the people we see, how can we claim to love the God we cannot see? Horizontal relationships become the litmus test for vertical relationship authenticity.

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## Theological Core

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- **Love Verification.** Claims of loving God are tested by observable love for others. Love isn't just internal feeling but visible action that can be measured and verified.
  - **Visible/Invisible Logic.** The easier test (loving visible people) reveals the truth about the harder claim (loving invisible God). If we fail the easier test, our claim to pass the harder one is false.
  - **Horizontal-Vertical Inseparability.** Relationships with God and people cannot be compartmentalized. They are fundamentally interconnected because people bear God's image.
  - **Command Connection.** This isn't optional or aspirational, God commands that those who love Him must also love others. It's not about preference but obedience.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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**Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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- Claims of loving God are proven false by hatred for fellow believers, this isn't about occasional conflict but deliberate ongoing hatred

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- The visible/invisible logic means easier love failure exposes harder love impossibility, we cannot separate our relationship with God from our relationships with people

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- This requires honest self-examination about who we might hate and what that reveals about our claimed love for God

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- Discernment is needed to distinguish between temporary frustration with others and the deeper hatred that falsifies our God-love claims

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### Grades 4, 6

- Loving God and loving people are connected like two parts of the same thing, you cannot have one without the other

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- When we choose to be mean to others, it shows we are not really understanding God's love

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- God gives us the power to love both Him and the people around us, even when they are difficult

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- Sometimes we feel angry or frustrated with others, and that's normal, but we can still choose loving actions

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### Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to love Him and love other people too, both at the same time

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- God loves everyone, and He wants us to love everyone too

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- We can show love by being kind and helpful to others

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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Legalistic Interpretation.** This isn't about perfect love or never feeling frustrated with others. John addresses deliberate hatred that coexists with religious claims, not the normal struggles of relationships.

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- **Scope Confusion.** "Brother or sister" in context likely refers to fellow believers, but don't use this to justify hatred toward non-believers. The principle of love extends beyond community boundaries.
- **Simplistic Application.** Avoid suggesting that any interpersonal conflict disqualifies someone from loving God. Focus on the pattern of deliberate hatred, not occasional disagreements or personality clashes.
- **Guilt Without Grace.** This passage can create crushing self-examination. Balance the challenging call with the reality that God's love enables our love, we don't earn God's love by loving others perfectly.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Does this mean I don't love God if I sometimes dislike certain people?"**

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John distinguishes between deliberate hatred and normal human struggles with relationships. Disliking someone or having conflict isn't the same as the hatred that John describes as making someone a "liar." This passage calls us to examine patterns of persistent hatred that contradict our claims of loving God. Temporary frustration or personality clashes are part of learning to love, not evidence of false faith.

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### **"What if someone is really awful, am I supposed to love people who hurt others?"**

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Love doesn't mean approving of harmful behavior or putting yourself in danger. You can love someone while opposing their actions and protecting yourself and others. Love seeks their good, which sometimes means consequences for harmful behavior. The passage challenges us not to harbor hatred that poisons our own hearts, even toward those who do wrong.

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### **"Does 'brother or sister' only mean Christians, so I can hate non-Christians?"**

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While John's immediate context refers to fellow believers, the principle extends further. Jesus commanded love for enemies and neighbors. Using this passage to justify hatred toward anyone misses the larger biblical witness. John's point is that if we can't love fellow believers who share our faith, our claim to love God is false, but this establishes a minimum, not a maximum for love.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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Love for God and love for people are so connected that hatred for visible brothers and sisters exposes the lie of claimed love for invisible God, we cannot compartmentalize love.

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

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### Your Main Job Today

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Guide students to wrestle with the uncomfortable reality that their relationships with people they can see reveal the truth about their relationship with God they cannot see. Help them explore this self-examination tool without crushing them with guilt.

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### The Tension to Frame

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Can we really love God while hating people we see? What does persistent hatred for others reveal about our claimed love for God?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate that this passage can feel challenging and uncomfortable, that reaction shows they're taking it seriously
  - Honor the complexity between normal relationship struggles and the deliberate hatred John describes
  - Let students wrestle with the implications rather than rushing to easy applications or quick fixes
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Imagine you're scrolling through social media and you see a post from someone in your class that just annoys you. Maybe they're showing off, or saying something you think is stupid, or just being themselves in a way that irritates you. You feel that familiar surge of frustration, maybe even anger.

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Now imagine you keep scrolling and see a post about faith, someone sharing a Bible verse about love, or talking about how much they love God. Maybe it's even from that same person who just annoyed you. And you think, "Yeah, right. If they really loved God, they wouldn't act like that."

But here's what gets uncomfortable: What if someone was thinking the same thing about your posts? What if the anger you felt toward that person, if it's not just temporary frustration but something deeper, what if it reveals something about your own claimed love for God?

Today we're looking at one of the most challenging passages about love in the entire Bible. It's from the apostle John, and it suggests that our relationships with people we can see are a test of our relationship with God we cannot see. Pay attention to how stark and direct John's language is here.

Open your Bibles to 1 John chapter 4, and let's read this together silently first.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Let them sit with the weight of this passage. Walk quietly around the room. Don't rush this, some will finish quickly but need time to process what they just read. Watch for facial expressions that show they're grappling with the implications.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific accusation does John make against certain people?
- What logic does John use to support his argument about love?
- What feels challenging or uncomfortable about this passage?
- How might this apply to your own life and relationships?

### 1 John 4:16-21 (NIV)

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

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

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but don't force anyone. Choose confident readers for the weighty content. Let readers pass if they want to.

**Reader 1:** Verses 16-18 (God's love foundation) **Reader 2:** Verse 19 (Source of our love) **Reader 3:** Verses 20-21 (The love test and command)

As you listen, notice the progression, from God's love for us to the test of our love for others. This isn't casual teaching; John uses the strongest possible language here.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to hear their thinking. If a group is stuck, ask "What surprised you most about John's tone here?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions you think you're supposed to ask, but questions you're actually curious about. For example: "Why does John call them liars instead of just wrong?" or "Does this mean any conflict with other people means I don't love God?" You have three minutes, go.

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

**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them struggle with the implications.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board without judging them. Look for themes. Start with questions most students will connect with.

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

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- "What specific word does John use to describe people who claim to love God but hate others?"
  - "What's John's logic about visible versus invisible love? Why does that argument work?"
  - "Is John talking about any kind of interpersonal conflict, or something more specific?"
  - "What's the difference between temporary frustration with someone and the hatred John describes?"
  - "How do you decide if your feelings toward someone cross the line John is talking about?"
  - "If someone consistently annoys you or you consistently avoid them, what might that reveal?"
  - "What would change if you took this passage seriously as self-examination?"
  - "Why does John connect this to God's command rather than just good advice?"
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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? John isn't just saying "be nice to people." He's saying that love for God and love for people are so connected that you can't have one without the other. The visible test reveals the invisible truth. If we're honest about who we might hate or consistently avoid, what does that tell us about our claimed love for God?

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

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension playing out? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, friendships. Who are the people you might struggle to love? Not just occasional irritation, but deeper patterns of avoidance or resentment.

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

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- That classmate whose social media posts consistently irritate you or make you roll your eyes
  - Family members you avoid or consistently feel frustrated with during gatherings
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- People in your friend group you secretly hope won't be included in plans
- Online interactions where you find yourself consistently negative toward certain people
- Church or youth group members you'd rather not work with on projects
- Former friends where hurt has turned into something that feels more like hatred

**Facilitation:** Don't rush to fix their relationships. Help them think through the self-examination without giving blanket advice. Some situations are complex and require wisdom, not simple answers.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone model the connection between loving God and loving difficult people?"
- "What would help you distinguish between normal relationship struggles and the pattern John describes?"
- "How do you examine your own heart honestly without becoming paralyzed by guilt?"
- "What's the difference between loving someone and approving of everything they do?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you from this challenging passage: John isn't trying to crush us with guilt but to give us a tool for honest self-examination. The people we can see become a test of our claimed relationship with the God we cannot see. This isn't about perfect relationships, it's about patterns of hatred that contradict our faith claims.

This week, pay attention to your heart responses to people around you. Notice patterns. Who do you consistently avoid? Who triggers immediate negative reactions? Don't rush to fix everything, but use these observations as prayer material. Ask God what your relationships with visible people reveal about your relationship with invisible God.

I'm grateful for how seriously you wrestled with this today. These are hard questions, and the fact that you're willing to examine them shows maturity. Keep asking the difficult questions, they're often where the most important growth happens.

# Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that loving God and loving people are connected like two parts of the same thing, you cannot separate them or choose just one.

## If Kids Ask "What if someone is really mean to me, do I have to like them?"

Say: "Loving someone doesn't mean liking everything they do or putting yourself in danger. It means not holding hatred in your heart and still wanting good things for them, even when they make bad choices."

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever said you love pizza. Keep your hands up. Now keep your hands up if you've also said you hate vegetables. Look around, lots of you can love pizza and hate vegetables at the same time, right? That makes perfect sense because pizza and vegetables are totally different things.

Now here's a harder question. Raise your hand if you've ever told God you love Him. Good. Now, raise your hand if there's someone at school, in your neighborhood, or even in your family that you really, really don't like. Maybe you even try to avoid them or hope they won't be around when you're having fun.

Here's what gets tricky: What if loving God and loving people aren't like pizza and vegetables, two totally separate things? What if they're more like... your left foot and your right foot? You can't really walk properly if one of them isn't working right. Part of you might think "I can just love God and not worry about loving difficult people," but another part might wonder if that actually works.

This is like when Elsa in Frozen tried to use her powers without caring about the people around her, or when Lightning McQueen in Cars only cared about winning races and didn't think he needed friends. They learned that what they thought they could do alone actually required connection with others.

The tricky part is figuring out whether you can really love someone you can't see (God) if you don't love the people you can see every day. Can those two kinds of love actually be separated, or are they connected in ways we might not realize?

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Today we're going to hear about what one of Jesus's closest friends, John, discovered about this question. He had some pretty strong things to say about people who claimed they loved God but hated the people around them. Let's find out what he learned and what it means for us.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share specific examples of people they struggle with. Acknowledge briefly without dwelling on details, then redirect to the bigger question about connection.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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The apostle John had been following Jesus for years, and he had learned a lot about love. In fact, people called him "the disciple whom Jesus loved" because he was so close to Jesus and understood God's love so well.

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But John was writing to churches where there was a big problem. There were people who came to church, who prayed out loud, who talked about how much they loved God and how spiritual they were. They seemed really religious and faithful.

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But here's what was happening: These same people were being really mean to other believers. They would gossip about them, exclude them from groups, say hurtful things about them, and even act like they hated them. They thought they could have a wonderful relationship with God while treating God's other children terribly.

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Imagine if you told your mom "I love you so much!" and then immediately turned around and started being cruel to your brother or sister, hitting them, calling them names, trying to get them in trouble. How do you think your mom would feel about your claim to love her?

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John was watching this happen in the churches, and it made him really upset. He realized these people were fooling themselves about what love actually means. So he decided to write them a letter that would help them understand the truth.

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John thought about how to explain this, and he came up with a really clear way to show the problem. He said something like this: "Look, you can see the people around you every day. You can watch how they

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act, you can hear what they say, you can choose whether to be kind or mean to them."

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"But God is invisible. You can't see Him with your eyes. You have to love Him by faith, by believing in Him even though you can't see Him. That's actually much harder than loving someone you can see."

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"So here's the problem with your thinking. If you can't even love the people you CAN see, the people who are right in front of you, how can you claim that you love God, who you CAN'T see? That doesn't make any sense."

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John was really direct about this. He didn't say "They're mistaken" or "They're trying their best." He said something much stronger.

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#### **1 John 4:20 (NIV)**

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

Whoa! John called them liars! That's pretty serious. He wasn't being mean, he was telling the truth about what was really happening. These people were lying to themselves about loving God while they hated people they could actually see.

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John's point was like this: Love is like a muscle. If you don't exercise a muscle, it gets weak. If you never practice loving the people you can see, how can you be strong enough to love God, who is invisible and much harder to understand?

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But John didn't stop there. He wanted to make sure they understood that this wasn't just his opinion or a good suggestion. This came from God himself.

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#### **1 John 4:21 (NIV)**

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*21 And he has given us this command: Anyone who loves God must also love their brother and sister.*

So God gave us a command, not just a suggestion, but a command. If we love God, we must also love our brothers and sisters. We can't pick just one and ignore the other.

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This means that loving God and loving people aren't two separate things we can choose between, like choosing between pizza and vegetables. They're connected, like your two hands working together to clap, or like your two legs working together to walk.

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When someone says "I love God" but consistently chooses to be hateful toward other people, it reveals that they don't really understand what love means. It's like saying "I'm great at basketball" while never being able to dribble the ball.

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The people around us, especially other believers, but really everyone, become like a test of whether our love for God is real. If we can't love people we can see, we're lying to ourselves about loving God we can't see.

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But here's the good news: God gives us the power to love both Him and the people around us. We don't have to choose. We don't have to figure out how to do it on our own. When we ask God to help us love Him, He also gives us His power to love the people who are difficult.

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Sometimes in our lives, we might feel angry or frustrated with someone, our siblings, classmates, neighbors, even people at church. Those feelings are normal and okay. But we can choose not to let those feelings turn into hatred that lives in our hearts.

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What we learn from John's letter is that God designed love to work like a complete system. When we truly love God, it shows up in how we treat people. And when we practice loving people, it helps us understand God's love better too.

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The amazing truth is that God doesn't want us to love Him OR love people, He wants us to love Him AND love people, because that's how love really works. It's all connected, like one big beautiful circle of love that starts with God, flows to us, and then flows through us to others.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine there's someone in your class who always seems to annoy you. Maybe they're loud when you want quiet, or they always want to be in charge of group projects, or they just have habits that bug you.

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You start avoiding them and maybe even hoping they won't be around. How do you think God feels when you tell Him you love Him but you're holding all that frustration and avoidance toward that person?

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**Listen For:** "God would be sad," "He wouldn't believe me", affirm: "You're right that our actions toward people affect our relationship with God."

### Question 2: The Logic

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John said it doesn't make sense to claim you love someone you can't see (God) when you hate someone you can see (people). Why do you think his logic works that way? What's easier, loving someone you can see every day, or loving someone who is invisible?

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**If They Say:** "Maybe loving God is easier because people are annoying", respond "That's an interesting point. But God sees everything we do wrong, why might He still be easier for some people?"

### Question 3: The Connection

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Think about someone you know who really seems to love God, maybe they pray a lot, read their Bible, come to church regularly. Now think about how they treat other people. Is there a connection between how they love God and how they treat people around them?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what John noticed, people who really love God show it by how they treat others."

### Question 4: The Challenge

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If you took John's teaching seriously, what would change about how you think about that annoying classmate, or your irritating sibling, or the neighbor kid who bothers you? What would it mean to love God AND love them at the same time?

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**If They Say:** "I'd have to be fake nice", respond "What's the difference between being fake and choosing loving actions even when you don't feel like it?"

You all are asking really good questions about this. John's point was that these two kinds of love, love for God and love for people, aren't separate things we can choose between. They work together like a

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team. Let's do an activity that shows how this connection works.

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

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

##### **Purpose**

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This activity physically demonstrates how love for God and love for people are connected and dependent on each other. Success looks like kids discovering that they need both "supports" working together to accomplish the goal, just like we need both loves working together.

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

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We're going to build human bridges called "Love Bridges." I need you to form groups of six. In each group, two people will be "God-love pillars", they stand facing each other about four feet apart, holding hands up high to make an arch.

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Two other people will be "People-love pillars", they also stand facing each other about four feet apart, holding hands up high. But here's the key: your four pillars need to be close enough that the arches can connect to form one long bridge.

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The last two people in your group are "love travelers", your job is to crawl under the complete bridge, from one end to the other. But here's the challenge: the bridge only works if ALL FOUR pillars stay strong and connected.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like John's teaching, you need both God-love and people-love working together to make the bridge complete. If one type of love fails, the whole bridge collapses.

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

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First, let each group set up their bridge with all four pillars connected. See how strong and complete it looks when both types of love are working together?

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Now, I want the "God-love pillars" to step away and sit down. Try to send your travelers through with only the "people-love" part of the bridge. What happens to your bridge when you only have love for people but no love for God?

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Okay, switch it. "People-love pillars" sit down, and "God-love pillars" stand back up. Now try to send your travelers through with only the "God-love" part. This represents someone who claims to love God but doesn't love the people around them.

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Notice how incomplete each bridge feels? The travelers can't make it all the way through safely. The bridge is broken when you only have one type of love.

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Now, everyone back to your complete bridge, all four pillars working together. Send your travelers through the complete love bridge. See how much better that works?

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**Watch For:** The moment when kids realize they can't complete the journey with only half the bridge, this represents John's teaching about the inseparable connection.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you only had part of the bridge versus when you had the complete bridge? This is exactly what John was teaching, love for God and love for people work together to create something complete and strong. When you try to have just one without the other, something essential is missing, and you can't complete the journey of love that God wants for us.

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

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Here's what we learned today from John's letter: God doesn't want us to choose between loving Him and loving people. He wants us to do both, because they're connected like two parts of the same bridge. When we truly love God, it shows up in how we treat others. And when we practice loving difficult people, it helps us understand God's love better.

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This doesn't mean you have to like everything everyone does, or that you can never feel frustrated with people. It means you don't let those feelings turn into hatred that lives in your heart. You can choose loving actions even when you don't feel loving emotions.

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The amazing result is that when both loves are working together, you become a bridge that other people can cross to experience God's love. Your life becomes a demonstration that God's love is real and powerful enough to love both Him and difficult people.

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

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This week, pick one person who's been difficult for you to love, maybe a sibling, classmate, or neighbor. Each day, do one small loving action for them (help them, say something kind, include them, or pray for them). Notice how practicing love for someone you can see helps you understand God's love better.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for showing us that love works best when it's complete, loving You and loving people together. Help us practice loving the people around us, even when it's hard. Give us Your power to love like Jesus did. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to love Him and love other people at the same time, both together, not just one.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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Compare loving God and people to loving your mom and your dad, you don't choose just one, you love both at the same time.

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about God's love or loving others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Love, Love, Love," or "God Is So Good." Use movements: point up during "God" words, point to each other during "love" words, hug yourself during "me" words.

---

Great singing! I heard you singing about love! Today we're going to learn about a very special kind of love. Come sit in our story horseshoe so we can hear what Jesus's friend John learned about love.

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound concerned when talking about people being mean, sound strong when sharing God's truth.

---

Today we're going to meet Jesus's friend John. John loved Jesus very much!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, smile warmly]*

---

John knew lots of people who said "I love God! I love God!" They would pray and sing and talk about God all the time.

---

*[Use excited, happy voice, then change to concerned expression]*

---

But John noticed something that made him very sad. These same people were being mean to other people! They would say mean words and do mean things.

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

---

John was confused. How could they say they love God but be mean to people? That didn't make sense to John!

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*[Move to center, speak like a wise teacher]*

---

So John wrote a letter to help people understand. He said, "Listen carefully! God wants you to love Him AND love people too!"

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*[Move to side, speak directly to children]*

---

John explained it like this: You can see people with your eyes, right? But you can't see God with your eyes. So if you can't love the people you CAN see, how can you love God who you CAN'T see?

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**1 John 4:20 (NIV)**

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**20** *Whoever claims to love God yet hates a brother or sister is a liar.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child with gentle authority]*

---

John said those people were not telling the truth! You can't really love God if you're being mean to people. Do you think John was right? Yes!

---

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

---

But then John told them the best news! God gave us a special rule that helps us know how to love.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, speaking clearly]*

---

God's rule is this: If you love God, you must also love other people! Both at the same time! Not just one, both!

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

So the people learned that love works like this: Love God AND love people. Not love God OR love people. AND! Both together!

---

*[Speak with excitement, gesture with both hands]*

---

When people understood this, they started being kind to each other. They helped each other. They shared with each other. They said nice words to each other.

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*[Pause dramatically, then speak warmly]*

---

And you know what happened? When they loved people, they felt God's love even more! God was so happy that they learned how love really works!

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*[Speak directly to the children with warmth]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we might feel upset with our brother or sister, or someone at school might be annoying. Those feelings are okay! But we can still choose to be kind and loving.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When someone is hard to love, you can pray, "God, help me love You and love this person too!" And God will help you! He gives you power to love!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves you so much, and He wants you to love Him and love everyone around you. That's how God's love grows bigger and bigger!

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

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

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

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

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#### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think God feels when we're kind to other people?
  2. Who is someone you love in your family?
  3. What does it look like to love someone who annoys you?
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4. How can you show love to someone at school?

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5. What changed when people learned to love God AND people?

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6. Why does God want us to love other people too?

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7. What would happen if everyone only loved God but not people?

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8. How can you be loving at recess or lunch?

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9. What does it feel like when someone is loving to you?

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10. Who helps you learn how to love others?

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11. Why is it important to love people you can see?

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12. How can you ask God to help you love someone difficult?

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13. What does God's love look like in action?

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14. How do you know if someone loves God?

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15. What's one way you can show love today?

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16. How does loving others help you love God?

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17. What would John say to someone being mean?

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18. How can you pray for someone who's hard to love?

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19. What if everyone loved like God wants us to?

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20. How can you be like John and teach others about love?

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

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

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

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Choose a song about love or kindness. Suggestions: "I've Got Peace Like a River" (love verse), "This Little Light of Mine," or "Love One Another." Include movements: reach up high for "God," reach out to sides for "others," hands on heart for "love."

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Beautiful singing about love! Now let's sit down for our closing prayer together. Cross your legs and fold your hands.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for teaching us about love through John's letter...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that You want us to love You and love other people too, both at the same time. When someone is hard to love, help us choose kindness anyway...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for showing us how to love like Jesus. Help us practice loving others this week so we can love You even more...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for Your big, wonderful love that teaches us how to love everyone around us. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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

Remember, God wants you to love Him AND love the people around you, both together! Have a wonderful week practicing God's kind of love. You're going to do great!

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# Unity Takes Work

*Peace Requires Intentional Effort, How do we balance unity with necessary conflict?*

**Ephesians 4:1-16**

## Instructor Preparation

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

## The Passage

**Ephesians 4:1-16 (NIV)**

*1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

*7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." 9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

## Context

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Paul writes from prison to the church in Ephesus, a diverse community struggling with unity across ethnic, social, and theological differences. The first half of Ephesians establishes their new identity in Christ; now Paul turns to practical application. This passage bridges from theological foundation to practical living, addressing the inevitable tension that arises when different people attempt to function as one body.

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Paul has just finished explaining how God broke down barriers between Jews and Gentiles, creating "one new humanity" in Christ. Now he addresses the daily challenge: how do people with different backgrounds, personalities, and opinions actually live together in love? The urgency comes from real conflict, this isn't theoretical advice but practical help for communities experiencing the strain of diversity within unity.

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## The Big Idea

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**Unity in community requires specific character virtues and intentional effort, it never happens automatically or by accident.**

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Paul's realism shows through his language: "make every effort" acknowledges that unity is fragile and takes work. The four virtues he lists, humility, gentleness, patience, and bearing with one another, aren't nice suggestions but essential requirements for community survival. This tension between idealistic unity and realistic human friction requires both character development and practical commitment.

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## Theological Core

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- **Unity as Effort.** Paul's phrase "make every effort" reveals that Christian unity is not automatic, it requires intentional work, commitment, and ongoing attention from every community member.
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- **Character Prerequisites.** Humility, gentleness, and patience aren't optional personality preferences but necessary virtues for anyone who wants to participate in authentic Christian community.
- **Bearing with Love.** The phrase "bearing with one another in love" acknowledges that people will be difficult, annoying, or disagreeable, but love chooses to stay engaged rather than withdraw.
- **Peace as Bond.** Peace functions like a rope or chain that holds unity together, without this connecting element, individual differences become divisive forces that fragment community.

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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Unity requires active effort, it doesn't happen naturally when people disagree or have different backgrounds
- The tension between maintaining peace and addressing necessary conflict requires wisdom and discernment
- Specific character virtues (humility, gentleness, patience) enable rather than weaken authentic community
- Bearing with others in love means staying engaged with difficult people rather than withdrawing or attacking

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#### Grades 4, 6

- Getting along with others takes work and specific choices about how to act
  - Being humble, gentle, and patient helps friendships and families work better
  - When someone is annoying or different, you can choose to be kind anyway
  - Feeling frustrated with someone is normal, but you can still choose to act with love
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to be kind and gentle with other people
  - God helps us be patient when someone is bothering us
  - We can choose to be nice even when someone is not nice to us
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **False Peace.** Don't suggest that unity means avoiding all conflict or never addressing problems, Paul's realism shows he expects tension and provides tools for navigating it constructively.
  - **Character Shaming.** Avoid presenting humility, gentleness, and patience as signs of weakness, these are actually strength that enables authentic relationship and community resilience.
  - **Effort Minimization.** Don't downplay Paul's phrase "make every effort", unity is difficult work that requires intentional commitment, not just good intentions or positive feelings.
  - **Individual Focus.** Remember this is about community dynamics, not just personal virtue, the goal is functional unity, not individual perfection or people-pleasing behavior.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### "What if someone is being abusive or harmful, do we still have to 'bear with them'?"

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Paul's instruction assumes people acting in good faith who are difficult or disagreeable, not those causing harm. Bearing with someone doesn't mean enabling abuse or avoiding necessary boundaries. The goal is authentic unity, not fake peace that protects harmful behavior. Sometimes love requires confrontation or separation for everyone's good, but always with the hope of eventual restoration when possible.

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### "Doesn't emphasis on unity suppress important differences or necessary social change?"

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Paul's unity isn't uniformity, he celebrates different gifts and roles throughout this passage. The question is how to navigate differences constructively rather than destructively. Unity creates a safe container for honest discussion and change. The character virtues Paul lists actually enable rather than prevent difficult conversations because they create trust and respect.

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**"How do you know when to push for change versus when to 'be patient' with how things are?"**

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This requires wisdom and discernment that grows with experience. Generally, patient bearing applies to personality differences and minor irritations, while action is needed for issues of justice, safety, or core values. The key is addressing problems with humility, gentleness, and love rather than harshness, pride, or withdrawal. The goal is always restoration of healthy relationship when possible.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Unity doesn't happen by accident, it requires specific character choices and intentional effort, especially when people disagree or annoy us.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to grapple with the tension between maintaining unity and addressing necessary conflict in relationships. Help them discover that Paul's virtues actually enable rather than weaken authentic community engagement.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When does emphasis on peace and unity become avoidance of necessary conflict? How do we balance getting along with speaking truth?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences with forced "niceness" that feels fake or stifling
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- Honor the complexity, some situations require different responses than others
  - Let them wrestle with discernment questions rather than giving simple answers
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about a group you're part of, a team, club, friend group, or even your family. Now imagine that every time someone disagrees with something, they either explode in anger or just go silent and withdraw. What happens to the group? It either becomes a war zone or splits apart, right?

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But here's the other extreme: imagine a group where everyone just smiles and says "that's fine" no matter what happens. Someone's being treated unfairly? "That's fine." Someone's making decisions that hurt people? "Let's just get along." What happens then? You get fake peace that protects problems and doesn't actually solve anything.

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This tension shows up everywhere in your life. At school, do you speak up when someone's being excluded, or do you stay quiet to avoid drama? In your family, do you address problems directly, or do you just try to keep everyone happy? Online, do you engage with people who disagree with you, or do you just block and move on?

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Today we're looking at someone who faced this exact challenge, how to build real unity in a community full of people who disagreed about almost everything. Paul is writing to a church that included Jews and non-Jews, slaves and free people, different social classes, different backgrounds. The potential for conflict was huge.

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As you read, notice what Paul says about effort, how much work does unity require? And pay attention to the specific character traits he mentions. Are these strengths or weaknesses?

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This is a dense passage with complex ideas, help with difficult words like "apportioned" or "ligament." Let early finishers think about the questions below. Watch for students who seem confused and offer quiet assistance.

**As You Read, Think About:**

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- What specific actions does Paul command regarding unity?
- Why might Paul choose these particular character traits, humble, gentle, patient?
- What's surprising or challenging about Paul's instructions?
- How would you feel if someone asked you to "bear with" a difficult person?

### **Ephesians 4:1-16 (NIV)**

*1 As a prisoner for the Lord, then, I urge you to live a life worthy of the calling you have received. 2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace. 4 There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called to one hope when you were called; 5 one Lord, one faith, one baptism; 6 one God and Father of all, who is over all and through all and in all.*

*7 But to each one of us grace has been given as Christ apportioned it. 8 This is why it says: "When he ascended on high, he took many captives and gave gifts to his people." 9 (What does "he ascended" mean except that he also descended to the lower, earthly regions? 10 He who descended is the very one who ascended higher than all the heavens, in order to fill the whole universe.) 11 So Christ himself gave the apostles, the prophets, the evangelists, the pastors and teachers, 12 to equip his people for works of service, so that the body of Christ may be built up 13 until we all reach unity in the faith and in the knowledge of the Son of God and become mature, attaining to the whole measure of the fullness of Christ.*

*14 Then we will no longer be infants, tossed back and forth by the waves, and blown here and there by every wind of teaching and by the cunning and craftiness of people in their deceitful scheming. 15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ. 16 From him the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.*

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

## Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the key command sections and the body metaphor at the end.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-6 (Paul's commands for unity) **Reader 2:** Verses 7-13 (Gifts and building up the body) **Reader 3:** Verses 14-16 (Maturity and truth in love)

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Listen for the contrast between what's immature and what's mature in how we handle differences and conflict.

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

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

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read. Not questions you already know the answers to, but things you're actually curious or confused about. For example: "Why does Paul say 'make every effort', isn't unity supposed to be natural?" or "What's the difference between being gentle and being a pushover?" You have three minutes, go.

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## Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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**Remember:** Let students drive with THEIR questions. Write their questions on the board and start with ones most students connect with. Probe deeper rather than lecturing. Guide discovery.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions. I'll write them on the board and we'll tackle the ones that interest most of you.

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## Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that Paul expects conflict and tension in this community?"
  - "Why do you think Paul lists these specific traits, humble, gentle, patient? What do they enable?"
  - "What's the difference between 'bearing with someone' and enabling bad behavior?"
-

- "How is 'speaking the truth in love' different from either brutal honesty or fake niceness?"
- "What makes unity require 'every effort' rather than just good intentions?"
- "When might pursuing unity actually be harmful or wrong?"
- "What would it look like if someone used these verses to shut down necessary confrontation?"
- "How do you tell the difference between mature conflict and immature conflict?"

## Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul isn't asking them to avoid conflict or pretend everything's fine. He's giving them tools for engaging conflict constructively rather than destructively. The humility, gentleness, and patience aren't ways to avoid problems, they're ways to address problems without destroying relationships. It's the difference between fighting to win versus fighting to solve.

## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension playing out? Where do you have to choose between fake peace and destructive conflict? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, friend groups, even global issues you care about.

## Real Issues This Connects To

- Group projects where someone isn't doing their part, confront or stay silent?
- Family dinner table discussions about politics or controversial topics
- Friend groups where someone is being excluded or treated poorly
- Social media debates about issues you care deeply about
- Team dynamics when there's conflict between players or with coaches
- Standing up for someone being bullied versus avoiding the drama

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to give answers. Some situations require different responses than others. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket rules. The goal is wisdom, not formula.

## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone handle conflict in a way that actually strengthened relationships?"
  - "What would 'speaking truth in love' look like in one of these situations?"
  - "How do you tell the difference between necessary conflict and drama?"
  - "What's the difference between humility and being a doormat?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Unity isn't about pretending everything's fine or avoiding hard conversations. It's about developing the character and skills to engage conflict constructively. Paul's virtues, humility, gentleness, patience, aren't signs of weakness. They're actually what make you strong enough to handle difficult people and situations without either exploding or running away.

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This week, pay attention to your own conflict style. Do you tend to avoid problems to keep peace, or do you jump into fights without thinking about relationships? Try experimenting with one of Paul's approaches, maybe choosing gentleness when you normally would get defensive, or being patient with someone who usually annoys you.

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The conversations you had today show you're already thinking deeply about these issues. Keep wrestling with the hard questions, that's exactly what maturity looks like. Real unity is worth the effort it takes to build it.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

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## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that getting along with others requires specific choices and effort, especially when people are different or annoying.

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

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Say: "Being gentle and patient doesn't mean letting someone hurt you. It means you get help from an adult and try to solve the problem without being mean back."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been in a group, maybe at school, on a team, or even just with your family, where people had trouble getting along. Keep your hands up if someone got really frustrated and either yelled at people or just stomped off by themselves.

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Now here's a tougher question: Have you ever been in a group where everyone just smiled and pretended everything was fine, even when someone was being left out or treated badly? Where people said "it's okay" when it really wasn't okay? That feels weird too, doesn't it? Like you're not allowed to have real feelings.

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Both of these are really frustrating. When people fight all the time, it's exhausting and mean. But when people pretend nothing's wrong, problems never get solved and people get hurt. It's like you have to choose between being fake or being mean, and neither one feels right.

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This is just like in the movie *Inside Out*, where Riley has to figure out that you can be sad and happy at the same time, or how in *Frozen*, Elsa learns that love isn't about hiding your feelings, it's about caring enough to work through problems together.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to be honest about problems without being mean to people. How do you tell someone they hurt your feelings without hurting their feelings back? How do you stand up for what's right without starting a fight?

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Today we're going to hear about a really smart leader named Paul who had to help a whole group of people learn how to get along. These people came from totally different backgrounds and disagreed about lots of things. But Paul discovered something important about what it really takes to build friendships and families that work. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to both fighting and fake peace experiences. Acknowledge their examples briefly: "That sounds really hard" or "You're right, that doesn't feel good." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Paul was sitting in a dark prison cell, but his mind was on his friends far away. These friends were part of a church in the big city of Ephesus, and Paul loved them very much.

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But Paul had a problem. He kept hearing stories about how his friends were having trouble getting along with each other. Some of them used to be Jewish, and they had grown up following certain rules and traditions. Others weren't Jewish at all, they came from completely different cultures with different foods, different languages, even different ideas about right and wrong.

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Some people in the church were rich, with big houses and fancy clothes. Others were poor, maybe even slaves who didn't own anything at all. Some were really smart and educated, while others couldn't even read.

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Imagine being in a group like that! It would be like trying to be best friends with someone who speaks a different language, eats completely different food, and has totally different rules in their family. Even when you want to get along, it's really hard to understand each other.

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Paul could picture what was happening. Someone would suggest doing something one way, and someone else would say, "That's not how we do it!" People's feelings were getting hurt. Some were getting angry and arguing. Others were just staying quiet and avoiding each other.

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So Paul decided to write them a letter. But he didn't just say "be nice to each other." He knew that getting along takes more than just wanting to get along. It takes specific skills, like learning to ride a bike or play a sport. You have to practice certain things.

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Paul thought carefully about what really helps people live together peacefully. Then he wrote down exactly what they needed to do.

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First, he told them about where their friendship was supposed to come from. They all belonged to the same God, who loved each of them equally, no matter where they came from or what they looked like. That was their starting place, they were already family because of God's love.

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But then came the hard part. Paul knew that just because they were supposed to be family didn't mean it would be easy. So he gave them a list of specific things to practice.

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**Ephesians 4:2-3 (NIV)**

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*2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love. 3 Make every effort to keep the unity of the Spirit through the bond of peace.*

Let's break this down, because each word matters. First, Paul said "be completely humble." Humble means you don't think you're more important than everyone else. You listen to other people's ideas instead of assuming yours are always right.

Then he said "be gentle." Gentle means you don't use harsh words or a mean tone of voice, even when you're frustrated. You handle people's feelings carefully, like holding a baby bird.

Next: "be patient." Patient means you don't expect people to change immediately or understand everything right away. You give them time to learn and grow.

And here's the really important part: "bearing with one another in love." Bearing with someone means you stay with them even when they're annoying or difficult. You don't just walk away or give up on them. Love means you keep trying to work things out.

#### **Ephesians 4:15 (NIV)**

*15 Instead, speaking the truth in love, we will grow to become in every respect the mature body of him who is the head, that is, Christ.*

But notice, Paul didn't say to just be quiet and pretend everything was fine. He said "speak the truth in love." That means you can tell someone when something is wrong, but you do it in a way that shows you care about them, not in a way that's meant to hurt them.

Then Paul said something really interesting. He said "make every effort." That means getting along doesn't just happen automatically. You have to work at it, just like you have to work at learning math or getting better at sports.

Paul explained that when people practice these things, humility, gentleness, patience, and speaking truth with love, something amazing happens. Instead of fighting all the time or avoiding each other, they start working together like parts of the same body.

Think about how your body works. Your hands don't compete with your feet about who's more important. Your eyes don't get jealous of your ears. Every part does its own job, but they all work

together to help you run and play and hug people and create things.

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That's what Paul wanted for his friends. He wanted them to discover that their differences could actually make them stronger, like how a sports team is better when people have different skills, some are fast, some are strong, some are good at planning strategy.

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But it only works when everyone practices those four things: being humble instead of thinking you're always right, being gentle instead of harsh, being patient instead of demanding, and caring enough to tell the truth when something's wrong.

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The people who got Paul's letter tried it, and you know what? It worked. Not perfectly, they still had disagreements sometimes. But they learned how to disagree without being mean. They learned how to solve problems without destroying friendships.

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Sometimes in our lives, we're in groups where people come from different backgrounds or have different ideas. Maybe your classmates come from different kinds of families. Maybe your team has kids who are really different from you. Maybe even in your own family, people have different personalities.

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What we learn from Paul's letter is that getting along isn't about pretending to be the same or never having problems. It's about learning specific skills, like being humble, gentle, patient, and truthful with love. When you practice those things, you can have real friendships with all kinds of different people.

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The amazing thing Paul discovered is that when you put effort into getting along with people, you don't just avoid fights. You actually create something beautiful, a community where everyone belongs and everyone's gifts can shine.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Hard Feelings

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Imagine you're working on a group project at school, and one person keeps interrupting everyone and acting like their ideas are the only good ones. You start feeling really frustrated and annoyed. What would "being humble and gentle" look like in that situation? What would you want to say, and what

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might actually help?

**Listen For:** "Tell the teacher," "Get mad at them", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Your brain is trying to solve a problem. What do you think humble and gentle would add to those solutions?"

### Question 2: The Patience Challenge

Paul said to be patient and "bear with one another." Think about someone in your life who does something that really bugs you, maybe they're always slow, or they ask the same questions over and over, or they make weird noises. What do you think it means to "bear with" that person instead of just avoiding them or getting annoyed?

**If They Say:** "Just ignore them", respond: "What's the difference between ignoring someone and bearing with them? Paul seems to think bearing with is more active than just ignoring."

### Question 3: Truth and Love

Paul said to speak "truth in love." Imagine your friend keeps leaving you out when they make plans with other people, and it really hurts your feelings. What would be the difference between speaking truth in love versus just staying quiet or getting revenge? What would truth-in-love words actually sound like?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Paul's advice so helpful, he knew people needed to address real problems, but in a way that fixes relationships instead of breaking them."

### Question 4: The Effort Part

Paul said "make every effort" to keep unity. Why do you think getting along requires effort? Why doesn't it just happen automatically when people want to be friends? Think about your own experience with groups that work well versus groups that don't.

**If They Say:** "Because people are different", respond: "Exactly! So what kind of effort do you think helps people bridge those differences instead of letting them become walls?"

You guys are thinking really carefully about this. Paul discovered that real friendship and real teamwork requires specific skills, just like any other skill. You don't automatically know how to be humble or gentle or patient, you have to practice. But when you do, amazing things become possible. Let's try an activity that shows what this looks like.

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

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

##### **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces that unity requires cooperation and patience by having kids physically experience how different people with different strengths must work together to accomplish a common goal. Success looks like kids discovering that their differences become assets when they practice humility, gentleness, and patience with each other.

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

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We're going to build a Unity Bridge. I'm going to divide you into two groups. Each group will start on opposite sides of the room. Your challenge is to build a human bridge that connects your two groups, but here's the catch: you can only use your bodies, and every single person has to be part of the bridge.

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But here's the tricky part: each person can only use one hand and one foot to touch the floor or other people. So if you're tall, you'll need to work with people who are shorter. If you're flexible, you might help in ways that people who aren't flexible can't. Everyone's differences become important for solving this together.

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And here's the most important rule: if anyone gets frustrated or starts being bossy, the bridge collapses and you have to start over. You have to use Paul's skills, humility, gentleness, and patience, to make this work.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul was teaching his friends, different people with different abilities learning to work together by practicing specific character skills.

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

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At first, let them struggle to figure out the logistics. Some kids will naturally try to take charge while others hang back. Let them experience the initial confusion of coordinating different body sizes, strengths, and ideas without immediately giving guidance.

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As they encounter the challenge of the physical coordination, watch for moments when someone gets frustrated or starts being demanding. This is when you pause and remind them: "Remember Paul's rules, what character skill do you need right now?"

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When you see someone starting to figure out how to include others or ask for help instead of demanding, highlight it: "I noticed how Sarah just asked gently for help instead of telling people what to do. That's exactly what humility looks like in action."

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Look for the breakthrough moment when they realize they need everyone's different abilities, tall kids, short kids, flexible kids, strong kids, and that bossing people around makes it harder, while gentle cooperation makes it possible.

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Once they succeed in forming a stable bridge with everyone included, have them freeze and notice how it feels to be connected and supporting each other, versus how it felt when people were frustrated or left out at the beginning.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses patience over frustration or asks for help humbly instead of bossing others around, this is the physical representation of Paul's unity skills in action.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when people were getting frustrated and bossy versus when you were being patient and working together? This is exactly what Paul was talking about, your differences weren't the problem. The problem was how you handled your differences. When you practiced humility, gentleness, and patience, your differences actually made you stronger and helped you accomplish something none of you could do alone.

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

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Here's what we learned today: Getting along with people isn't about pretending to be the same or avoiding all problems. It's about learning specific skills, being humble instead of bossy, being gentle instead of harsh, being patient instead of demanding, and telling the truth in a way that shows you care.

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This doesn't mean you let people be mean to you or that you never speak up about problems. It means you learn how to address problems in ways that build friendships instead of destroying them.

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The amazing result is that when you practice these skills, you can be friends with all kinds of different people. Your differences don't have to be walls between you, they can actually make your friendships and teams stronger, just like how different instruments make music sound better than just one instrument playing alone.

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

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Pick one person in your life who sometimes annoys you or is really different from you. This week, try practicing one of Paul's skills with that person, maybe being more patient when they're slow, or being more humble when they have different ideas. See what happens when you make effort to get along instead of just hoping it will work out on its own.

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

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*God, thank you for making us all different in special ways. Help us learn how to be humble, gentle, and patient with other people, especially when they're different from us or when they annoy us. Help us remember that getting along takes effort, and give us your help to keep trying even when it's hard. Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind, gentle, and patient with others even when it's hard.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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## If Kids Don't Understand

Compare being gentle to holding a baby animal, you touch softly because you don't want to hurt them. Ask "How do you hold a kitten?"

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

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness and patience. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love One Another," or "God Wants Us to Be Kind." Use gentle hand movements during words like "kind" and "gentle", soft patting motions or gentle hugs.

Great singing! I love how gentle your voices sounded when we sang about kindness. Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape to hear about someone who learned a very important lesson about being kind and patient with others.

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

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

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, gentle voice when talking about being gentle, excited voice when talking about friends working together. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when talking about arguing, sound happy when talking about getting along.

Today we're going to meet a very special man named Paul who loved Jesus and loved helping people learn how to be friends.

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

Paul had many friends in a place called Ephesus. But you know what? These friends were having trouble getting along with each other. Some of them were different colors. Some were rich and some were poor. Some liked different foods and spoke different languages.

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*[Make a frustrated face and voice]*

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Sometimes they would argue! Some would say "We do it THIS way!" and others would say "No, we do it THAT way!" Their feelings were getting hurt and they were not being very nice to each other.

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

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Paul heard about this and felt sad. He loved all these friends so much! He wanted them to be happy together. So he decided to write them a very important letter to help them learn how to get along.

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

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In his letter, Paul told them exactly what God wanted them to do. He said they should be humble. Humble means you don't think you're better than everyone else. You listen to other people too.

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*[Move to side, use very gentle voice and movements]*

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Paul said they should be gentle. Gentle means you use a soft voice and kind words, even when you're upset. Like how you pet a puppy very softly so you don't hurt it.

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**Ephesians 4:2 (NIV)**

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*2 Be completely humble and gentle; be patient, bearing with one another in love.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Paul also said to be patient. Patient means you don't get angry right away when someone is being slow or doesn't understand. You wait and you help them. Do you think that was good advice? Yes!

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*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

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And here's the really special part, Paul said to "bear with one another in love." That means even when someone is bothering you, you don't walk away or be mean back. You keep being kind because you love them.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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Paul said this is how God wants all his children to treat each other. Not just when it's easy, but especially when it's hard! When someone is being annoying or different from you, God still wants you to be humble, gentle, patient, and loving.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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You know what happened when Paul's friends read his letter? They tried doing what he said! Instead of arguing all the time, they started being more gentle. Instead of being bossy, they started being more humble.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what? They started getting along so much better! They learned that being different was okay, it actually made them stronger when they worked together with kindness.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God wants the same thing for you! God wants you to be humble, gentle, and patient with your friends, your family, and even with kids who are different from you or who sometimes bother you.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school, someone might cut in line or take your crayon. Sometimes your brother or sister might be annoying. Sometimes a friend might not want to play the game you want to play.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When that happens, you can remember Paul's advice. You can choose to be gentle instead of mean. You can choose to be patient instead of getting angry right away. You can choose to be loving even when someone is bothering you.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God will help you be kind and patient, even when it's hard. And when you practice being humble, gentle, and patient, something wonderful happens, you make really good friends and your family gets along better too!

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### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

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#### Discussion Questions

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

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1. How do you think Paul's friends felt when they were arguing all the time?
  2. What does it mean to be gentle with someone? Can you show me with your hands?
  3. When is it hard for you to be patient?
  4. What would you do if someone took your toy and you wanted to be gentle like Paul said?
  5. How do you think Paul's friends felt after they started being kind to each other?
  6. Why do you think God wants us to be humble?
  7. What's the difference between being gentle and being mean?
  8. When someone at school is bothering you, what could you do to be patient?
  9. Who in your family do you need to be more patient with?
  10. Can you think of someone who is always gentle and kind?
  11. What happens when everyone in a family is kind to each other?
  12. How can you be humble when you really want to go first?
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13. How does God help us be patient when it's hard?

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14. What does it mean to love someone even when they're being annoying?

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15. When you're gentle with someone, how does that make them feel?

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16. Why do you think being patient is better than getting angry?

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17. What did Paul's friends learn about getting along?

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18. How can you ask God to help you be kind?

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19. What would happen if everyone at school was humble and gentle?

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20. How can you be like Paul's friends this week?

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

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

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

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Choose a song about being kind or patient. Include movements like gentle patting motions for "gentle," slow movements for "patient," and pointing to yourself then others for "humble." Examples: "I Will Be Kind," "God's Love," or "Gentle Jesus."

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Beautiful singing! I loved watching you move gently during that song. Now let's sit quietly for prayer and thank God for helping us be kind to others.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Paul and his friends who learned how to be kind.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to be humble, gentle, and patient with our friends and family. Help us use kind words and soft voices, even when someone is bothering us.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving us and helping us learn how to love others. Help us be like Paul's friends who learned to get along. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind. Examples: "God, help me be patient with my sister" or "Thank you for teaching us to be gentle."

Remember, God wants you to be humble, gentle, and patient with others, and God will help you! Have a wonderful week practicing kindness with everyone you meet.

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# Love Builds, Fighting Destroys

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*Community Choice, When does conflict become destructive?*

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**Galatians 5:13-16**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**Galatians 5:13-16 (NIV)**

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*13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not gratify the desires of the flesh.*

## Context

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Paul's letter to the Galatian churches addresses a bitter controversy about whether Gentile Christians must follow Jewish law to be fully accepted by God. False teachers insisted that circumcision and law-keeping were necessary for salvation, while Paul argued that Christ's work was sufficient. This theological dispute had become personal and divisive, threatening to tear these young Christian communities apart.

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Just before this passage, Paul had been arguing forcefully for Christian freedom from the law as a means of salvation. Now he addresses the potential misuse of that freedom and its consequences. The Galatians were experiencing destructive internal conflict, ironically, their arguments about keeping the law were causing them to violate the law's central commandment to love their neighbors.

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## The Big Idea

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**The entire law is summarized in neighbor-love, but communities that "bite and devour" each other through internal conflict will destroy themselves.**

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Paul presents a stark either-or choice with no middle ground. Communities either fulfill God's intent through love, or they self-destruct through destructive conflict. The irony is profound, the Galatians' disputes about law-keeping were causing them to violate the law's most fundamental principle. This principle extends beyond theological disagreements to any community where winning internal battles becomes more important than preserving relationships.

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## Theological Core

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- **Law Fulfilled in Love.** All of God's commandments find their ultimate expression and completion in genuine love for one's neighbor, not perfect adherence to rules, but active care for others' wellbeing.
  - **Destructive Conflict Pattern.** "Biting and devouring" describes conflict that seeks to wound, defeat, or eliminate rather than resolve differences, the pattern that inevitably leads to community breakdown.
  - **Mutual Destruction.** Internal conflict doesn't just harm relationships; it destroys the community itself, making it impossible to accomplish any shared purpose or mission.
  - **Community Choice.** Every community faces the fundamental choice between love that builds and conflict that destroys, there is no sustainable middle ground between these approaches.
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## Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- How to distinguish between healthy conflict that strengthens relationships and destructive conflict that tears them apart
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- Why good intentions in disagreements can still lead to community destruction if we're not careful about our methods
- That love isn't just a feeling but a practical choice about how to handle differences and disagreements
- How to evaluate their own communities for "biting and devouring" patterns and work toward love-based resolution

## Grades 4, 6

- That when groups fight internally, everyone loses, even the "winners"
- How to make choices that build up their teams, families, and friendships rather than tear them down
- That God's rules all come down to one thing: loving other people well
- That feelings of anger or frustration are normal, but we can still choose loving actions even when we feel upset

## Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to love each other, not fight and hurt each other
- When we're kind to others, it makes everyone happier
- We can choose to be loving even when we feel upset or angry

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **False Conflict/Peace Dichotomy.** Don't suggest that all conflict is bad or that peace requires avoiding difficult conversations. The issue isn't conflict itself but "biting and devouring", conflict that seeks to harm rather than resolve differences constructively.
- **Oversimplified Love Definition.** Avoid reducing love to mere niceness or emotional warmth. Paul's concept of neighbor-love includes truth-telling, accountability, and working through disagreements, but always with the goal of building up rather than tearing down.

- **Individual Versus Community Focus.** Don't make this solely about personal relationships. Paul is addressing community patterns and systemic approaches to handling differences within groups, not just one-on-one interactions.
  - **Missing the Irony.** The Galatians' conflict was about law-keeping, yet their methods violated the law's central principle. Help students see how easy it is to undermine our own stated values through destructive conflict patterns, even with good intentions.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What about when someone is really wrong and needs to be stopped?"**

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Great question, there's a difference between addressing harmful behavior and "biting and devouring." When someone needs correction, love seeks their good and the community's health, not just winning or punishment. Ask: "Are we trying to help this person and protect others, or are we trying to hurt and defeat them?" The goal matters as much as the action. Even necessary correction can be done with love as the driving force.

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### **"Doesn't this just let people get away with bad stuff?"**

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Actually, love often requires harder conversations and more accountability than conflict-based approaches. But love-driven correction seeks restoration and protection, while "biting and devouring" seeks victory and elimination. Love doesn't avoid difficult truths, it delivers them in ways meant to heal rather than destroy. Sometimes the most loving thing is setting firm boundaries or confronting harmful behavior directly.

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### **"How can you tell the difference between healthy and destructive conflict?"**

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Look at the goal and the methods. Healthy conflict seeks understanding, resolution, and stronger relationships, even when it involves strong disagreement. Destructive conflict seeks to win, harm, or eliminate the other party. Ask yourself: "Am I trying to understand and find a solution, or am I trying to defeat this person?" Also consider: "Would I handle this the same way if I genuinely wanted what's best for this person and our relationship?"

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**Communities thrive through love and self-destruct through internal warfare, we get to choose which pattern we create.**

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

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to examine the difference between healthy disagreement and destructive conflict in their own communities. Help them see how easy it is to slip from resolving differences into "biting and devouring" patterns, even with good intentions.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When does standing up for what's right become destructive to the community you're trying to help? How do we handle real differences without "biting and devouring" each other?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate that some conflicts feel completely justified, Paul's opponents probably felt the same way
  - Help students examine methods and goals, not just positions or issues
  - Let them wrestle with the complexity rather than offering simple answers
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Imagine you're part of a group project where half the team thinks you should do it one way and half thinks you should do it completely differently. Both sides have good points. Both sides care about getting a good grade. But the discussions are getting heated. People are questioning each other's intelligence. Some are forming side alliances and talking behind others' backs. Sound familiar?

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Now here's what's weird: everyone started with the same goal, doing well on the project. Everyone had good intentions. But somehow the way you're handling your differences is actually making it impossible

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to succeed on the thing you all care about. The arguing has become more important than the project itself.

Today we're looking at a community that faced something eerily similar. The early church in Galatia had a theological disagreement about how to follow God properly. Both sides cared deeply about faith. Both sides had Bible verses to back up their positions. But their methods of handling the disagreement were destroying the very community they claimed to care about.

As we read, pay attention to the language Paul uses to describe what's happening to them. Notice the stark choice he presents, there's no middle ground here. And think about communities you're part of where this same pattern might be playing out in different forms.

Let's open to Galatians 5:13-16 and start by reading silently. Take your time with it.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage is short but dense, let them sit with the contrast between love fulfilling the law versus biting and devouring destroying community. Watch for puzzled faces and be ready to clarify vocabulary like "flesh" or "gratify."

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors does Paul warn against, and what does he recommend instead?
- Why might people who care about following God's rules end up "biting and devouring" each other?
- What's surprising or challenging about Paul's solution to their community problems?
- Where have you seen this "love versus conflict" dynamic play out in groups you know?

### Galatians 5:13-16 (NIV)

*13 You, my brothers and sisters, were called to be free. But do not use your freedom to indulge the flesh; rather, serve one another humbly in love. 14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. 16 So I say, walk by the Spirit, and you will not*

*gratify the desires of the flesh.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read with expression, this has contrast and drama. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the sharp warning language in verse 15.

**Reader 1:** Verse 13 (Paul's foundational principle about freedom and service) **Reader 2:** Verse 14 (The law fulfilled in love) **Reader 3:** Verses 15-16 (The warning about destruction and the Spirit alternative)

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Listen for the tension in Paul's tone, he's not just teaching here, he's giving an urgent warning about something he sees happening right now in their community.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What struck you as most surprising?" or "What would you want to understand better?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what we just read. Not questions you already know the answers to, but things you're actually curious about or confused by. Maybe something that surprised you, or something that connects to your life in an unexpected way. You have 3 minutes. Ask what you're really wondering about.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive this with their questions. You're here to facilitate discovery and probe deeper, not to lecture. Follow their curiosity and help them see the patterns.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around conflict, love, community breakdown, or practical application. Start with questions most students will relate to.

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#### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that the Galatians were already 'biting and devouring' each other?"

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- "Why do you think Paul says the 'entire law' is fulfilled in neighbor-love? What does that suggest about how God views rules versus relationships?"

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- "What's the difference between disagreeing with someone and 'biting and devouring' them?"

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- "Paul warns they'll be 'destroyed by each other', what does community destruction actually look like?"

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- "How can people who care deeply about doing the right thing end up destroying their own community?"

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- "Where do you see 'biting and devouring' patterns in communities you know, school, teams, online spaces, even families?"

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- "What would have happened if the Galatians had chosen a different way to handle their theological disagreement?"

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- "Why is this either-or choice between love and destruction so important for any community that wants to survive?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what Paul is pointing out here? The Galatians were so focused on being right about following God's law that they forgot the law's central point, loving their neighbors. They were destroying their community in the name of saving it. Paul's saying there's no middle ground: communities either build each other up through love or tear each other apart through destructive conflict. And here's the kicker, even people with good intentions can slip into the "biting and devouring" pattern without realizing it.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension between love and destructive conflict playing out? Think about school groups, sports teams, friend circles, family dynamics, online communities, even church youth groups. Where have you seen communities start with good intentions but slip into "biting and devouring" patterns?

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

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- Group projects where personal conflicts overshadow the actual assignment and everyone's grades suffer
- Family arguments that start over legitimate issues but escalate into personal attacks and lasting resentment
- Friend groups that split into factions over disagreements, leaving everyone feeling isolated and hurt
- Social media debates where the goal shifts from understanding to "destroying" the other person's credibility
- Team conflicts where players are more focused on being right than winning games together
- School or community issues where people become more invested in defeating opponents than solving actual problems

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to fix everything. Some situations are genuinely complex. Help them think through what love-based versus conflict-based approaches might look like rather than giving simple solutions.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen a group successfully work through major disagreements without 'biting and devouring'? What made the difference?"
- "What would help you recognize when you're slipping from healthy disagreement into destructive conflict?"
- "How do you balance standing up for important principles with preserving relationships and community?"
- "What's the difference between loving someone and just avoiding conflict to keep the peace?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Paul isn't saying avoid all conflict or never disagree with people. He's saying that how we handle our differences determines whether our communities thrive or self-destruct. Love doesn't mean being nice, it means genuinely seeking what's best for people and for

the community, even in difficult conversations.

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This week, pay attention to the communities you're part of. Notice when conflicts feel like they're building something versus when they feel like they're tearing people apart. Experiment with asking yourself: "Am I trying to understand and find solutions, or am I trying to win and defeat?" See what happens when you choose love-driven responses, even in frustrating situations.

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You guys did excellent thinking today. Keep wrestling with these hard questions about how to navigate differences without destroying the relationships and communities you care about. You're developing wisdom that will serve you well in every area of life.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that fighting within groups hurts everyone, while choosing to love each other helps the whole community succeed and thrive.

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### If Kids Ask "What if someone is being really mean and won't stop?"

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Say: "Great question! Sometimes we do need to tell a teacher or parent when someone is hurting others. But even then, we're trying to help everyone be safe, not trying to hurt the mean person back."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been part of a team or group where people started arguing and fighting with each other instead of working together. Maybe a sports team, a class project, or even your family. Keep your hands up if that fighting made it harder for your group to do what you were supposed to do together.

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Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where the fighting got so bad that even when people got what they wanted, nobody felt happy about it anymore. Like, maybe your team won an argument about strategy, but now half the players don't want to play together. Or

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your family figured out who was right about something, but now everyone's upset and dinner is awkward.

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That feeling you get when the arguing becomes bigger than the thing you were trying to accomplish? That's totally normal. It happens because sometimes we get so focused on proving we're right that we forget about taking care of each other. And here's the weird thing, we can actually destroy the very group we're trying to help.

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It's like in movies when the good guys start fighting each other so much that they can't defeat the real villain anymore. Think about superhero teams like the Avengers when they spend more time arguing with each other than working together. What happens? The bad guys get stronger while the heroes tear each other apart.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to handle disagreements and problems without destroying the team, family, or group you care about. How do you solve real issues while still taking care of each other?

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Today we're going to hear about some early Christians who faced exactly this problem. They cared deeply about following God, but their arguments about the right way to do it were actually tearing their church community apart. Let's find out what happened and what they learned about choosing love over fighting.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will likely relate to team conflicts, sibling arguments, or class project drama.

Acknowledge these briefly with "Yeah, that's exactly what I'm talking about" to validate their experiences before moving to the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Long ago, there were groups of Christians in different cities who loved Jesus and wanted to follow God in the best way possible. These weren't bad people, they were people who genuinely cared about doing what was right.

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But they had a big disagreement. Some people said, "If you really want to follow God, you have to follow all the old rules from the Old Testament, including some really specific ones about food and ceremonies." Other people said, "No, Jesus already did everything we need. We don't have to follow all those old rules anymore."

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Now, both sides had good reasons for what they believed. Both sides could point to parts of the Bible that supported their position. Both sides genuinely loved God and wanted their churches to honor Him. So far, this sounds like a normal disagreement, right?

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But then something sad started happening. Instead of talking respectfully about their different ideas, people began attacking each other personally. They started questioning each other's faith. They formed little groups within the church and stopped talking to people who disagreed with them.

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The apostle Paul heard about what was happening in these churches, and he was really concerned. He could see that these good people with good intentions were about to destroy something beautiful, their Christian community.

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So Paul wrote them a letter. And here's the most important part of what he told them:

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**Galatians 5:14-15 (NIV)**

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*14 For the entire law is fulfilled in keeping this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself."  
15 If you bite and devour each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other.*

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Paul was telling them something really important: "You're arguing about the right way to follow God's rules, but you're forgetting the most important rule of all, love each other! All of God's rules come down to one thing: love your neighbor as much as you love yourself."

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And then he gave them a very serious warning. He said their fighting was like wild animals "biting and devouring" each other. When animals fight like that, they hurt each other so badly that sometimes both animals end up wounded or dead, even the one who "wins" the fight.

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Paul was saying, "If you keep attacking each other like this, you're going to destroy your entire church community. Nobody will win. Everyone will lose. The arguing will tear apart everything you've built together."

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Think about what this meant. These people started out wanting to honor God and build a strong church. But their methods were actually going to destroy the very thing they wanted to protect. Their community would fall apart, new people wouldn't want to join a fighting church, and even the people involved would end up hurt and bitter.

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But Paul didn't just tell them what not to do. He gave them a better way: "Instead of biting and devouring each other, choose to love each other. Serve each other. Look out for each other's good, not just your own."

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He was showing them that God's heart is about love, not about winning arguments. When people love each other, really love each other, they find ways to work through disagreements without destroying their relationships.

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What happened when some of these Christians started following Paul's advice? Their churches became stronger, not weaker. People felt safer sharing their thoughts because they knew others wouldn't attack them personally. They found creative solutions to their problems because they were working together instead of against each other.

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Most importantly, people outside the church looked at these communities and said, "Wow, look how those Christians love each other, even when they disagree about things. Maybe there's something special about following Jesus."

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Sometimes in our lives, in our families, our classrooms, our teams, we have the same choice Paul was talking about. We can choose the "biting and devouring" path where we try to win arguments and prove we're right, even if it hurts people. Or we can choose the love path, where we work together to solve problems while taking care of each other.

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Here's what Paul learned and what those early Christians learned: Love doesn't mean you never disagree with people. Love doesn't mean you ignore problems or let people get away with harmful behavior. But love means that even when you have to address difficult issues, you're trying to help people and strengthen your community, not tear it down.

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God's biggest rule, the one that's more important than all the others, is to love your neighbor as much as you love yourself. When we do that, amazing things happen. When we don't, even good people with good intentions can destroy something beautiful.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Hard Feelings

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Imagine you're part of a group project and half your team wants to do a poster while the other half wants to build a model. You really, truly believe your idea is better and will get a higher grade. But the discussion is getting heated and people are starting to say mean things about each other's ideas. How would you be feeling inside?

**Listen For:** "Frustrated," "Mad," "Like they don't understand", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. When you care about something, disagreements can feel really intense."

### Question 2: The Slippery Slope

Now imagine that argument about posters versus models gets so bad that your team splits into two groups, people start saying the other side's ideas are "stupid," and by the end, everyone's so upset that nobody wants to work together anymore. What just happened to your chances of getting a good grade?

**If They Say:** "Everyone would fail" or "The project would be ruined", respond: "Exactly! The fighting hurt the very thing you all cared about. That's what Paul meant by 'destroyed by each other.'"

### Question 3: The Love Choice

What do you think Paul meant when he said the solution is to "love your neighbor as yourself"? If you were in that group project situation, what might love look like while you're still trying to make the best decision for your team?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made those early Christians' choice so important, they had to learn to care about each other while still caring about doing the right thing."

### Question 4: The Ripple Effect

Think about a family, classroom, or team where people choose love over fighting when they disagree. What would that feel like to be part of? What would other people think when they watched that group handle problems together?

**If They Say:** "It would feel safe" or "People would want to join", affirm: "Yes! Love creates the kind of communities where people want to belong and where amazing things can happen."

You guys are getting it! Paul discovered that love isn't just about being nice, it's about choosing ways to solve problems that build up your community instead of tearing it apart. Now let's do an activity to experience what this looks like.

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

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

##### **Purpose**

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This activity reinforces that communities succeed through cooperation and mutual support, not through internal competition. Kids will physically experience how "biting and devouring" patterns make success impossible, while love-based cooperation enables everyone to achieve their goals. Success looks like kids discovering that helping each other is the only way the whole group can win.

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

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We're going to do an activity called Bridge Builders. I need you to divide into two equal groups and line up facing each other about six feet apart. Each group represents one side of a river, and your goal is to get your entire group safely to the other side.

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Here are the rules: You can only move by stepping on "stones" in the river. The stones are invisible, but they only appear when someone from the opposite group reaches out and offers you their hand to step on. You cannot create stones for your own team, only for the other team.

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Here's the twist that makes this like the Galatians' situation: each group will be tempted to focus only on getting their own people across first. But if you do that, if you "bite and devour" by competing instead of cooperating, both groups will get stuck in the middle of the river and nobody wins.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul was teaching: when communities help each other succeed, everyone wins. When they compete and fight, everyone loses, even the people who seem to be "winning" at first.

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

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Let them start and watch what happens initially. Most groups will try to get their own people across first without thinking about helping the other team. Let this go for about a minute so they can experience the frustration of getting stuck.

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As they struggle, you'll see the "aha" moment coming. Some kids will realize that they need to help the other team in order for anyone to succeed. When you see that realization starting, encourage it without giving away the answer.

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Use coaching phrases like: "I notice both teams are stuck in the middle now. I wonder what would happen if you tried a completely different approach?" or "What if instead of focusing on beating the other team, you focused on how to help everyone get across safely?"

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The breakthrough comes when someone decides to reach out and help someone from the opposite team instead of just focusing on their own group's progress. Celebrate this moment loudly: "Did you see what just happened? That choice to help instead of compete just changed everything!"

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Once they've got the cooperative approach going, let them complete the activity successfully. Then have them notice the difference: "Look around, everyone made it across safely! How does this feel different from when you were competing?"

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**Watch For:** The moment when a student chooses to help the opposing team instead of advancing their own team, this is the physical representation of choosing love over "biting and devouring."

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you were competing versus when you started cooperating? When you focused on beating the other team, both teams got stuck and frustrated. But the moment you started helping each other, suddenly everyone could succeed! That's exactly what Paul was teaching those early Christians: love doesn't make you weak, it makes everyone stronger.

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

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Here's what we learned today: God's most important rule is to love our neighbors as much as we love ourselves. When groups choose love, they get stronger and accomplish amazing things together. When they choose fighting and competition, they "bite and devour" each other until everyone loses.

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This doesn't mean you never disagree with people or that you ignore real problems. But it means that even when you have to work through difficult situations, you're trying to help your whole community succeed, not just trying to win or prove you're right.

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The amazing result is that when people choose love over fighting, they create the kind of families, classrooms, teams, and friendships where everyone feels safe, problems get solved creatively, and people from the outside want to join because it looks so good.

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

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This week, pay attention to one group you're part of, your family, your class, a sports team, or a friend group. When disagreements or problems come up, try asking yourself: "How can I handle this in a way that helps our whole group, not just gets me what I want?" See what happens when you choose the love path instead of the fighting path.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for teaching us that love is more important than winning arguments. Help us choose love when we disagree with people in our families, schools, and teams. Give us wisdom to solve problems in ways that help everyone, not just ourselves. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God wants us to love each other, not fight and hurt each other.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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Compare fighting in groups to breaking a toy, when pieces fight each other, the whole toy breaks and nobody can play with it anymore.

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about loving others or being kind. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: point to others during "love one another," open arms wide during "Jesus loves," and gentle patting motions during "be kind."

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Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because I have an important story to tell you about some people who had to choose between fighting and loving. This is going to be really good!

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound concerned when you talk about fighting, sound warm and happy when you talk about loving each other.

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Today we're going to meet some people who loved Jesus very much and wanted to make God happy.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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These people went to church together and were friends. But then something sad started to happen. They began to argue about the best way to follow God.

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*[Use a worried expression and concerned voice]*

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The arguing got worse and worse. Instead of talking nicely to each other, they started saying mean things. They stopped being friends with people who disagreed with them.

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, shake your head sadly]*

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A man named Paul heard about the fighting. Paul loved Jesus and he loved these people very much. He was worried because he could see they were hurting each other.

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

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So Paul wrote them a letter. He said, "God wants you to love each other! That's the most important thing. Don't bite and fight like angry animals!"

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*[Move to side, sound alarmed]*

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Paul warned them: "If you keep fighting and hurting each other, your whole church will break apart! Nobody will be happy!"

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#### **Galatians 5:14-15 (NIV)**

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*Paul wrote: "Love your neighbor as yourself. If you bite and devour each other, you will be destroyed by each other."*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you think Paul was right to be worried about his friends fighting? Yes! Fighting hurts everyone, even when people think they're doing the right thing.

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

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But Paul didn't just say "Stop fighting." He told them something wonderful: "Choose to love each other instead! Help each other! Be kind!"

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe with excitement building]*

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Paul knew that when people choose love instead of fighting, amazing things happen! Their church could be strong and happy again!

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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Some of the people listened to Paul. They said "sorry" to each other. They chose to be kind instead of mean. They chose to love instead of fight.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And you know what happened? Their church became happy again! People felt safe. They worked together. Other people saw how much they loved each other and wanted to learn about Jesus too!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God's most important rule is this: Love other people just as much as you love yourself. When we do that, everyone is happier!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in our lives, with our families, at school, with our friends, we have the same choice. We can choose to fight and be mean, or we can choose to love and be kind.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone makes you upset or when you disagree about something, you can choose love. You can use kind words. You can ask a grown-up for help. You can try to solve the problem together.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves it when we choose to love each other! He wants our families, our classes, and our friendships to be happy places where everyone feels safe and cared for.

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

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

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

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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 fighting with each other?
2. How do you feel when people in your family argue?
3. What do you think Paul meant when he said "love your neighbor"?
4. What would you do if two of your friends were being mean to each other?
5. How did the people's church change when they chose love?
6. Why does God want us to love each other instead of fight?
7. What happened when the people said "sorry" to each other?
8. When is it hard to choose love instead of fighting at school?
9. How can you choose love when someone makes you upset?
10. Who helps you choose love when you feel angry?
11. Why do you think fighting makes everyone sad?
12. How can you help your family choose love?
13. What does it feel like when everyone is being kind?
14. When have you seen someone choose love instead of fighting?
15. How can you be brave and choose love when others are fighting?
16. What did you learn about God's rules today?

17. What do you want to remember from Paul's story?

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18. How can we pray for help to choose love?

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19. What would happen if everyone at school chose love?

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20. How can you be like the people who listened to Paul?

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

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

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

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Choose songs that reinforce love and kindness. Suggestions: "Love is Something If You Give It Away," "Make Me a Servant," or "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam." Include movements: make heart shapes with hands during "love," serve motions during "servant," and shine actions during "sunbeam."

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

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Paul who taught people to love each other.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us choose love when we feel upset or angry with other people. Help us use kind words and gentle hands.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that loving others is your most important rule. Make our families and friends happy places.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you that you love us so much and help us love others. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about choosing love. Examples: "God, help me be kind to my sister" or "Thank you that you love us, God."

Remember, God wants us to choose love, not fighting. You can be kind and loving this week! Have a wonderful week, everyone!

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# Serving Without Conditions

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*Love in Action, When should we serve people who will betray us?*

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**John 13:1-17**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**John 13:1-17 (NIV)**

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*1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one of you is clean.*

*12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

## Context

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This passage occurs in the upper room on the night before Jesus' crucifixion, during the Passover meal that would become known as the Last Supper. John explicitly notes that Jesus knew what was ahead, his approaching death, Judas's betrayal that was already set in motion, and his return to the Father. The disciples are unaware of the gravity of this moment; they're focused on the meal and their own concerns about who is greatest among them.

The immediate context reveals the stunning reversal about to unfold. Jesus, knowing his divine authority and impending sacrifice, chooses this moment to perform the most menial task imaginable, washing road-dusty feet, a job so lowly that Jewish servants couldn't be compelled to do it. The disciples watch their Teacher and Lord strip down and take the posture of the lowest household slave, serving each of them individually, including Judas, whose betrayal is already in motion.

## The Big Idea

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**Jesus deliberately serves those who will betray, deny, and abandon him, establishing service, not worthiness of recipients, as the foundation of community leadership.**

This isn't naive service that ignores reality; Jesus knows exactly what Judas will do, what Peter will do, and how they'll all scatter. Yet he serves them anyway, creating a pattern that operates independent of merit or future faithfulness. This challenges every instinct we have about conditional service based on worthiness, creating a radical model for leadership and community that doesn't wait for people to deserve care.

## Theological Core

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- **Hierarchy Inversion.** Jesus uses his supreme authority to serve, demonstrating that true power expresses itself through service rather than domination over others.
- **Service as Leadership.** The master's role isn't to be served but to establish patterns of care that others can follow, creating community through example rather than command.
- **Indiscriminate Service.** Love serves regardless of recipient worthiness or future response, operating on the giver's character rather than the receiver's merit.
- **Pattern Establishment.** Jesus creates a deliberate model, "as I have done for you", that becomes the template for how his followers will relate to each other in community.

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## Age Group Overview

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## What Each Age Group Learns

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### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Service isn't conditional on recipient worthiness, it flows from the giver's character and calling
- Leadership means serving even those who will disappoint us, while maintaining appropriate boundaries
- Jesus' service of Judas wasn't naïve but a deliberate choice to model unconditional love
- Hierarchy exists to create opportunities for service, not exemptions from it

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### Grades 4, 6

- We can choose to be kind even to people who aren't kind to us
  - Helping others is more important than being the most important person
  - When someone hurts our feelings, we can still choose to do the right thing
  - Our feelings being hurt is normal, but we don't have to let those feelings control our choices
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## Grades 1, 3

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- Jesus loves everyone and helps everyone
  - God wants us to help other people
  - We can be helpers like Jesus
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Promoting Doormat Christianity.** Jesus serves from a position of strength and clear identity, not weakness or people-pleasing. Emphasize that service flows from security in God's love, not from need for approval.
  - **Ignoring Appropriate Boundaries.** Jesus knowing Judas would betray him doesn't mean we ignore warning signs of abuse. Distinguish between serving difficult people and enabling harmful behavior patterns.
  - **Making Service Transactional.** Avoid suggesting that we serve in order to get good responses from people. Jesus serves Judas knowing the outcome; our service isn't contingent on recipients' gratitude or change.
  - **Overlooking Jesus' Authority.** Jesus serves from his position as Lord and Teacher, not despite it. This isn't self-deprecation but authority expressed through service rather than domination.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"Doesn't serving people who betray us just enable their bad behavior?"**

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Jesus' service of Judas wasn't enabling because it wasn't removing consequences or covering up wrong choices. Jesus served with full knowledge of what Judas would do, but he didn't prevent Judas from experiencing the results of his betrayal. Service can coexist with appropriate boundaries and natural consequences. The question is whether we serve from love or manipulate to control outcomes.

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**"How do we know when service becomes unhealthy people-pleasing?"**

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Jesus serves from his secure identity as beloved Son returning to the Father, not from need for acceptance. Healthy service flows from knowing who we are in God's love and choosing to give from that fullness. Unhealthy service tries to earn love or control other people's responses. The motivation matters as much as the action.

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### **"What about situations where serving someone puts others at risk?"**

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Jesus' service doesn't ignore reality or put innocent people in danger. Washing feet isn't the same as enabling harmful behavior that hurts others. Wise service considers the broader community and may sometimes mean creating boundaries to protect vulnerable people. Love for one person doesn't override responsibility to others who might be harmed.

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

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**Jesus serves not because people deserve it, but because love serves, even when it costs everything and receives betrayal in return.**

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

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between serving others unconditionally and maintaining healthy boundaries. Help them discover that Jesus' service flows from strength and identity, not weakness or naïvety.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When does serving people who will betray us become enabling their harmful behavior, and how can we love unconditionally while still protecting ourselves and others?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences with people who have taken advantage of their kindness
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- Honor the complexity, there's no simple formula for when to serve and when to create boundaries
  - Let students wrestle with real scenarios rather than providing easy answers to difficult situations
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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You're part of a group project, and there's that one person who never does their part but always shows up to take credit. You've covered for them before, done extra work so the group doesn't fail, helped them look good even when they contributed nothing. Now there's another project coming up, and guess who wants to be in your group again?

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Part of you wants to help because that's who you are, you don't like seeing people fail or get embarrassed. You're the type who steps up when things need to get done. But another part of you is frustrated because you know exactly what's going to happen: you'll do the work, they'll take the credit, and nothing will change.

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Your friends think you're crazy for even considering it. "Stop being a doormat," they say. "Let them fail for once." But something in you wonders if there's a difference between being a pushover and actually loving people well. Is there a way to be genuinely helpful without enabling bad behavior?

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Today we're looking at a moment when Jesus faced something similar, except the stakes were infinitely higher. He's about to wash the feet of someone he knows will betray him in a matter of hours. Watch for how he navigates service when he knows exactly what the cost will be.

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Open your Bibles to John 13. We're going to read about the most powerful person in the room choosing to serve, including the person who's already planning to destroy him.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage has emotional weight, let students feel the gravity of Jesus serving Judas. Some may finish early; encourage them to reread and notice details about Jesus' knowledge and intentionality.

**As You Read, Think About:**

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- What does Jesus know about his situation and the people he's serving?

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- Why might this act of service be particularly shocking to the disciples?

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- What's the difference between Jesus' service and being taken advantage of?

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- How would you feel if you were Peter? If you were Judas?

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### John 13:1-17 (NIV)

*1 It was just before the Passover Festival. Jesus knew that the hour had come for him to leave this world and go to the Father. Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them to the end. 2 The evening meal was in progress, and the devil had already prompted Judas, the son of Simon Iscariot, to betray Jesus. 3 Jesus knew that the Father had put all things under his power, and that he had come from God and was returning to God; 4 so he got up from the meal, took off his outer clothing, and wrapped a towel around his waist. 5 After that, he poured water into a basin and began to wash his disciples' feet, drying them with the towel that was wrapped around him.*

*6 He came to Simon Peter, who said to him, "Lord, are you going to wash my feet?" 7 Jesus replied, "You do not realize now what I am doing, but later you will understand." 8 "No," said Peter, "you shall never wash my feet." Jesus answered, "Unless I wash you, you have no part with me." 9 "Then, Lord," Simon Peter replied, "not just my feet but my hands and my head as well!" 10 Jesus answered, "Those who have had a bath need only to wash their feet; their whole body is clean. And you are clean, though not every one of you." 11 For he knew who was going to betray him, and that was why he said not every one of you is clean.*

*12 When he had finished washing their feet, he put on his clothes and returned to his place. "Do you understand what I have done for you?" he asked them. 13 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. 14 Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. 15 I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you. 16 Very truly I tell you, no servant is greater than his master, nor is a messenger greater than the one who sent him. 17 Now that you know these things, you will be blessed if you do them.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers but let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the dialogue between Jesus and Peter.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1, 5 (Setting and Jesus' preparation) **Reader 2:** Verses 6, 11 (Dialogue with Peter and reference to betrayal) **Reader 3:** Verses 12, 17 (Jesus explains the pattern he's establishing)

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Listen for the tension here, this isn't a sweet, sentimental moment. There's shock, resistance, and the heavy knowledge of approaching betrayal.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about Jesus' choice to serve Judas?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious or confused about. Not simple factual questions, but things that make you think or feel conflicted. For example, "Why would Jesus serve someone he knew was going to betray him?" Ask what you're really wondering about. You have 3 minutes.

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

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**Remember:** Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the tension.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes. Start with questions most students can relate to about service and boundaries.

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#### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What specific things did Jesus know before he started washing feet, and how does that change the meaning of his service?"
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- "What's the difference between Jesus serving Judas and being a doormat who lets people walk all over him?"

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- "If you were planning to betray someone, how would you feel about them serving you? What would that do to you internally?"

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- "Jesus says this is an 'example' we should follow, but does that mean we serve people who will harm us or others?"

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- "What's the difference between 'love them to the end' and 'enable their harmful behavior'?"

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- "How do we know when someone is like current-day Peter (impulsive but faithful) versus current-day Judas (planning betrayal)?"

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- "What would have happened to the story if Jesus had refused to wash Judas's feet?"

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- "Why does Jesus emphasize that he's 'Lord and Teacher' right after he serves them? What's he trying to communicate?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus serves from a position of strength, knowing who he is, where he's going, what's about to happen. This isn't insecurity trying to earn love; it's secure love choosing to give even when it costs everything. He's not trying to change Judas's mind or prevent the betrayal. He's establishing a pattern: this is what love looks like in community, regardless of response.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about school, family, friendships, social media, places where you have to decide whether to serve or help people who might not deserve it or might take advantage of you.

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

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- Helping classmates who take advantage of your kindness but never reciprocate

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- Forgiving family members who continue to hurt you with their words or actions

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- Being friends with someone who uses you for rides, homework help, or social status

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- Responding to people online who attack you personally for your beliefs or opinions

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- Serving in organizations or teams where leadership takes credit for your work
- Choosing whether to help someone who has gossiped about you or betrayed your trust

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

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone serve others beautifully without being taken advantage of?"
- "What would help you distinguish between serving from love and serving from fear or insecurity?"
- "How do you decide when to create boundaries and when to absorb the cost of someone else's behavior?"
- "What's the difference between Jesus-like service and people-pleasing that enables harmful behavior?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus serves not because people deserve it, but because love serves. He doesn't serve to change Judas or prevent betrayal, he serves because that's what love does, even when it costs everything. But notice: he serves from his identity as Lord and Teacher, not from insecurity or need for acceptance.

This week, pay attention to your motivations when you help others. Are you serving from security in God's love, or are you trying to earn approval or control outcomes? There's no perfect formula for when to serve and when to create boundaries, but notice the difference between serving from strength versus serving from fear.

I'm proud of how you wrestled with hard questions today. Keep asking them. The tension between love and boundaries doesn't resolve easily, and that's okay. Keep seeking wisdom about how to love well without losing yourself in the process.

# Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that choosing to be kind to others, even people who are mean to us, is what Jesus wants us to do, and that our feelings can be hurt but still choose to do the right thing.

## If Kids Ask "Why should I be nice to people who are mean to me?"

Say: "Your feelings being hurt makes total sense. Jesus felt sad too, but he chose to love anyway because that's what creates good friendships and communities."

### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been really kind to someone and then they were mean to you anyway. Maybe you shared your snack with someone, and later they said something hurtful about you. Or you helped someone with their homework, and then they didn't invite you to their birthday party.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if someone has been mean to you, but then later you had a chance to be mean back to them, but you didn't know what to do. Like maybe the person who was mean to you forgot their lunch money, and you had extra. Part of you thinks, "They were mean to me, so I don't have to help them." But another part of you thinks, "But they look hungry, and I have enough to share."

Those mixed feelings are totally normal! It's confusing when someone hurts your feelings but then needs your help. Your heart wants to be kind, but your hurt feelings make you want to say "figure it out yourself." Both of those feelings make sense, and you're not bad for feeling both ways.

This reminds me of the movie Frozen when Anna keeps being kind to Elsa even after Elsa accidentally hurts her. Or in Toy Story when Woody helps Buzz even after Buzz made him feel replaced and unimportant. Have you noticed how the best stories show people choosing to help even when their feelings are hurt?

The tricky part is figuring out how to be genuinely kind without being a pushover, how to have a good heart without letting people walk all over you. It's one of the hardest parts of growing up and learning how to be a good friend.

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Today we're going to hear about Jesus facing this exact same decision, except someone he loved was planning to do something way worse than being mean at recess. Jesus had to choose whether to be loving to someone who was about to betray him. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will share stories of being hurt or confused about kindness. Acknowledge briefly: "That sounds really hard" or "I bet that felt confusing." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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It was the most important dinner of the year, Passover dinner. Jesus and his twelve best friends were together around a table, celebrating and eating good food. But Jesus knew something that made this dinner different from every other dinner they'd shared.

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Jesus knew that in just a few hours, he was going to be arrested. He knew that he was going to die on a cross the next day to save the world from sin. And here's the really hard part: Jesus knew that one of his best friends sitting at that very table was planning to betray him.

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The friend's name was Judas. Judas had already talked to the bad guys and promised to help them catch Jesus. For money. Judas was going to help Jesus' enemies hurt him, and Jesus knew it. But Judas didn't know that Jesus knew.

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Imagine having dinner with someone who was planning to do something terrible to you, but they didn't know you knew about it. How would that feel? Your stomach would probably feel sick. You might feel angry or scared or really, really sad.

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Jesus was probably feeling some of those things too. But then Jesus did something that shocked everyone at the dinner table. He stood up, took off his nice dinner clothes, and wrapped a towel around his waist like a servant would wear.

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Then Jesus got a bowl of water and knelt down on the floor. He started washing everyone's feet! Back then, people wore sandals and walked on dusty roads, so their feet got really dirty. Washing feet was the job of the least important servant in the house, and here was Jesus, their leader and teacher, doing it

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himself.

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One by one, Jesus washed each friend's feet. When he got to Peter, Peter said, "No way! You're not washing my feet!" Peter felt embarrassed that his teacher was serving him like a servant.

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But Jesus said something surprising: "Peter, you don't understand what I'm doing right now, but someday you will. If you don't let me wash your feet, you can't really be my friend."

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Then Peter got confused and said, "Well then wash my hands and head too!" But Jesus smiled and said, "You just need your feet washed. That's enough."

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### **John 13:13-15 (NIV)**

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*13-15 "You call me 'Teacher' and 'Lord,' and rightly so, for that is what I am. Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

But here's the most amazing part of the whole story: Jesus also washed Judas's feet. The friend who was planning to betray him in just a few hours. Jesus knelt down and carefully washed the feet of the person who was going to help his enemies catch him.

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Jesus wasn't being foolish or naive. He knew exactly what Judas was planning. But Jesus chose to love Judas anyway. He chose to serve him, to be kind to him, to treat him with dignity and care, even knowing what was coming.

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After Jesus finished washing everyone's feet, he put his regular clothes back on and sat down. "Do you understand what I just did for you?" he asked them. "I'm your teacher and your leader, but I served you like a servant. I did this to show you how to treat each other."

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Jesus was teaching them that love means choosing to be kind even when people don't deserve it. Even when they hurt you. Even when you know they're going to disappoint you or let you down. Jesus served Judas not because Judas deserved it, but because that's what love does.

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Later that night, everything happened just like Jesus knew it would. Judas led the soldiers to Jesus and pointed him out so they could arrest him. But earlier that evening, Jesus had shown Judas, and all of them, what real love looks like.

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Sometimes in our lives, we have chances to be kind to people who haven't been kind to us. We can choose to help someone who was mean to us. We can choose to forgive someone who hurt our feelings. It doesn't mean we're pushovers or doormats, it means we're choosing to love the way Jesus loves.

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What we learn from Jesus is that being kind isn't about whether people deserve it. It's about choosing to love because that's who God made us to be. When we choose kindness even when it's hard, we're being like Jesus.

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And here's the amazing thing: when we love people who don't deserve it, sometimes it changes their hearts. Sometimes it helps them become better people. But even if it doesn't, we still choose love because that's what Jesus did for us.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Hard Feelings

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If you were Jesus and you knew that one of your best friends was planning to betray you, how would you feel inside? Would you feel angry, sad, scared, confused, or maybe all of those things mixed together? And how hard do you think it would be to wash that person's feet and be gentle and kind to them?

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**Listen For:** "Angry," "really sad," "I wouldn't want to", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. It would be really hard to choose kindness when someone was planning to hurt you."

#### Question 2: The Confusing Choice

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Why do you think Jesus chose to wash Judas's feet anyway, even though he knew what Judas was planning to do? Jesus could have just skipped Judas or told everyone what Judas was planning. But he didn't. What do you think Jesus was trying to show them?

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**If They Say:** "Maybe he thought Judas would change his mind", respond "That's a good thought. What do you think Jesus was trying to teach all of them about how to treat each other?"

### Question 3: The Hard Truth

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Jesus said "I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you." That means we're supposed to love people even when they're not very lovable. Can you think of a time when that would be really hard to do? When might you have to choose between getting revenge and choosing kindness?

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**Connect:** "That sounds like the exact same choice Jesus had to make. It's hard, but this is what makes love so powerful and special."

### Question 4: The Amazing Result

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What do you think would happen in your classroom or friend group if everyone followed Jesus' example? If people chose to be kind even when others weren't kind back? How might that change things? What would be different about the way kids treated each other?

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**If They Say:** "People would be nicer" or "There would be less fighting", affirm "Yes! Love has power to change things, even when it's hard to choose."

Jesus showed us that love is a choice we make, not just a feeling we have. Even when our feelings are hurt, we can still choose to be kind. That's what makes us like Jesus and what creates really good friendships and communities.

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

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

### Purpose

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This activity reinforces the pattern of serving others by having kids physically experience how choosing to help creates community. Success looks like kids discovering that when everyone chooses to help others (even those who didn't help them), the whole group becomes stronger and everyone benefits.

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### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

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We're going to do an activity called "The Help Circle." First, everyone spread out around the room and sit down on the floor. You're going to pretend you each have a problem that you need help solving, but you can't solve anyone else's problem except the person directly to your right.

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Here's the challenge: some of you are going to get help from the person on your left, but some of you are not. The people who don't get help might feel frustrated or hurt. But then you'll have a choice: do you still help the person on your right, even if the person on your left didn't help you?

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In the first round, I want you to only help the person on your right IF the person on your left helped you. If you didn't get help, don't give help. Let's see what happens to our circle when we make help conditional on whether we received help.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus faced, he had the choice to serve Judas or not serve him based on how Judas was treating him. Let's see what happens when we make different choices.

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

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Round One: I'm going to tell some of you to help the person on your right, and others to not help. Then everyone else decides what to do based on whether they got help. Notice what happens to the whole circle when help depends on whether you received help first.

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As they encounter the breaking circle, watch for kids who want to help but feel like they shouldn't because they didn't receive help. Some will look confused or frustrated when they see others who need help but feel like the "rules" say they can't help.

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Now let's try Round Two with Jesus' rule: everyone helps the person on their right no matter what the person on their left did. Choose to be helpful regardless of whether you received help. Let's see what happens when everyone follows Jesus' example.

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Celebrate when the circle becomes strong and supportive! Point out how different it feels when everyone chooses to help regardless of whether they were helped. "Look how much stronger the whole circle is when everyone chooses kindness!"

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In Round One, the circle broke down because help became conditional. In Round Two, the circle became strong because everyone chose to help regardless of what they received. Which circle would you rather be part of?

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to help even though they didn't receive help, this is the physical representation of Jesus' service pattern. Celebrate these moments: "Did you see how [name] chose to help even though no one helped them?"

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

What did you notice about how it felt when help depended on whether you got helped first versus when everyone chose to help no matter what? The first way feels uncertain and breaks down, but Jesus' way creates a strong, caring community where everyone benefits. That's the power of choosing kindness even when it's not returned!

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

Here's what we learned today: Jesus chose to love Judas even though he knew Judas was going to betray him. Jesus washed his feet and treated him with kindness because that's what love does, it chooses to be kind even when people don't deserve it.

This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with people who are mean to you or let people hurt you over and over. It means that when you have a choice between being mean back or choosing kindness, you can choose kindness because that's what Jesus did for us.

The amazing result is that when we choose love even when it's hard, we help create the kind of community where people take care of each other. We become helpers who make the world a little bit more like Jesus wants it to be.

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

This week, look for one chance to be kind to someone who hasn't been kind to you. It might be helping someone who was mean to you, sharing with someone who didn't share with you, or forgiving someone who hurt your feelings. Remember: you're choosing kindness because that's what Jesus did, not because they deserve it.

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

*Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us what real love looks like by washing everyone's feet, even Judas who was going to betray you. Help us to choose kindness even when people are mean to us.*

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*Give us hearts that want to help others and courage to do the right thing even when it's hard. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help little ones see that Jesus loves everyone and helps everyone, and that God wants us to be helpers too.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare washing feet to helping someone tie their shoes or carrying something heavy, then ask "Would you help someone even if they weren't nice to you?"

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about helping others and God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "I've Got the Joy," or "God is So Good." Use movements: point to others during "Jesus loves me," clap hands during "joy," raise arms during "God is good."

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Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit down in our special story shape so we can hear about how Jesus helped his friends. Come sit in a horseshoe so everyone can see!

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

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

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

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Today we're going to meet Jesus and his friends at dinner time!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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Jesus and his twelve best friends were having a special dinner together. Everyone was sitting around the table, eating and talking and having fun. But Jesus knew something very important was about to happen.

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*[Use voice change to sound wise and loving]*

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Jesus knew that one of his friends was planning to do something very hurtful to him. But Jesus still loved that friend. Jesus loves everyone, even when they make bad choices.

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, act out standing up]*

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Then Jesus did something very surprising! He stood up from dinner and took off his nice clothes. He wrapped a towel around himself like a helper would wear.

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*[Move to center, act out kneeling and washing]*

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Then Jesus got down on the floor with a bowl of water and started washing everyone's feet! Back then, people's feet got very dusty and dirty from walking on dirt roads. Washing feet was a job that helpers did, not teachers!

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*[Move to side, sound surprised like Peter]*

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When Jesus came to his friend Peter, Peter said, "No way! You're my teacher! You shouldn't wash my feet!" But Jesus said gently, "Peter, let me help you. That's what friends do."

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**John 13:14-15 (NIV)**

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*14-15 "Now that I, your Lord and Teacher, have washed your feet, you also should wash one another's feet. I have set you an example that you should do as I have done for you."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you know what the most amazing part is? Jesus washed the feet of the friend who was planning to be mean to him! Jesus was gentle and kind to everyone, even the friend who was going to hurt him. That's how much Jesus loves!

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*[Move to center, speak with warmth]*

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After Jesus finished helping everyone, he sat back down and said, "Do you see what I just did? I helped all of you. Now you should help each other too!"

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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Jesus was showing them that loving people means helping them, even when they're not nice to us. Even when they hurt our feelings. Even when they don't say "thank you."

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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Jesus wanted his friends to remember that God's love means we help others because that's what love does! Love helps. Love is kind. Love takes care of people.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And you know what? We can be helpers just like Jesus! We can be kind to people even when they're not kind to us. We can help people because that's what God wants us to do!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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Jesus loves everyone so much that he helps everyone. Even people who are mean to him. That's the kind of love God has for us, and that's the kind of love we can share with others!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school or home, someone might be mean to you. They might say something that hurts your feelings or not share with you. When that happens, you can still choose to be kind because that's what Jesus did!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When someone needs help, you can help them. When someone drops their crayons, you can help pick them up. When someone looks sad, you can be kind to them. That's how we show God's love!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God made you to be a helper, just like Jesus! You can show love by being kind and helpful to everyone around you.

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

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

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

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

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### **Discussion Questions**

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

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1. How do you think Jesus felt when he was washing his friends' feet?
  2. Would it be hard for you to help someone who was mean to you?
  3. Why do you think Peter didn't want Jesus to wash his feet?
  4. What would you do if your friend was mean to you but then needed help?
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5. What changed after Jesus washed everyone's feet?

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6. How does God want us to treat other people?

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7. What happened when Jesus chose to be kind to everyone?

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8. How can you be a helper at school like Jesus?

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9. How can you be a helper at home like Jesus?

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10. Who is someone you know who is a good helper?

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11. Why did Jesus wash the feet of the friend who was mean to him?

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12. How can you be kind when someone is not kind to you?

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13. What does it mean that God loves everyone?

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14. When is it hard to be a helper?

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15. How does it feel when someone helps you?

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16. What did you learn about Jesus today?

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17. What do you want to remember about this story?

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18. How can we pray for people who are mean to us?

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19. What would happen if everyone was a helper like Jesus?

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20. How can you show God's love to your friends?

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

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

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

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Choose a song about helping and loving others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Jesus Wants Me for a Helper." Movements: point to others during "love one another," pat hearts during "be kind," raise hands during "helper."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Sit criss-cross and fold your hands.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you that Jesus loves everyone and helps everyone.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to be kind helpers like Jesus. Help us to share and be nice even when other people are not nice to us.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you love us so much and that you want us to show your love to others. Help us remember to be helpers this week. In Jesus' name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "Help me be kind at school" or "Thank you that Jesus loves me."

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Remember, God made you to be a helper just like Jesus! Look for ways to be kind and helpful this week. Have a wonderful week, and I'll see you next time!

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