

# Loving Difficult People

*Volume 5*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# Loving Difficult People

*Volume 5*

Published by

**1611 Press**

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

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First Edition: 2026

## **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*

# Counter-Response

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*Living the Upside-Down Way, What happens when blessing replaces cursing?*

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**1 Corinthians 4:6-21**

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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 Corinthians 4:6-21 (NIV)**

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*6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against another. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

*8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign, and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! 9 It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as human beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!*

*11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the*

*scum of the earth, the garbage of everyone, right up to this moment.*

*14 I am not writing this to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

*18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?*

## Context

Paul is addressing deep divisions in the Corinthian church, where believers have become "puffed up" by aligning themselves with different apostolic leaders, Paul, Apollos, Cephas. The Corinthians believe they have "arrived" spiritually, living as though the kingdom of God has already fully come. They enjoy honor, wisdom, and strength while their apostolic leaders suffer.

Paul's strategy is ironic contrast, he describes the Corinthians as "rich" and "reigning" while positioning himself and the apostles as "condemned to die in the arena," becoming "spectacles to the whole universe." This isn't self-pity but a deliberate wake-up call about what faithful kingdom living actually looks like in a hostile world.

## The Big Idea

**Paul models a practiced pattern of counter-response: when cursed, he blesses; when persecuted, he endures; when slandered, he answers kindly, transforming automatic reactions into Christ-like alternatives.**

This isn't heroic one-time courage but sustained daily practice that acknowledges being treated as "scum of the earth" while maintaining blessing, endurance, and kindness. The pattern is both psychologically demanding and spiritually transformative, requiring a fundamental reorientation toward honor and reputation.

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## Theological Core

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- **Patterned Response over Reactive Response.** Paul demonstrates learned behaviors that replace instinctual reactions, blessing instead of cursing back, endurance instead of retaliation, kindness instead of defensive anger.
  - **Present Tense Faithfulness.** The phrase "right up to this moment" emphasizes this is ongoing reality, not past heroics, these responses happen daily in real time with real mistreatment.
  - **Honor Reorientation.** Being called "scum of the earth" by others doesn't determine self-worth, Paul's identity comes from his calling, not from human approval or reputation.
  - **Sustained Endurance under Sustained Mistreatment.** This pattern applies to ongoing situations of being maligned, not just single incidents, it's a way of life that persists through extended seasons of difficulty.
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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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- Paul's counter-responses (blessing for curse, endurance under persecution, kindness for slander) represent learned patterns that can replace automatic reactions
  - Being treated as "scum of the earth" by others doesn't have to define your self-worth or determine your response
  - Sustained kindness in the face of ongoing mistreatment requires intentional practice and spiritual strength
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- There's a difference between healthy boundary-setting and enabling abuse, wisdom helps us discern when and how to respond
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### Grades 4, 6

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- We can learn to respond with kindness even when others are repeatedly mean to us
  - Our choices about how we respond are more powerful than what others choose to do to us
  - Being kind when others are mean doesn't always make them stop, but it changes what happens inside us
  - Feeling angry or hurt when mistreated is normal, we can acknowledge those feelings and still choose to respond with kindness
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### Grades 1, 3

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- God helps us say nice things when people are mean to us
  - Jesus wants us to be kind even when others aren't kind to us
  - We can ask God to help us when it's hard to be nice
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Enabling Abuse.** Paul's pattern doesn't mean passively accepting harmful treatment without boundaries, his endurance includes appropriate action like warning the Corinthians and setting clear expectations for his return visit.
  - **Spiritual Superiority.** Don't present this as "the more spiritual response" that makes us better than others, Paul emphasizes that everything we have is received, not achieved, and his suffering doesn't make him superior.
  - **Heroic Individualism.** This isn't about individual heroics but about learned community patterns, Paul mentions Timothy and other coworkers who share this way of life, suggesting it's sustainable through relationship and support.
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- **Self-Destruction.** Calling oneself "scum of the earth" isn't healthy self-talk, Paul is describing how others perceive him, not accepting that assessment as his identity or worth before God.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"Doesn't this just teach people to be doormats and let others abuse them?"**

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Paul's pattern isn't passive, he endures mistreatment while actively blessing, which is a powerful form of resistance. He also sets clear boundaries with the Corinthians, warning them and promising accountability. The goal isn't to enable abuse but to break cycles of retaliation while maintaining dignity and clear communication about unacceptable behavior.

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**"How can calling yourself 'scum of the earth' be psychologically healthy?"**

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Paul isn't accepting this as his identity, he's describing how society treats apostles while maintaining his sense of calling and worth. The key distinction is between how others perceive us and how God sees us. Paul endures being treated as garbage while knowing his true identity comes from his relationship with Christ and his apostolic calling, not from human approval.

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**"Is it really possible to sustain blessing people who keep hurting you without becoming bitter?"**

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This is the genuine tension Paul addresses, he acknowledges this pattern exists "right up to this moment," suggesting it's an ongoing challenge, not a one-time victory. The sustainability comes through community support, spiritual practices, and keeping perspective on ultimate identity and purpose. It's difficult and requires intentional cultivation, not just willpower.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**We can learn to respond to mistreatment with blessing, endurance, and kindness, not as heroes but as people practicing a different way of life, even when it's hard and even when others don't change.**

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**Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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## Your Main Job Today

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Guide students to explore the psychological and spiritual dimensions of Paul's counter-response pattern, blessing for curse, endurance under persecution, kindness for slander, while wrestling honestly with questions of sustainability and healthy boundaries.

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## The Tension to Frame

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How do we practice sustained kindness toward those who mistreat us without becoming doormats, losing our sense of worth, or enabling harmful behavior?

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## Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate students' instinctive resistance to "turning the other cheek", their protective instincts make sense
  - Honor the complexity between healthy boundary-setting and Christ-like response, both can be true simultaneously
  - Let students wrestle with the sustainability question rather than offering quick answers, this is genuinely difficult
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Imagine someone at school has been targeting you for weeks. They mock your clothes, spread rumors about you, exclude you from group projects, and make snide comments about your family. Your friends tell you to ignore it, but it keeps happening. Every day brings a new humiliation, and you can feel the anger building up inside you.

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Part of you wants to fight back, to expose their weaknesses, to gather your friends and isolate them, to give them a taste of their own medicine. That response makes perfect sense. Your brain is trying to protect you, and retaliation feels like justice. Most people would say you have every right to defend yourself.

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But today we're looking at someone who faced ongoing mistreatment, not just from one person but from entire communities, and developed a completely different pattern of response. Paul the apostle was cursed, persecuted, and slandered regularly, and he developed what he calls a practiced pattern of counter-response.

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As we read, notice how Paul describes his responses as learned behaviors, not just natural reactions. Also pay attention to how he talks about his reputation, he's called "the scum of the earth" by others, yet he maintains dignity. What makes this psychologically sustainable?

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Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians chapter 4, starting at verse 6. We'll read through verse 21 silently first, then discuss what Paul is actually doing here.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "spectacle" or "slandered." Watch for students who finish early, they can reread verses 12-13 specifically. Let them feel the weight of Paul's ongoing suffering.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What specific mistreatments does Paul describe experiencing?
  - How does Paul respond to each type of mistreatment, and what pattern do you notice?
  - What's surprising or difficult about Paul's approach to handling conflict?
  - How would you feel if you were in Paul's position with this kind of ongoing treatment?
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### 1 Corinthians 4:6-21 (NIV)

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*6 Now, brothers and sisters, I have applied these things to myself and Apollos for your benefit, so that you may learn from us the meaning of the saying, "Do not go beyond what is written." Then you will not be puffed up in being a follower of one of us over against another. 7 For who makes you different from anyone else? What do you have that you did not receive? And if you did receive it, why do you boast as though you did not?*

*8 Already you have all you want! Already you have become rich! You have begun to reign, and that without us! How I wish that you really had begun to reign so that we also might reign with you! 9 It seems to me that God has put us apostles on display at the end of the procession, like those condemned to die in the arena. We have been made a spectacle to the whole universe, to angels as well as human beings. 10 We are fools for Christ, but you are so wise in Christ! We are weak, but you are strong! You are honored, we are dishonored!*

*11 To this very hour we go hungry and thirsty, we are in rags, we are brutally treated, we are homeless. 12 We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; 13 when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of everyone, right up to this moment.*

*14 I am not writing this to shame you but to warn you as my dear children. 15 Even if you had ten thousand guardians in Christ, you do not have many fathers, for in Christ Jesus I became your father through the gospel. 16 Therefore I urge you to imitate me. 17 For this reason I have sent to you Timothy, my son whom I love, who is faithful in the Lord. He will remind you of my way of life in Christ Jesus, which agrees with what I teach everywhere in every church.*

*18 Some of you have become arrogant, as if I were not coming to you. 19 But I will come to you very soon, if the Lord is willing, and then I will find out not only how these arrogant people are talking, but what power they have. 20 For the kingdom of God is not a matter of talk but of power. 21 What do you prefer? Shall I come to you with a rod of discipline, or shall I come in love and with a gentle spirit?*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read with expression. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the dramatic contrast sections in verses 8-10.

**Reader 1:** Verses 6-10 (Paul's ironic comparison) **Reader 2:** Verses 11-13 (Paul's suffering and responses) **Reader 3:** Verses 14-21 (Paul's paternal authority)

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Listen for the emotional tone in Paul's voice, this isn't just information, it's a passionate appeal with irony, pain, and authority all mixed together.

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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 generate 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What confused you most?" or "What seemed hardest to believe?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people near you. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or confused by. Not questions you think you should ask, but what you're actually wondering. For example, "How does Paul not get bitter?" or "What does he mean by 'scum of the earth'?" You have three minutes, go.

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### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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**Remember:** Let students drive the conversation with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guiding discovery rather than lecturing. Write questions on the board to track themes.

**Collecting Questions:** Have each group share one question. Write them on the board, looking for themes about sustainability, boundaries, responses to mistreatment, and psychological health.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that Paul's responses are learned behaviors rather than just natural reactions?"
  - "How does Paul maintain dignity while being treated as 'scum of the earth', what's his source of identity?"
  - "What's the difference between blessing someone who curses you and enabling their harmful behavior?"
  - "Paul mentions Timothy and other coworkers, how might community support make this pattern more sustainable?"
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- "In verses 18-21, Paul promises to confront arrogant behavior, how does this fit with his pattern of endurance?"
- "Where do you see this kind of ongoing mistreatment happening in our world today?"
- "What would happen if someone tried Paul's approach in your school's social dynamics?"
- "What's the difference between Paul's response pattern and just being a doormat?"

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### **Revealing the Pattern**

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul isn't just enduring suffering, he's developed what he calls a practiced pattern of counter-response. When cursed, bless. When persecuted, endure. When slandered, answer kindly. These aren't automatic reactions but learned alternatives that replace the instinct to retaliate. He's training his reflexes.

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

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see ongoing mistreatment happening, situations where someone faces repeated targeting, mockery, exclusion, or hostility? Think about school hallways, social media comment sections, family dynamics, workplace tensions, even broader social conflicts.

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

- A classmate who gets bullied daily but chooses to respond with kindness instead of plotting revenge
  - Family members who face ongoing criticism but continue to show love and respect
  - Students who get mocked for their beliefs, appearance, or interests but refuse to hide or retaliate
  - Online harassment where people respond to hate comments with thoughtful engagement rather than counter-attacks
  - Racial, religious, or cultural minorities who face systemic mistreatment but work for justice through peaceful persistence
  - Anyone in a toxic situation who must decide between reactive response and intentional counter-response
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to prescriptive answers. Some situations require different responses, help them think through discernment and boundary-setting rather than giving blanket advice about "always being kind."

## Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone respond to mistreatment with unexpected kindness, and what happened?"
- "What would help someone sustain Paul's pattern without burning out or becoming bitter?"
- "How do you discern when to endure mistreatment versus when to set boundaries or seek help?"
- "What's the difference between healthy resilience and enabling someone's harmful behavior?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Paul shows us that we can learn to respond differently to mistreatment. Not as heroes or saints, but as people intentionally practicing counter-response, blessing for curse, endurance under pressure, kindness for hostility. This isn't easy, and it's not always the right response to every situation, but it's a learned pattern that can break cycles of retaliation.

This week, pay attention to your automatic reactions when someone treats you unfairly. Notice the impulse to retaliate, defend, or withdraw. Then ask yourself: what would a counter-response look like in this situation? You don't have to be perfect at it, Paul calls this a practiced pattern, which means it takes time to develop.

I'm genuinely impressed by the thoughtfulness you brought to these questions today. You wrestled with real tensions without settling for easy answers. Keep asking hard questions, that's how wisdom develops, and that's exactly what Paul would want from people learning to follow Jesus in a complicated world.

## Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that they can learn to respond with kindness when others are mean, even when the meanness keeps happening, and that this changes something important inside them even if it doesn't always change the other person.

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### If Kids Ask "What if being nice just makes them be meaner to you?"

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Say: "That's a really smart question. Sometimes people do get meaner when you're nice because it surprises them. But being kind changes what happens inside your heart, and it shows them a different way to act. You can still get help from adults if someone won't stop being mean."

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#### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school be mean to you more than once, not just accidentally, but the same person being unkind again and again. Keep your hands up if that person made fun of you, left you out, or said something hurtful multiple times.

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Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever felt really angry at someone who kept being mean to you, and part of you wanted to be mean right back to them. Maybe you thought about embarrassing them in front of their friends, or telling everyone their secrets, or getting them in trouble somehow.

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I want you to know that those angry feelings make complete sense. When someone hurts us over and over, our hearts want to protect us, and sometimes that means wanting to hurt them back. It's normal to feel that way, and it doesn't make you a bad person. The tricky part is that fighting meanness with more meanness usually just makes everything worse.

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This reminds me of movies where someone gets picked on and then becomes a bully themselves, or books where characters get revenge but end up feeling worse instead of better. Think about characters like Elsa in Frozen, when people were afraid of her powers, she could have used those powers to hurt them back, but she had to learn a different way.

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The really difficult question is this: what do you do when someone keeps being mean to you? How do you respond in a way that doesn't make you become mean too? How do you protect your heart without closing it off completely?

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Today we're going to hear about a man named Paul who figured out a completely different pattern for responding when people were mean to him. Not just once or twice, but every single day. Let's find out what he discovered about changing the way we respond to meanness.

**What to Expect:** Kids may share specific examples of being mistreated. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep momentum moving toward the story. Some may express strong desire for revenge, validate the feeling while pointing toward the lesson.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a man walking down a dusty road in an ancient city, carrying a heavy bag of tools. His name is Paul, and he's a missionary, someone who travels around telling people about Jesus. But this isn't an easy job, because not everyone wants to hear about Jesus.

Paul had been treated badly in city after city. Some people would shout mean things at him as he walked by. Others would throw rocks or garbage. They would spread false rumors about him, saying he was a troublemaker or a criminal. They would exclude him from their shops and restaurants.

Day after day, week after week, this kept happening. Paul would wake up knowing that somewhere during the day, someone would probably curse at him, call him names, or try to hurt him. Imagine how that would feel, knowing that meanness was waiting for you almost every day.

Think about what that would be like. You wake up knowing that the kids at school are going to whisper about you, or make fun of your clothes, or exclude you from games at recess. How would your stomach feel? How would your heart feel?

Most people in Paul's situation would have gotten bitter and angry. Most people would have started planning ways to get back at their enemies. Most people would have either given up and gone home, or started being just as mean to others as they were being to him.

But Paul discovered something powerful. He realized that he could choose his response. Even when people were mean to him, he could decide how to react. And he started practicing a different pattern, a pattern he called "counter-response."

When people cursed at Paul, when they shouted mean things or called him terrible names, Paul would bless them instead. He would say kind things about them or pray for good things to happen to them. Can you imagine how surprising that would be?

When people persecuted Paul, when they chased him out of town or tried to hurt him, Paul would endure it. He wouldn't fight back or seek revenge. He would keep going, keep doing his work, keep caring about people even when they were cruel to him.

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When people slandered Paul, when they spread lies about him or ruined his reputation, Paul would answer with kindness. He would speak gently to them, try to understand why they were upset, and continue treating them with respect.

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Paul wrote to his friends about this pattern. He told them the truth about how difficult it was. He said:

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### **1 Corinthians 4:12-13 (NIV)**

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*"We work hard with our own hands. When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly. We have become the scum of the earth, the garbage of everyone, right up to this moment."*

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Paul was honest about how others saw him. They called him "scum" and "garbage", the worst names they could think of. But notice what Paul did with that treatment. He didn't let their meanness turn him mean. He didn't let their cruelty make him cruel.

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Paul learned that blessing others when they cursed him was like breaking a chain. When someone is mean to us, they're handing us a chain of meanness. Most people take that chain and pass it on to someone else. But Paul learned to break the chain instead.

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This wasn't easy for Paul. He felt the hurt just like anyone else would. But he practiced this pattern over and over until it became his natural response. When people were mean, Paul's heart would automatically think, "How can I bless this person instead?"

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Paul discovered that this counter-response pattern changed something inside him. Instead of getting bitter and angry, he stayed hopeful and loving. Instead of becoming like his enemies, he became more like Jesus. The meanness stopped with Paul, he didn't pass it on.

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Paul's friends started noticing this pattern. They watched him respond to cruelty with kindness, again and again. Some of them started learning the same pattern. They realized they could choose blessing instead of cursing, endurance instead of revenge, kindness instead of meanness.

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The amazing thing was that this pattern sometimes changed the people who were being mean to Paul. When they expected him to fight back but he blessed them instead, they didn't know what to do. Some of them started wondering why Paul was different. Some of them even became his friends.

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But even when the mean people didn't change, Paul did this anyway. Because he learned that our response to meanness says more about who we are than about who they are. Paul chose to let God's love flow through him, even when others chose to let meanness flow through them.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice Paul faced. Someone is mean to us repeatedly, and we have to decide: will we pass the meanness on, or will we break the chain? Will we let their cruelty make us cruel, or will we let God help us respond with blessing, endurance, and kindness?

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What we learn from Paul is this: we can choose our response to meanness. It takes practice, just like learning to play an instrument or getting better at a sport. But we can train our hearts to respond with kindness even when others choose to be cruel. That's what God wants to help us do.

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When we practice this pattern, we become more like Jesus. We break chains of meanness instead of passing them on. And we discover that choosing kindness changes something beautiful inside our own hearts, even when it doesn't immediately change the people around 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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Imagine you're Paul, walking into a town where you know people are going to call you names and throw things at you. What would your stomach feel like? What thoughts would be going through your head? Would it be scary, or frustrating, or make you want to stay home instead?

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**Listen For:** "Scared," "angry," "wanting to run away", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. Paul probably felt all of those things too. It's normal to feel that way when people are mean."

#### Question 2: The Surprise Response

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When someone calls you a mean name, what's your brain's first idea about how to respond? Now imagine you chose to say something kind to them instead. How do you think they would react? What would their face look like?

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**If They Say:** "They'd be confused" or "They wouldn't know what to do", respond: "Exactly! When we respond differently than expected, it breaks the pattern and makes people think."

### Question 3: The Chain Breaker

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Paul talked about breaking the chain of meanness instead of passing it on. Think about a time when someone was mean to you, and then you felt like being mean to someone else. What would it look like to break that chain instead of passing the meanness along?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Paul's choice so hard and so powerful, he stopped the meanness from spreading."

### Question 4: The Inside Change

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Paul said that practicing this pattern changed something inside him. What do you think changed? How might someone be different inside if they practice responding to meanness with kindness, over and over?

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**If They Say:** "They'd be happier" or "Their heart wouldn't be angry", affirm: "Yes! Choosing kindness protects our hearts from becoming bitter and keeps us feeling good about who we are."

Paul learned something that can help all of us: we have more power over our responses than we think. Even when we can't control what others do to us, we can choose how we react. And practicing kindness changes us from the inside out.

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## 4. Activity: Chain Breakers (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 counter-response by having kids physically experience how choosing kindness breaks chains of meanness while choosing meanness keeps the chains going. Success looks like kids discovering that they have power to change the direction of interactions through their response choices.

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

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We're going to play Chain Breakers. I need you to form two lines facing each other, about arm's length apart. One line will be the "Mean Chain" and one will be the "Kind Chain." We'll take turns sending messages down the chains to see what happens.

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Here's how it works: I'll whisper a mean comment to the first person in the Mean Chain. They'll whisper it to the next person, and so on down the line. But here's the twist, anyone can choose to change the message to something kind before passing it on. If they do, they step over to the Kind Chain and keep the new kind message going.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul learned, when someone sends meanness your way, you can choose to pass it on or break the chain by sending kindness instead. Let's see what happens when we practice choosing our response.

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

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Round 1: Start with a mildly mean comment like "Your shoes look weird" and see if anyone chooses to change it to something kind. Watch how quickly messages travel when they're mean versus when they become kind.

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Round 2: Mix it up by starting with a mean comment but planting one student to change it early. Watch what happens when the kind message reaches other students, do they keep it kind or switch it back to mean?

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Coaching: When you see someone struggling to decide, ask: "What would Paul do?" or "How could you break this chain?" When someone chooses kindness, celebrate: "You just broke the mean chain!"

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Round 3: Try starting with kindness and see if the Kind Chain can keep it going, or if anyone tries to make it mean. Notice how it feels different to pass along kind messages versus mean ones.

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The breakthrough moment: When kids realize they feel better passing along kindness and that mean messages naturally want to keep going but kind messages make people smile and feel good.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to change a mean message to a kind one, this is the physical representation of Paul's counter-response pattern. Celebrate these moments as "chain breaking."

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you passed along mean messages versus kind messages? How did your face change? How did your heart feel different? This is exactly what Paul discovered, when we choose to respond with kindness, it changes something inside us and breaks chains of meanness from spreading to others.

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

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Here's what we learned today: Paul discovered that we can choose how to respond when people are mean to us. Instead of automatically being mean back, we can practice counter-response, blessing when others curse, being kind when others are cruel, breaking chains of meanness instead of passing them on.

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This doesn't mean we have to let people hurt us or that we can't ask adults for help when someone won't stop being mean. It means that even in difficult situations, we have the power to choose kindness and keep our hearts from becoming bitter or cruel.

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The amazing result is that when we practice Paul's pattern, we become more like Jesus. Our hearts stay soft and loving instead of hard and angry. We might even help others learn that there's a better way to respond to problems than just being mean back.

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

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This week, when someone is unkind to you, take a deep breath and ask yourself: "How can I break this chain?" You don't have to be perfect at it, but try to respond with one kind word or action instead of being mean back. See what happens, both in the other person and in your own heart.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for teaching us through Paul that we can choose kindness even when others choose meanness. Help us practice responding with blessing when people are mean to us. Make our hearts strong and kind like Jesus. Help us break chains of meanness and spread chains of*

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*kindness instead. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God helps us say nice things when people are mean to us, and this makes our hearts happy.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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

### If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare being kind when someone is mean to giving them a present when they're grumpy, then ask "How do you think that would make them feel?"

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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 kindness or love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Love One Another," or "Be Kind." Use movements: point to others during "love one another," hug yourself during "Jesus loves me," and smile big during "be kind."

---

Great singing! Now sit down in our story shape, a horseshoe so everyone can see. We're going to hear about a man named Paul who learned something very special about being kind to people who weren't kind to him.

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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 sad when people are mean to Paul, sound happy and strong when Paul chooses kindness.

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Today we're going to meet a man named Paul. Paul loved Jesus very much and wanted to tell everyone about him.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

But some people didn't want to hear about Jesus. They said mean things to Paul. They called him bad names. They were very unkind.

---

*[Make a sad, worried face]*

---

This happened every day! Paul would wake up and think, "I wonder if people will be mean to me today." How do you think that made Paul feel?

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

---

But Paul had an idea. A very special idea. Instead of being mean back to the people, Paul decided to be kind!

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

---

When people said mean words to Paul, Paul said nice words back. When people were cruel to Paul, Paul was gentle to them.

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*[Move to side, act out the responses]*

---

If someone yelled "You're stupid, Paul!" Paul would say, "I hope you have a wonderful day." If someone threw things at Paul, Paul would pray, "God, please bless this person."

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**1 Corinthians 4:12-13 (NIV)**

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*"When we are cursed, we bless; when we are persecuted, we endure it; when we are slandered, we answer kindly."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you think it was hard for Paul to be nice when people were mean? Yes! But Paul asked God to help him.

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

And you know what happened? Something amazing! When Paul chose to be kind, his heart stayed happy. He didn't become angry or sad inside.

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

Paul learned that when someone is mean to us, we can choose to be nice back. We don't have to be mean just because they are mean.

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

Sometimes the mean people were so surprised by Paul's kindness that they stopped being mean! They thought, "Why is Paul being nice to me when I was mean to him?"

*[Speak with excitement]*

Paul discovered that being kind was like having a superpower! He could turn meanness into kindness just by choosing to respond with love.

*[Pause dramatically]*

Paul learned that God helps us be kind even when others are not kind to us. God gives us the power to choose kindness!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

Sometimes at school or with your brothers and sisters, someone might be mean to you. You can remember Paul's story and ask God to help you say something nice back.

*[Move closer to the children]*

When someone calls you a name, you can say something kind. When someone is not nice to you, you can still be gentle. God will help you!

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

God loves you so much and He wants to help you be kind like Paul was kind. You can ask God for help anytime someone is mean to you.

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

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

Find a friend 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!

**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 Paul felt when people were mean to him?
2. What would your face look like if someone called you a bad name?
3. How do you think Paul felt inside when he chose to be kind?
4. What would you want to say if someone was mean to you?
5. What changed when Paul decided to be nice to mean people?

6. How does God help us be kind?

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7. What happened to the mean people when Paul was nice to them?

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8. When has someone at school been mean to you?

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9. When has someone at home been mean to you?

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10. Who do you know that is always kind?

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11. Why did Paul choose to be nice instead of mean?

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12. How can we be like Paul when someone is mean to us?

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13. What does God want us to do when people are unkind?

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14. How does it feel when you choose to be kind?

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15. What would happen if everyone chose to be kind like Paul?

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

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17. What do you want to remember about being kind?

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18. How can we pray when someone is mean to us?

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19. What would happen if you said something nice to someone who was grumpy?

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20. How can we ask God to help us be kind like Paul?

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Great discussions! Come back together in our straight lines. Who wants to share what they talked about with their partner?

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness or love with movements. Try "If You're Happy and You Know It" (clap your hands), "This Little Light of Mine" (hold up finger), or "Love, Love, Love" (hug yourself). Include actions like spreading arms wide for "love" and gentle waves for "kindness."

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Beautiful singing! Now sit down cross-legged for our prayer time. Fold your hands and bow your heads. Let's thank God for helping us be kind.

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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's story about being kind...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember to be nice when people are mean to us. Help us ask you for help when it's hard to be kind...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you love us and want us to be kind like Paul was kind...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you help us choose kindness and make our hearts happy. 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 nice when someone is mean" or "Thank you for helping us be kind like Paul."

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Remember, God helps you be kind even when others are mean. You can ask God for help anytime. Have a wonderful week practicing kindness like Paul!

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# Following Christ's Example

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*Christ's Way Through Suffering, When Is Non-Retaliating The Right Response?*

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**1 Peter 2:18-25**

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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 Peter 2:18-25 (NIV)**

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*18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. 19 For it is commendable if someone bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. 20 But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. 21 To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. 22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. 24 "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." 25 For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.*

## Context

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Peter writes to Christians scattered across the Roman Empire who are experiencing social hostility and persecution for their faith. Many are household slaves, artisans, and common laborers with little social power. They face daily situations where they must choose between asserting their rights and following Christ's example of non-retaliation.

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This passage follows Peter's broader instructions about Christian behavior in hostile environments. He has just taught about being "a chosen people" and "living stones," but now addresses the practical reality of suffering unjustly under human authority. The immediate context shows Peter moving from general principles to specific, difficult situations where Christ's example becomes the guiding pattern.

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## The Big Idea

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**Following Christ means embracing his non-retaliatory response to unjust suffering as a vocational calling, not an optional virtue.**

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This isn't about passive submission to all authority, but about actively choosing Christ's specific pattern of entrusting judgment to God rather than seeking personal vindication through retaliation. The complexity emerges when we consider different power contexts and whether resistance might sometimes honor rather than contradict this principle.

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## Theological Core

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- **Christ as Example.** Jesus' suffering becomes the explicit template for Christian response to persecution, not merely inspiration but instruction for how disciples navigate unjust treatment.
  - **Non-Retaliatio**n as Calling. The "called to this" language makes Christ-like response to suffering a vocational mandate, fundamentally reshaping how Christians understand their purpose in hostile environments.
  - **Entrusted Judgment.** The capacity for restraint under persecution flows from actively transferring the right of judgment to God, creating space for divine rather than human justice.
  - **Suffering Response Strategy.** Peter provides a concrete framework for faithful response: no retaliation, no threats, conscious entrustment to divine judgment, maintaining righteousness despite persecution.
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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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- Christ's non-retaliation is presented as a vocational calling that shapes how Christians respond to persecution and injustice
  - Entrusting judgment to God enables restraint while maintaining moral clarity about right and wrong
  - Different power contexts require careful discernment about when non-retaliation follows Christ's example and when resistance might be faithful
  - The goal is not passive submission but active trust in divine justice while refusing to perpetuate cycles of retaliation
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## Grades 4, 6

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- Jesus faced mean people and unjust treatment but chose not to be mean back
  - Following Jesus means making similar choices when people treat us badly
  - Trusting God to handle fairness allows us to focus on doing what's right
  - It's okay to feel angry or hurt, but we can choose Jesus' way of responding
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## Grades 1, 3

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- Jesus shows us the best way to act when people are mean to us
  - God sees everything and takes care of what's fair
  - We can choose to be kind even when others aren't kind to us
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Blanket Passivity.** This passage doesn't endorse passive submission to all authority or abuse. The focus is specifically on retaliation versus non-retaliation in the context of persecution for righteousness, not general submission to harmful power.
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- **Ignoring Power Contexts.** Peter's audience had little social power under Roman authority. Applying this principle requires careful thought about contexts where resistance might honor rather than contradict Christ's example.
- **Minimizing Real Suffering.** Don't rush to application without acknowledging the real pain of unjust treatment. This passage validates suffering while providing a framework for response.
- **False Equivalencies.** Not all conflict situations mirror the persecution context of this passage. Distinguish between interpersonal conflict, systemic injustice, and religious persecution when applying these principles.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Does this mean Christians should never resist injustice or fight back when attacked?"**

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This passage specifically addresses retaliation in persecution contexts. Peter's focus is on breaking cycles of revenge, not prohibiting all forms of resistance. The principle of entrusting judgment to God might actually require resistance in some situations, particularly when protecting others or confronting systemic injustice. The key question becomes: "What response honors Christ's example in this specific context?"

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### **"What about situations where non-retaliation enables more harm to occur?"**

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This is where the historical context matters. Peter's audience faced Roman persecution with little power to resist effectively. In contexts where we have power to prevent harm to others, Christ's love might require intervention rather than non-resistance. The principle of entrusting judgment to God doesn't eliminate human responsibility to protect the vulnerable.

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### **"How do we practically 'entrust ourselves to God who judges justly'?"**

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This involves consciously releasing the desire for personal vindication while maintaining commitment to righteousness. It might include prayer for enemies, seeking systemic change through appropriate channels, focusing on faithful response rather than outcomes, and trusting that God's justice operates on a timeline beyond our immediate experience. It's active trust, not passive resignation.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**Following Christ means choosing his non-retaliatory response to persecution as our vocational calling, trusting God's justice while refusing to perpetuate cycles of revenge.**

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between Christ's call to non-retaliation and situations where resistance might be faithful. Help them explore how entrusting judgment to God functions practically in different power contexts.

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### The Tension to Frame

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When is non-retaliation the faithful response to injustice, and when might resistance better honor Christ's example? How do we discern the difference?

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### Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their instincts about justice while exploring the complexity of faithful response
  - Honor the reality that different power contexts require different applications of this principle
  - Let them wrestle with the tension rather than providing easy answers to complex situations
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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You're at school and someone starts spreading rumors about you that aren't true. People are laughing, looking at you differently, and you can feel your reputation crumbling. Your first instinct might be to fire back with rumors about them, to expose something embarrassing, or to rally your friends to defend you. That impulse makes complete sense, you want to protect yourself and set the record straight.

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But then another part of you wonders if fighting fire with fire just creates more drama. Maybe responding in kind makes you part of the problem, not the solution. Yet staying silent feels like letting them win, like being a doormat. You're caught between wanting justice and wondering what the right response actually looks like.

Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the stakes were life and death. Jesus encountered false accusations, public humiliation, and ultimately execution. His response became the template for how his followers navigate unjust treatment. But that raises complicated questions about when to follow that template.

As we read, notice how Peter describes Jesus' response to persecution and what he says about our calling to follow that example. Pay attention to the specific actions Jesus didn't take and what he did instead. Think about how this might apply to different situations where we face injustice.

Open your Bibles to 1 Peter 2:18-25 and begin reading silently. We'll discuss what you discover in a few minutes.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage contains challenging concepts about suffering and submission. Let students feel the weight of Peter's instructions and Christ's example without rushing to explanations.

### As You Read, Think About:

- Who is Peter addressing and what situations are they facing?
- What specific actions did Jesus choose not to take when he suffered?
- What does "entrusted himself to him who judges justly" mean practically?
- What feelings might you have if you were in the original audience?

### 1 Peter 2:18-25 (NIV)

*18 Slaves, in reverent fear of God submit yourselves to your masters, not only to those who are good and considerate, but also to those who are harsh. 19 For it is commendable if someone*

bears up under the pain of unjust suffering because they are conscious of God. **20** But how is it to your credit if you receive a beating for doing wrong and endure it? But if you suffer for doing good and you endure it, this is commendable before God. **21** To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps. **22** "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." **23** When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly. **24** "He himself bore our sins" in his body on the cross, so that we might die to sins and live for righteousness; "by his wounds you have been healed." **25** For "you were like sheep going astray," but now you have returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who can read with appropriate gravity. This passage deals with serious themes of suffering and persecution.

**Reader 1:** Verses 18-20 (Context of unjust suffering) **Reader 2:** Verses 21-23 (Christ's example)

**Reader 3:** Verses 24-25 (Purpose and identity)

Listen for the emotional weight in these words. This isn't abstract theology, it's practical guidance for people facing real persecution and injustice.

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

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

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions might be: "Why does Peter say we're called to this?" or "What's the difference between suffering for doing wrong versus suffering for doing good?" You have three minutes to discuss and develop questions that matter to you. I'll be walking around to listen.

## 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 complexity.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around suffering, retaliation, justice, and practical application. Start with questions most students will connect with.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What specific actions did Jesus refuse to take when he was insulted and suffered? What did he do instead?"
  - "Peter says 'to this you were called.' What does it mean to be 'called' to suffer for doing good?"
  - "What's the difference between being a doormat and following Christ's example of non-retaliation?"
  - "How might 'entrusting himself to him who judges justly' have worked practically for Jesus? What would that look like for us?"
  - "Are there situations where resistance might honor Christ better than non-retaliation? How do we discern the difference?"
  - "Peter's audience were slaves with little power. How might this principle apply in contexts where we do have power to resist?"
  - "What would have happened if Jesus had retaliated or made threats? How would that have changed everything?"
  - "Why does this matter for us today? How does this passage challenge our natural responses to injustice?"
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### Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? Peter isn't just giving general advice about being nice. He's saying that Christ's specific response to persecution, no retaliation, no threats, active trust in God's justice, becomes the pattern for how Christians navigate unjust suffering. This is our calling. The question becomes: how do we discern when this pattern applies and what it looks like in our contexts?

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. You face situations where people treat you unjustly, spread lies about you, exclude you for doing what's right, or mock your beliefs. How you respond in those moments shapes not just your character but also your witness to who Christ is.

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### Real Issues This Connects To

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- Being excluded or mocked for your faith or moral choices at school
  - Dealing with parents or authorities who treat you unfairly
  - Responding when friends betray your trust or spread rumors
  - Navigating cyberbullying or online harassment
  - Witnessing systemic injustice in your community or world
  - Making choices about when to speak up and when to remain silent
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**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

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- "When have you seen someone respond to unfair treatment in a way that actually made the situation better?"
  - "What would help you choose Christ's way when every instinct tells you to fight back or get even?"
  - "How do you discern when non-retaliation follows Christ's example and when resistance might be more faithful?"
  - "What's the difference between trusting God for justice and just being passive about injustice?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Following Christ means we're called to his pattern of non-retaliation when facing persecution, but this isn't about being doormats. It's about actively entrusting judgment to God while refusing to perpetuate cycles of revenge. This is complicated because different situations require discernment about what faithful response looks like.

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This week, pay attention to your first impulse when someone treats you unfairly. Notice the desire for immediate justice or vindication. Then ask: "What would entrusting this to God look like? How can I respond in a way that honors Christ's example?" This isn't easy, but it's part of what we're called to.

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You asked really thoughtful questions today and wrestled with genuinely difficult ideas. Keep that up. The world needs Christians who can navigate injustice with both wisdom and faithfulness. I believe you're capable of that kind of discernment.

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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 following Jesus includes copying his way of responding when people are mean or unfair to us. Focus on trusting God instead of getting even.

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### If Kids Ask "But what if someone really hurts me? Shouldn't I fight back?"

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Say: "Jesus wants us to be safe. If you're in danger, get help from adults who can protect you. But when people are mean with words or unfair treatment, we can choose Jesus' way of trusting God instead of being mean back."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had someone say something really mean to you that wasn't true. Keep it up if you felt angry and wanted to say something mean back to them. Now raise both hands if part of you wanted to get them back somehow, maybe embarrass them in front of other people or tell everyone something they didn't want people to know.

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Here's a harder question: You know the feeling when someone treats you badly and part of you thinks "I should be nice because that's what good kids do," but another part thinks "If I don't stand up for myself, they'll think I'm weak and keep being mean to me"? That's a really confusing feeling, and it happens to everyone, even adults.

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Those feelings make total sense. When someone hurts us, our brain wants to protect us by fighting back. It's normal to feel angry when people are unfair. It's normal to want them to understand how they made you feel. Sometimes it seems like the only way to make it stop is to be mean back.

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You know how in movies like "The Incredibles" or "Frozen," characters have to decide whether to use their powers to fight back when villains attack them? Elsa could have frozen everyone who was mean to her, but she had to figure out a better way. Heroes face that same choice you face, how do you respond when people treat you badly?

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The tricky part is figuring out what to do with those angry feelings and how to respond in a way that actually helps instead of making things worse. Sometimes what feels like the strong choice actually makes everything worse.

---

Today we're going to hear about Jesus facing the meanest people you can imagine, people who lied about him, hurt him, and even killed him. But the way he responded was so different from what anyone expected that it changed everything. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share examples of being bullied or excluded. Acknowledge them briefly: "That sounds really hard. Those feelings make sense." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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There was a time when Jesus' friends were scattered all around the world, living in places where people didn't like Christians. Some of these Christians were servants who had to obey masters who were sometimes really mean to them. Others were just regular people who got picked on for believing in Jesus.

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These Christians faced a hard choice every single day: when people were mean to them for following Jesus, how should they respond? Should they fight back? Should they try to get even? Should they just pretend to stop believing in Jesus so the mean treatment would stop?

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One of Jesus' best friends, Peter, wrote them a letter to help them figure out what to do. But Peter didn't just give them his opinion, he reminded them about how Jesus himself handled it when people were incredibly mean to him.

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Imagine being Jesus. You spend your days healing sick people, feeding hungry people, and teaching everyone about God's love. You've never hurt anyone. You've never lied or cheated or stolen. You're the best person who ever lived.

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But then some powerful, jealous people start spreading lies about you. They say you're dangerous. They convince crowds of people to hate you. They arrest you even though you've done nothing wrong. They put you on trial with judges who already decided they want to hurt you.

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During that trial, people yelled lies about Jesus. They made fun of him. They hit him. They spit on him. They said terrible things about him in front of everyone. Can you imagine how that felt? Jesus had the power to stop all of it, he could have called angels to rescue him or used his power to make all those mean people disappear.

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But here's what Peter wrote about how Jesus responded:

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**1 Peter 2:22-23 (NIV)**

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*22 "He committed no sin, and no deceit was found in his mouth." 23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

Did you catch what Jesus didn't do? He didn't lie about them back. He didn't threaten them. He didn't try to hurt them to make them stop hurting him. Even though they were being incredibly mean and unfair, Jesus chose not to be mean back.

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But Peter says Jesus didn't just stay quiet and take it like he didn't care. Instead, he "entrusted himself to him who judges justly." That means Jesus gave the whole situation to God. He basically said, "God, you see what's happening here. You know what's right and wrong. I trust you to take care of this."

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Peter told those Christians that this is exactly what we're supposed to do too, follow Jesus' example when people are mean to us for doing good. This is what Jesus looked like when he faced the worst treatment anyone could imagine.

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## 1 Peter 2:21 (NIV)

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*21 To this you were called, because Christ also suffered for you, leaving you an example, that you should follow in his steps.*

Jesus left us an example, like footprints to follow. When people are mean to us, especially when we're trying to do what's right, we can follow in Jesus' footsteps. That doesn't mean we become doormats or let people hurt us. It means we choose Jesus' way instead of the world's way.

The world's way says: "If someone's mean to you, be meaner back. If someone hurts you, hurt them worse. If someone embarrasses you, embarrass them back." But Jesus' way says: "Trust God to handle what's fair. Focus on doing what's right, not on getting even."

And here's the amazing thing, because Jesus chose this way, because he trusted God instead of fighting back, something incredible happened. His death on the cross didn't just end his life. It became the way God saved everyone from their sins. If Jesus had fought back, if he had gotten even, none of us could be forgiven.

Jesus showed us that sometimes the strongest thing you can do is trust God instead of trying to fix everything yourself. When we follow his example, we're not being weak, we're being like the strongest person who ever lived.

Sometimes in our lives, people will be mean to us for doing what's right. They might make fun of us for believing in Jesus or for being kind to someone others don't like. When that happens, we can remember Jesus' footprints and choose his way.

We can choose not to be mean back. We can choose to tell God about what's happening and trust him to take care of what's fair. We can choose to keep doing what's right even when people don't like it. That's what following Jesus looks like.

When we choose Jesus' way, we're showing the world what God is like. We're proving that God's power is stronger than the power of getting even. We're helping break the cycle where mean people make more mean people.

**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're Jesus during that trial. People who should have been fair to you are instead lying about you and hurting you. You have the power to stop it all, you could make them sorry they ever messed with you. But instead, you choose to trust God and not fight back. What do you think was the hardest part about making that choice?

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**Listen For:** "It would hurt," "I'd be angry," "I'd want them to stop", affirm: "Those feelings are totally normal. Jesus felt those things too, but he made a different choice."

#### Question 2: The Trust

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Peter says Jesus "entrusted himself to him who judges justly." That means Jesus basically said to God, "You handle this. You take care of what's fair." What do you think it means to give a situation to God instead of trying to fix it yourself? What might that look like?

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**If They Say:** "Pray about it", respond "Yes! What else might it include? How do we actually let God handle it instead of trying to control everything ourselves?"

#### Question 3: The Example

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Jesus left us an "example" to follow, like footprints showing us the way. When someone at school is mean to you for doing something good, how could you follow Jesus' footprints? What would it look like to trust God instead of getting even?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Jesus' choice so powerful, and it's what makes our choice powerful too when we follow his example."

#### Question 4: The Result

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Because Jesus chose not to fight back, his death became the way God saved everyone from their sins. What do you think might happen when we choose Jesus' way instead of the world's way of getting even? How might that change things around us?

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**If They Say:** "People might see God's love", affirm "Exactly! Our response shows others what God is like and breaks cycles of meanness."

You've thought deeply about this. Jesus' way isn't always easy, but it's always powerful. When we choose not to be mean back, when we trust God to handle what's fair, we're following in the footsteps of the strongest person who ever lived. Now let's experience what that trust looks like.

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

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

##### **Purpose**

This activity reinforces trusting God instead of trying to control everything ourselves by having kids physically experience moving from individual self-protection to group trust and cooperation. Success looks like kids discovering that trusting others actually creates more safety and strength than trying to handle everything alone.

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

We're going to do an activity called "Trust Bridge." I need everyone to spread out around the room, find your own space where you can't touch anyone else. When I say "protect yourself," I want you to curl up in a tight ball and cover your head with your arms. You're trying to protect yourself all by yourself.

But here's the challenge: while you're protecting yourself, you also need to try to move across the room to the other wall. The rule is you have to stay curled up in your protective ball while you move. See if you can get across the room while protecting yourself completely on your own.

After a few minutes, I'm going to give you a different option. You can choose to work with other people to create a "trust bridge", but that means you have to stop protecting yourself and start trusting others to help you get across safely.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what happens when we try to handle mean people all by ourselves versus trusting God and others to help us. Let's see what you discover. Ready? Protect yourself!

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

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Let them struggle for about 90 seconds in their protective balls, trying to move across the room. Watch how difficult and slow it is. They can barely see where they're going and keep bumping into each other. It's exhausting and ineffective.

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Call out encouragements but notice their frustration: "How's it going? Are you feeling safe? Are you making good progress?" Let them experience that total self-protection actually makes them more vulnerable and less effective, not safer.

---

After 90 seconds, offer the choice: "You can keep protecting yourself alone, or you can choose to work together to build trust bridges. To build a trust bridge, you stand next to someone, hold their hand, and help each other walk safely across. But you have to uncurl and trust them."

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Watch for the moment when someone chooses to uncurl and reach for someone else's hand. Celebrate it: "Look! They're choosing to trust instead of protecting themselves alone!" Guide others to form bridges, lines of kids holding hands, supporting each other.

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Notice how much faster and more effectively they can move when they trust each other instead of trying to protect themselves alone. They can see better, move more confidently, and actually help others who are still struggling in their protective balls.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to uncurl and reach for help, this is the physical representation of entrusting themselves to others rather than self-protection.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you were trying to protect yourself completely versus when you chose to trust others and work together? When you were curled up alone, you felt safer but you were actually more vulnerable and couldn't get where you wanted to go. But when you chose to trust, you could move better and help others too. That's exactly what Jesus did, instead of protecting himself by fighting back, he trusted God and it became the way to help everyone.

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

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Here's what we learned today: Jesus shows us how to respond when people are mean or unfair to us. Instead of being mean back or trying to get even, we can follow Jesus' example by trusting God to

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handle what's fair and choosing to keep doing what's right.

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This doesn't mean we let people hurt us or that we don't ask for help when we need it. It means we don't try to hurt people back when they hurt us. We trust that God sees everything and that his way is better than the world's way of getting even.

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When we choose Jesus' way, we show the world what God's love looks like, and we help break the cycle where mean people create more mean people.

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

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This week, when someone is mean to you or treats you unfairly, try the "Trust Bridge" response: instead of being mean back, take a deep breath and say to God, "I'm giving this to you. Help me respond like Jesus would." Then choose one kind action you can do instead of getting even.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Jesus' example of trusting you even when people were really mean to him. When people are mean to us, help us remember that we don't have to be mean back. Help us trust you to take care of what's fair and help us choose your way instead of the world's way. 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 learn that Jesus shows us how to act when people are mean, and God takes care of what's fair.

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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

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Compare Jesus trusting God to trusting your parents when someone is mean to you, you tell them and let them handle it instead of being mean back.

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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 trusting God or following Jesus. Suggestions: "Trust in the Lord," "I Will Follow," or "God is So Good." Use movements: point up to God during "trust" lyrics, march in place during "follow" lyrics, arms wide during "good" lyrics.

---

Great singing! You can sit down in a horseshoe shape facing me. We're going to hear about a time when Jesus showed everyone the best way to act when people are really mean to you. Get ready to listen!

---

### 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, sound mean when you're the bad people, sound strong when you talk about God.

---

Today we're going to meet the strongest person who ever lived, Jesus!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

Jesus was the kindest, most loving person ever. He helped sick people feel better. He fed hungry people. He was nice to everyone.

---

*[Make a sad face and speak in a worried voice]*

---

But some mean people didn't like Jesus. They were jealous because everyone loved Jesus and wanted to hear him talk about God.

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, use a mean voice]*

---

These mean people said bad things about Jesus that weren't true. They said he was a bad person, but that was a lie!

---

*[Move to center, speak gently like Jesus]*

---

Jesus could have used his power to make the mean people stop. He could have been mean back to them. But Jesus chose a different way.

---

*[Look around at each child with a gentle expression]*

---

When the mean people said bad things about Jesus, he didn't say mean things back to them. When they hurt his feelings, he didn't try to hurt their feelings.

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**1 Peter 2:23 (NIV)**

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*23 When they hurled their insults at him, he did not retaliate; when he suffered, he made no threats. Instead, he entrusted himself to him who judges justly.*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think Jesus felt sad when people were mean to him? Yes! It's okay to feel sad when people are mean. But Jesus knew something special.

---

*[Point up toward heaven with authority and warmth]*

---

Jesus knew that God his Father was watching everything. God saw the mean people being mean. God saw Jesus being kind.

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

So instead of being mean back, Jesus said, "God, I trust you. You see what's happening. You take care of what's fair."

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

And Jesus kept being kind and loving, even when people were mean to him. That's because Jesus is the strongest person ever!

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*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And do you know what happened? Because Jesus chose to trust God instead of being mean back, God was able to use Jesus to save everyone!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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Jesus showed us the best way to act when people are mean: don't be mean back, and trust God to take care of what's fair.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes kids at school might be mean to you. Sometimes someone might say something that hurts your feelings. Sometimes people might not share or might not be fair.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When that happens, you can remember Jesus! You can choose not to be mean back. You can tell God about it and trust him to take care of what's fair.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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When you choose Jesus' way, you're being like the strongest, kindest person ever. God sees everything and he loves it when we choose to be kind like Jesus!

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

---

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

## Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think Jesus felt when people were mean to him?
2. What would you want to do if someone said mean things about you?
3. Why do you think Jesus didn't say mean things back?
4. What does it mean to trust God when someone is mean to you?
5. How is Jesus' way different from being mean back?
6. When has someone been mean to you at school?
7. When has someone been mean to you at home?
8. What could you say to God when someone is mean?
9. Why is Jesus the strongest person ever?
10. How can we be like Jesus when people are mean?
11. What happens when we're mean back to mean people?
12. How does God take care of what's fair?
13. What makes Jesus' way the best way?
14. How do you feel when someone is kind to you?
15. What's hard about not being mean back?
16. How can Jesus help us when we're sad?
17. What should we remember about God when people are mean?

18. How can we pray when someone hurts our feelings?

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19. What would happen if everyone chose Jesus' way?

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20. How can we show others that Jesus' way is best?

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

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

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

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Select a song about being kind or trusting God. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Trust and Obey," or "Jesus Loves Me." Include movements: hug yourself during "love" lyrics, point to others during "kind" lyrics, fold hands during "trust" lyrics.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down cross-legged in rows for our prayer. Fold your hands and bow your heads quietly.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Jesus who shows us the best way to act.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*When people are mean to us, help us remember not to be mean back. Help us trust you to take care of what's fair.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Help us be kind like Jesus, even when it's hard. Help us remember that you see everything and you love us very much.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you always take care of us and that Jesus shows us how strong kindness can be. 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 trusting God when people are mean. Examples: "Help me not be mean back" or "Thank you that you see everything."

Remember, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose Jesus' way, don't be mean back, and trust God to take care of what's fair. Have a wonderful week showing everyone how strong kindness can be!

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# Blessing for Insult

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*Breaking the Cycle, When blessing is your calling, not revenge*

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**1 Peter 3:8-16**

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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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**1 Peter 3:8-16 (NIV)**

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*8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

*10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. 11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

*13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

## Context

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Peter writes to scattered Christians facing hostility in the Roman Empire, believers who are experiencing social rejection, insults, and persecution for their faith. These churches are composed of both Jewish and Gentile converts navigating how to live faithfully while under suspicion from their neighbors, employers, and government authorities.

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This passage comes as Peter's culminating instruction on relationships, he has just addressed how believers should relate to government, masters, spouses, and now the entire Christian community. The word "Finally" signals this is his climactic teaching: when facing external hostility, the internal unity and external response of the church must embody something radically different from the culture's pattern of retaliation.

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## The Big Idea

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**God calls his people to break the cycle of matching insult with insult by responding with blessing, not as optional graciousness, but as vocational calling connected to spiritual inheritance.**

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This isn't about passive absorption of abuse or pretending harm doesn't hurt. It's about the radical disruption of the automatic human pattern of returning evil for evil. The blessing response emerges from a community that has learned to be like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, and humble with each other first, internal health enables external transformation.

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## Theological Core

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- **Asymmetrical Response.** Christians are explicitly prohibited from matching evil with evil or insult with insult, instead called to respond with blessing, a radically different quality of response that breaks destructive cycles.
  - **Calling and Identity.** This blessing-for-insult pattern is not optional behavior but vocational calling ("to this you were called"), connecting response to fundamental Christian identity rather than mere ethics.
  - **Inheritance Connection.** The motivation for blessing enemies is connected to inheriting blessing, suggesting that how we respond to hostility affects our spiritual reward and relationship with God.
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- **Community Prerequisites.** The instruction to bless enemies follows immediately after commands for internal community health (like-minded, sympathetic, loving, compassionate, humble), indicating that external blessing flows from internal unity.
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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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- Blessing enemies is vocational calling, not optional niceness, it defines Christian identity and connects to spiritual inheritance
  - The tension between wanting justice and choosing blessing is real and requires wrestling with what blessing practically looks like
  - Internal community health (being like-minded, sympathetic, loving) enables the capacity to bless external enemies
  - Discernment is required to distinguish blessing response from passive absorption of abuse or enabling harmful behavior
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- We can choose to break the cycle of "getting back" at people who hurt us by responding with blessing instead of matching their meanness
  - Our choices have consequences, blessing responses can change situations in ways revenge cannot
  - It's normal to feel hurt or angry when insulted, but we can choose blessing response even when we don't feel like it
  - Blessing others when they're mean takes practice and help from God, but it's what Christians are called to do
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## Grades 1, 3

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- When someone is mean to us, we can be kind back instead of being mean back
  - God wants us to bless people who hurt us, and God will help us do that
  - Being kind to mean people is what Jesus people do
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Passive Doormat Theology.** This passage doesn't teach passive absorption of abuse or enable harmful behavior, blessing response is active and transformative, not passive submission. Distinguish between blessing enemies and enabling their destructive patterns.
  - **Emotion Denial.** Don't suggest that blessing response means not feeling hurt, anger, or the desire for justice. These feelings are natural and acknowledged, the call is to choose blessing response despite and through those feelings, not instead of them.
  - **Individual Ethics Only.** The passage roots enemy-blessing in community health first, don't skip the prerequisite of internal unity. Communities that practice like-mindedness and compassion with each other develop capacity for blessing external enemies.
  - **Optional Graciousness.** This isn't about being nice when convenient, Peter uses calling language ("to this you were called") and inheritance language ("inherit a blessing"), indicating this response pattern is fundamental to Christian identity and spiritual reward.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"What about situations where people are actually dangerous or abusive, are we supposed to just bless them and let them keep hurting us?"**

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Blessing response doesn't mean enabling abuse or failing to protect yourself and others from harm. Blessing can include seeking justice, establishing boundaries, and working to stop destructive behavior. The key is that our motivation is restoration and good for everyone involved, not revenge or punishment. Sometimes the most loving thing is to help someone face consequences for harmful

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behavior.

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**"How is this fair? Why should good people have to bless bad people while bad people get away with their behavior?"**

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Peter acknowledges this tension, he knows it's not fair in human terms. But the passage suggests that God sees and responds differently than humans do, and that those who choose blessing inherit blessing in ways that the immediate situation doesn't reveal. The goal isn't earthly fairness but transformation, both of ourselves and potentially of those who harm us.

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**"What does 'repay with blessing' actually look like in real situations? How do I practically bless someone who insults me?"**

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Blessing response varies by situation but always seeks the good of the other person and breaks destructive cycles. It might include refusing to spread gossip about them, praying for their wellbeing, looking for opportunities to help them, speaking well of them when others criticize, or actively working for their success. The goal is their flourishing, not their punishment, while maintaining appropriate boundaries for your own wellbeing.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Breaking the cycle of insult-for-insult by choosing blessing is not optional graciousness but Christian calling, and it changes everything for both you and your enemies.**

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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 their natural desire for justice and God's call to respond to insults with blessing, helping them discover what this radical response looks like in their actual relationships and conflicts.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When someone insults or hurts us, everything in us wants to match their energy and give it back, but what if blessing them is not just nice advice but actually our calling as Christians?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of being hurt and their natural desire for justice, these feelings are legitimate and acknowledged in Scripture
  - Help them distinguish between blessing response and passive absorption of abuse, this passage is about active transformation, not doormat theology
  - Let students wrestle with what blessing practically looks like rather than giving them easy answers, the complexity is the point
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Think about the last time someone said something that really stung, maybe they called you stupid, made fun of how you look, questioned your abilities, or attacked something you care about. Maybe it was online, maybe it was face-to-face. You know that feeling when the insult hits and your brain immediately starts composing the perfect comeback, the thing that will hurt them as much as they hurt you?

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That automatic response makes complete sense. They attacked you, so you attack back. They insulted you, so you insult them. Eye for an eye, insult for insult, it feels like justice. It feels like self-respect. In a world where everyone's looking for your weak spots, hitting back feels like the only way to maintain your dignity and show people they can't walk all over you.

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Today we're looking at someone who understood that instinct perfectly, Peter was writing to Christians who were being insulted, mocked, and attacked for their faith. They were facing real hostility from neighbors, employers, and government officials. Except Peter tells them something that sounds almost impossible: don't match insult with insult. Instead, repay with blessing.

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As we read, notice two things: first, how Peter acknowledges the reality of being hurt and insulted, he's not pretending it doesn't happen or doesn't hurt. Second, notice the language he uses about why blessing response isn't just nice behavior but actually connected to who we are as Christians.

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Open your Bibles to 1 Peter 3, starting at verse 8. We'll read silently first, then talk through what Peter is actually asking and whether it's even possible in real life.

## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Some students will read quickly, others slowly, let them process at their own pace. Watch for students who seem confused by the language and be ready to help with vocabulary like "revere" or "maliciously." Let them feel the weight of what Peter is asking.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors is Peter commanding, and what is he explicitly prohibiting?
- What reasons does Peter give for why Christians should respond this way?
- What seems most difficult or unrealistic about what Peter is asking?
- How would you feel if you were one of the Christians receiving this letter?

### 1 Peter 3:8-16 (NIV)

*8 Finally, all of you, be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble. 9 Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing.*

*10 For, "Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. 11 They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it. 12 For the eyes of the Lord are on the righteous and his ears are attentive to their cry, but the face of the Lord is against those who do evil."*

*13 Who is going to harm you if you are eager to do good? 14 But even if you should suffer for what is right, you are blessed. "Do not fear their threats; do not be frightened." 15 But in your hearts revere Christ as Lord. Always be prepared to give an answer to everyone who asks you to give the reason for the hope that you have. But do this with gentleness and respect, 16 keeping a*

*clear conscience, so that those who speak maliciously against your good behavior in Christ may be ashamed of their slander.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Choose confident readers for verses 10-12 since they include an Old Testament quote. Let students pass if they're uncomfortable, some may be processing personal experiences with insults or conflict.

**Reader 1:** Verses 8-9 (community health and enemy response) **Reader 2:** Verses 10-12 (Old Testament wisdom about consequences) **Reader 3:** Verses 13-16 (suffering for doing right and responding to persecution)

Listen for the emotions and tension in this passage, Peter isn't giving easy advice to people in easy situations. These are survival instructions for people under real attack.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate questions. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about what Peter expects?" or "What seems hardest about this?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and spend the next three minutes coming up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Don't worry about having the "right" questions, ask what you're actually curious or confused about. Maybe something about what Peter expects, or how this would work in real life, or why he connects blessing with inheritance. Ask what you actually want to know.

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

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**Remember:** Let students drive with their questions. Your job is to facilitate discovery, not lecture. Help them wrestle with the complexity rather than providing easy answers.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions, I'll write them on the board and we'll work through them together. Start with the questions most of you can relate to.

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

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- "What evidence do you see in the text that Peter understands how hard this is?"
  - "Peter says 'to this you were called', what does that suggest about blessing response? Is it optional?"
  - "What's the difference between repaying with blessing and just letting people walk all over you?"
  - "Notice the community health stuff in verse 8 comes before enemy blessing in verse 9, why might that order matter?"
  - "Peter connects blessing response to 'inheriting a blessing', what do you think that means?"
  - "What would 'repay with blessing' actually look like with someone who insulted you at school?"
  - "What if Peter had told them to repay insult with justice instead of blessing, how would that change things?"
  - "Why does this matter for how we handle conflict in our relationships today?"
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### **Revealing the Pattern**

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Do you notice what's happening here? Peter isn't just giving nice advice, he's describing a completely different way of being human. Instead of the automatic cycle where insult creates insult and evil creates evil, Christians are called to break the cycle by responding with something qualitatively different. It's not about being nice when convenient, it's about who we are as people called by God to inherit blessing.

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

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you actually experience insults and attacks? I'm thinking about school hallways, group texts, social media comments, family arguments, team dynamics. Where are the places you regularly face the choice between matching someone's energy or choosing something different?

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

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- When classmates mock your academic performance, appearance, interests, or values
- When family members criticize your choices, friends, or future plans in hurtful ways
- When friends turn on you with gossip, exclusion, or public embarrassment
- When people attack you online for your opinions, posts, or simply for existing
- When you face discrimination or prejudice based on your race, religion, family background, or identity
- When making hard decisions about whether to defend yourself or others who are being targeted

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to provide solutions. Some situations are genuinely complex and require discernment. Help them think through what blessing might look like rather than giving blanket advice.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose blessing response, and what happened as a result?"
- "What would help you choose blessing when your natural instinct is to attack back?"
- "How do you distinguish between blessing response and enabling someone's harmful behavior?"
- "What's the difference between blessing someone and pretending they didn't hurt you?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Peter isn't asking you to be a doormat or pretend insults don't hurt. He's calling you to something much harder and much more transformative, breaking the cycle of insult-for-insult by choosing blessing instead. This isn't optional niceness; it's fundamental to your identity as someone called by God. And it's revolutionary.

This week, pay attention to your automatic responses when someone hurts or insults you. Notice the impulse to match their energy. Then experiment with asking: "What would blessing look like here?" Sometimes it's prayer, sometimes it's practical help, sometimes it's refusing to participate in gossip about them. Sometimes it's establishing boundaries while still seeking their good.

You wrestled with hard questions today and didn't settle for easy answers. That's exactly what this passage requires, the kind of deep thinking that leads to transformed relationships. Keep wrestling, keep asking hard questions, and keep discovering what it looks like to break cycles instead of perpetuating them.

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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 break the cycle of "getting back" at people who hurt them by choosing to respond with blessing instead, and that this choice changes everything.

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### If Kids Ask "What if someone is really mean and hurts me badly?"

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Say: "Jesus wants us to be safe and get help when someone hurts us. Blessing someone doesn't mean letting them keep hurting you, it means wanting good things for them while protecting yourself."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had someone say something really mean to you, maybe they called you a name, made fun of something about you, or said something that really hurt your feelings. Keep your hands up if you've ever wanted to say something mean right back to them.

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Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where someone was mean to you, you were mean back to them, they were meaner to you, and it just kept getting worse and worse. Like a meanness war where everyone keeps trying to win by being the meanest.

---

That feeling makes total sense, doesn't it? When someone hurts you, part of you thinks "They deserve to know how that feels" and another part thinks "If I don't hit back, they'll think they can keep being mean to me." Sometimes it feels like being mean back is the only way to protect yourself or show them they can't treat you that way.

---

This is exactly like what happens in the movie "Turning Red" when Mei gets embarrassed by her friends and starts lashing out at everyone, or in "Encanto" when family members hurt each other with words and everyone just gets more and more defensive. The meanness keeps growing because everyone's trying to protect themselves by hurting back.

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The tricky part is figuring out how to protect yourself and stand up for yourself without turning into someone just as mean as the person who hurt you. How do you break the cycle instead of making it bigger?

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Today we're going to hear about what the apostle Peter told some Christians who were being insulted and treated badly by their neighbors. He gave them instructions that sounded almost impossible, but that had the power to change everything. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will enthusiastically raise hands for the first questions, acknowledge their experiences briefly. Some may share specific instances of conflict, listen but keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture a time about 2,000 years ago when being a Christian was dangerous and confusing. The Christians in this story weren't meeting in beautiful churches, they were meeting secretly in people's houses because their neighbors didn't understand their faith and sometimes got angry about it.

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These Christians were regular people, merchants, servants, mothers, fathers, teenagers, but they had decided to follow Jesus. And that decision was making their lives really hard. Their neighbors thought they were weird. Their employers sometimes treated them unfairly. Even their own family members sometimes turned against them.

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People would insult them on the street, calling them troublemakers and crazy people. They'd spread rumors about them. Some Christians lost their jobs. Others lost their friends. Kids at school would make fun of Christian kids for their beliefs. It was lonely and scary and frustrating.

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Imagine being one of those Christians. Every day you'd wake up knowing that someone might say something mean about your faith, or exclude you from activities, or treat you like you didn't matter. Think about what that would feel like in your stomach, that nervous, angry feeling when you know people don't like you for something important to you.

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The Christians started feeling something familiar: the urge to fight back. When someone insulted their faith, they wanted to insult that person right back. When someone was cruel to them, they wanted to be cruel in return. When someone excluded them, they wanted to exclude that person too.

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It made perfect sense. These people were being mean first, why shouldn't the Christians defend themselves? Why shouldn't they show these bullies how it felt to be treated badly? Why should they just take it?

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But then they received a letter from Peter, one of Jesus's closest friends. Peter understood exactly what they were going through because he had faced the same kind of treatment. He knew what it felt like to want to fight back.

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And Peter started his instructions with something interesting. He didn't immediately tell them how to handle their enemies. First, he told them how to treat each other as Christians: "Be like-minded, be sympathetic, love one another, be compassionate and humble."

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In other words, "Learn to be kind and understanding with the people on your team first. Practice compassion with people who are easy to love. Build up your kindness muscles with your Christian family."

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And then Peter said something that must have sounded almost impossible:

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**1 Peter 3:9 (NIV)**

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*"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay with blessing, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing."*

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Can you imagine how the Christians felt when they heard that? "Wait, what? When someone insults us, we're supposed to... bless them? When someone is evil to us, we don't get to be evil back? Are you serious, Peter?"

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But Peter wasn't just giving them impossible advice. He was explaining something important: God hadn't called them to be just like everyone else who responds to meanness with meanness. He had called them to something completely different.

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Peter continued reading from the Old Testament to help them understand:

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## 1 Peter 3:10-11 (NIV)

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*"Whoever would love life and see good days must keep their tongue from evil and their lips from deceitful speech. They must turn from evil and do good; they must seek peace and pursue it."*

Peter was helping them see the pattern: when you respond to evil with evil, evil wins. When you respond to insults with insults, the insults multiply. But when you respond to meanness with blessing, something good and kind, you break the cycle.

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This didn't mean the Christians had to pretend the insults didn't hurt. It didn't mean they couldn't protect themselves or get help when they needed it. Peter knew that being treated badly really does hurt, and that wanting justice is normal.

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What Peter was teaching them was that they had a choice in how to respond. They could match the meanness and make it bigger, or they could choose blessing and make something completely different happen.

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Some of the Christians probably tried it. When a neighbor insulted their faith, instead of insulting back, they might have said, "I hope you have a good day" and meant it. When someone excluded them, instead of excluding that person back, they might have looked for ways to include them.

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And something amazing started to happen. The people who expected a fight didn't get one. Instead, they encountered something they'd never seen before, people who responded to meanness with genuine kindness. It confused their enemies and often stopped the cycle of hurt from growing.

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Not everyone changed their minds about the Christians, and some people kept being mean. But many people started asking, "Why are these Christians so different? Why don't they fight back like everyone else?" And that gave the Christians opportunities to explain about Jesus.

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Some of the people who had been mean to Christians actually became Christians themselves because they were so amazed by this different way of responding to conflict. The blessing response was like a superpower that could change enemies into friends.

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Peter taught them that this wasn't just a nice strategy, it was their calling as people who followed Jesus. Just like Jesus had blessed people who hurt him, they were called to break cycles of meanness by choosing blessing instead.

---

Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice those early Christians faced. When someone is mean to us at school, or a sibling hurts our feelings, or someone online says something cruel, we can ask: "Do I want to make this meanness bigger by being mean back, or do I want to try breaking the cycle with blessing?"

---

It's not always easy, and it doesn't always work the way we want it to. But Peter promised that God sees when we choose blessing over meanness, and that choosing blessing changes us into the kind of people God wants us to be.

---

What we learn is that we have more power than we think. We can't control how other people treat us, but we can control how we respond. And when we choose blessing, we're doing exactly what Jesus would do.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Natural Response

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Imagine someone at your school calls you a really mean name in front of other people. Your face gets hot, you feel embarrassed and angry, and your brain immediately starts thinking of the perfect comeback that will make them feel as bad as they made you feel. What's appealing about responding that way, and what might go wrong if you do?

---

**Listen For:** "It would feel good to get them back," "They deserve it", affirm: "That makes total sense. That response feels like justice and protection."

#### Question 2: The Cycle Pattern

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Think about what happens when one person is mean, then the other person is mean back, then the first person is even meaner. Where does that cycle usually lead? Have you ever seen a situation where the meanness just kept growing until someone got really hurt?

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**If They Say:** If they mention specific conflicts, respond: "That sounds really hard. What do you think might have happened if someone had chosen blessing instead?"

### Question 3: The Challenge

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Peter told the Christians to "repay with blessing" instead of matching meanness with meanness. What do you think "blessing" someone who hurt you would actually look like? What would that sound like or look like in real life?

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**Connect:** "These are exactly the kinds of blessing responses Peter was talking about, things that break the cycle instead of feeding it."

### Question 4: The Power

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Why do you think choosing blessing instead of meanness might actually be more powerful than fighting back? What could happen when someone expects a fight but gets kindness instead?

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**If They Say:** If they worry about looking weak, respond: "It actually takes more strength to choose blessing than to match someone's meanness. Anyone can be mean back."

You're understanding something really important: we have more control than we think. We can't control how people treat us, but we can choose how we respond. And that choice can break cycles of hurt instead of making them bigger.

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## 4. Activity: Cycle Breakers (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 blessing response breaks destructive cycles by having kids experience the difference between matching negative energy and responding with positive energy. Success looks like kids discovering that blessing response has the power to change the entire dynamic of a conflict.

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### Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

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We're going to play Cycle Breakers. Everyone stand up and find a partner, stand about three feet apart facing each other. One person in each pair will be Partner A, the other will be Partner B.

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Partner A, your job is to make an angry face and take one step toward your partner while saying "You're mean!" in an angry voice. Partner B, your job is to make the same angry face, take a step toward Partner A, and say "YOU'RE mean!" even louder. Keep going back and forth, each time getting a little angrier and a little louder.

---

We're doing this because it's exactly like what happens when people respond to meanness with meanness, the conflict gets bigger and louder and angrier with each exchange. Let's see what happens when we feed the cycle.

---

After about one minute, I'll call "STOP!" and we'll try something completely different to see what changes.

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

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Go ahead and start the cycle, remember, each exchange should get a little more intense. I want you to notice how it feels in your body when the anger keeps growing.

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Keep going! Notice how each person's anger feeds the other person's anger. See how the conflict is getting bigger even though no one is actually being hurt, it's just the pattern of matching energy with energy.

---

STOP! Shake it off, take a deep breath. Now we're going to try the same start, but when Partner A says "You're mean!" in an angry voice, Partner B, instead of matching that energy, I want you to take a step back, soften your face, and say "I hope you have a good day" in a genuinely kind voice.

---

Partner A, now your job is to notice how it feels when you expect a fight but get kindness instead. Let your face show whatever you're feeling, confusion, surprise, maybe even relief that the fight stopped.

---

Partner B, finish by asking "Are you okay? You seem upset." and really mean it. You're choosing to bless someone who was angry at you by caring about how they're feeling.

---

**Watch For:** The moment when Partner A's angry expression changes to confusion or surprise, this is the physical representation of how blessing response breaks cycles and changes the entire dynamic.

---

## **Debrief(1 minute)**

What did you notice about how it felt when the anger kept feeding more anger versus when someone chose blessing instead? Partner A's, how did it feel when you expected Partner B to fight back but they chose kindness? This is exactly what Peter was talking about, blessing response has the power to stop cycles of meanness and create something completely different.

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

Here's what we learned today: when someone is mean to us, we have a choice. We can match their meanness and make the conflict bigger, or we can choose blessing and break the cycle. Peter taught those early Christians that blessing response isn't just a nice idea, it's what God calls us to do as Christians.

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This doesn't mean letting people hurt you or pretending meanness doesn't hurt your feelings. It means choosing to respond with something good instead of something mean, even when you don't feel like it. It means wanting good things for people who hurt you, while still protecting yourself and getting help when you need it.

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The amazing result is that blessing response can change enemies into friends, stop fights from growing, and help you become the kind of person God wants you to be. You have more power than you think to change conflict situations.

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## **This Week's Challenge**

This week, when someone is mean to you or hurts your feelings, before you respond, ask yourself: "Do I want to make this bigger by being mean back, or do I want to try blessing them instead?" Try at least one blessing response and notice what happens. It might be saying something kind, doing something helpful, or even just choosing not to say the mean thing you're thinking.

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## **Closing Prayer (Optional)**

*Dear God, thank you for teaching us that we don't have to match meanness with meanness. When someone hurts us this week, help us remember that we can choose blessing instead. Give us the courage to break cycles instead of making them bigger. Help us be the kind of people who make peace instead of making conflicts worse. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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# Grades 1, 3

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

## Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that when someone is mean to us, we can be kind back instead of being mean back because that's what Jesus wants.

## Movement & Formation Plan

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

## If Kids Don't Understand

Compare blessing someone to sharing a cookie when someone takes your toy, you choose to be kind even when they're not kind to you.

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

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness or loving others. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love One Another," or "Jesus Loves You and Me." Use movements: point to others during "one another," hug yourself during "love," spread arms wide during "Jesus loves you."

Great singing! Now let's sit down on the floor in a horseshoe shape so I can tell you an amazing story about some people who learned to be kind to mean people. This is going to be exciting!

## 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 sad when describing meanness, sound strong and happy when describing blessing responses.

---

Today we're going to meet some special people called Christians who loved Jesus very much.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

But there was a problem. Some of their neighbors didn't like that they loved Jesus. These neighbors said mean things to the Christians and made them feel sad.

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*[Make a sad face and speak in a hurt voice]*

---

The Christians felt hurt and confused. When someone says mean things to you, what do you want to do? That's right, you want to say mean things back!

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, cross arms angrily]*

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The Christians started thinking, "If they're mean to us, we should be mean to them! If they hurt our feelings, we should hurt their feelings!"

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

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But then they got a letter from Peter, one of Jesus's best friends. Peter knew exactly how they felt because mean people had said mean things to him too!

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*[Move to side, sound like you're reading a letter]*

---

Peter wrote to them and said, "I know people are being mean to you. I know it hurts your feelings. But here's what Jesus wants you to do..."

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**1 Peter 3:9 (NIV)**

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*"Do not repay evil with evil or insult with insult. On the contrary, repay with blessing."*

*[Pause and look around at each child with surprise]*

Can you imagine what the Christians thought when they heard that? "Wait, Peter! When someone is mean to us, we're supposed to be... NICE to them? Are you serious?"

*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

But Peter explained something amazing. He said, "When you're kind to mean people, something special happens. You break the meanness cycle!"

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

You see, when someone is mean to you and you're mean back, what happens? The meanness gets bigger! But when someone is mean to you and you're kind instead, the meanness stops growing!

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

So some of the Christians tried it. When someone said something mean to them, instead of being mean back, they said something kind. Instead of hurting back, they helped!

*[Speak with excitement and wonder]*

And guess what happened? Some of the mean people were so surprised by the kindness that they stopped being mean! Some of them even became friends with the Christians!

*[Pause dramatically]*

Peter told them this was like a superpower that God gives Christians. Instead of making meanness bigger, Christians can make kindness bigger!

*[Speak directly to the children]*

Sometimes at school or at home, people might say mean things to you or hurt your feelings. When that happens, you can remember what Peter taught those Christians.

*[Move closer to the children]*

You can choose to be kind instead of mean. You can say something nice instead of something hurtful. You can help instead of hurting back.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves it when we choose kindness, even when other people choose meanness. And sometimes, our kindness can help mean people become kind people 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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Stand up and find a partner! I'm going to give each pair of friends one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

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

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#### Discussion Questions

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

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1. How do you think the Christians felt when people said mean things to them?
  2. When someone is mean to you, what do you usually want to do?
  3. What do you think the mean people thought when Christians were kind to them?
  4. If someone called you a mean name, what would being kind back look like?
  5. What happens when someone is mean and you're mean back to them?
  6. Why do you think God wants us to be kind to mean people?
  7. What changed when the Christians chose kindness instead of meanness?
  8. Can you think of a time when someone was kind to you when you were grumpy?
  9. What's something kind you could do for someone who hurt your feelings?
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10. Why is choosing kindness like a superpower?

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11. What would happen if everyone in our class chose kindness when others were mean?

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12. How do you think Jesus feels when we choose kindness?

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13. What's harder: being mean back or being kind back?

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14. Who can help us choose kindness when we want to be mean?

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15. What if being kind doesn't make the mean person nice right away?

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16. How does it feel in your heart when you choose kindness?

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17. What are some kind words you could say to someone who's mean to you?

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18. Can you pray for someone who's mean to you?

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19. What would Jesus do if someone was mean to him?

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20. How can we remember to choose kindness when we're feeling hurt?

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

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness and love. Suggestions: "If You're Kind and You Know It" (clap your hands), "God Loves You So Much" (hug yourself), or "Be Kind" (point to friends). Include actions: clap during "kind," hug yourself during "love," point to others during "friends."

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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 for teaching us to be kind to people who are mean.*

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*[Pause]*

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*When someone hurts our feelings this week, help us remember to choose kindness instead of being mean back. Help us be like Jesus.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you that you love us so much and that you help us choose kindness. Help our kindness help other people want to be kind too.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for always being kind to us, God. Help us be kind like you. 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 kindness. Examples: "Help me be kind when someone's mean" or "Thank you for teaching us about kindness."

Remember, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose kindness instead! You have Jesus's power to break meanness with kindness. Have a wonderful week being kind like Jesus!

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# Patient With Everyone

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*Different Responses, Universal Patience, How do we balance warning with patience?*

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**1 Thessalonians 5:11-24**

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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 Thessalonians 5:11-24 (NIV)**

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*11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*

*16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

## Context

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Paul is writing to the young church in Thessalonica, wrapping up his letter with intensely practical instructions about community life. These believers are facing persecution from outside while navigating inevitable conflicts and personality clashes within their community. Some members are apparently causing disruption through idleness, while others are struggling with discouragement and weakness.

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This passage comes immediately after Paul's teaching about the day of the Lord and living in readiness for Christ's return. He's moving from cosmic theology to kitchen-table practicality, how do you actually treat each other while waiting for Jesus? The church is learning to function as a family, and Paul is giving them the relational wisdom they desperately need.

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## The Big Idea

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**Different people need different responses, but patience applies to everyone, even when we're giving warnings or correcting behavior.**

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This isn't about being a doormat or avoiding difficult conversations. Paul explicitly calls for warning those who are idle and disruptive. The stunning insight is that we can confront problems while maintaining patience, and we can respond to different situations appropriately without losing our commitment to universal grace.

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## Theological Core

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- **Situational Wisdom.** Different people and situations require different responses, warning for the disruptive, encouragement for the disheartened, help for the weak. Love isn't one-size-fits-all.
  - **Universal Patience.** Regardless of the specific response needed, patience applies to everyone. This is non-negotiable and absolute, not dependent on whether people deserve it.
  - **No-Retaliatio n Principle.** "Make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong" is an explicit prohibition against automatic escalation. We break the cycle of harm by choosing good instead of revenge.
  - **Proactive Goodness.** We don't just avoid retaliation, we "always strive to do what is good." This is active pursuit of others' welfare, not passive non-aggression.
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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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- Patience and directness aren't opposites, you can address problems while remaining patient
  - Different situations require different responses, but the attitude of patience applies universally
  - Breaking retaliation cycles requires intentional choice to pursue good instead of getting even
  - Discerning when to warn, encourage, or help requires wisdom and attention to what people actually need
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## Grades 4, 6

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- Different people need different kinds of help, and we can learn to notice what they need
  - Being patient doesn't mean being a pushover, sometimes love means speaking up
  - When someone hurts us, getting revenge makes everything worse; choosing to do good breaks the cycle
  - It's okay to feel frustrated with people and still choose to be patient with them
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to be patient with everyone, even difficult people
  - When someone is mean to us, we choose to be kind instead of being mean back
  - We can help people in different ways, some people need encouragement, some need help
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **False Opposition Between Patience and Confrontation.** Don't present these as mutually exclusive. Paul calls for both warning the disruptive and being patient with everyone. The challenge is learning to confront problems while maintaining a patient attitude.
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- **One-Size-Fits-All Responses.** Avoid suggesting that the same response works for everyone. The passage explicitly differentiates between warning, encouraging, and helping. Wisdom means discerning what each person actually needs.
- **Conditional Patience.** Don't make patience dependent on good behavior or deserving responses. The text says "patient with everyone", this is universal, not earned.
- **Passive Non-Retaliatio**n. Paul doesn't just say "don't pay back wrong", he says "strive to do what is good." This is active pursuit of others' welfare, not just avoiding harm.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"Doesn't being patient with disruptive people just enable their bad behavior?"**

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Paul actually addresses this directly by calling for both warning the disruptive AND being patient with everyone. Patience doesn't mean avoiding difficult conversations or boundaries. It means maintaining grace in our attitude even when we need to address problems. The goal is their growth, not our comfort.

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### **"How do you break retaliation cycles when the other person keeps escalating?"**

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Paul's instruction is absolute: "Make sure nobody pays back wrong for wrong." This means taking responsibility for our own responses regardless of others' behavior. Breaking cycles often requires someone being willing to absorb unfairness without passing it on. This is costly but powerful, it's how transformation happens.

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### **"How do you know what response someone needs, warning, encouragement, or help?"**

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This requires developing relational wisdom and really paying attention to people. Are they struggling with laziness/disruption (need warning), discouragement (need encouragement), or genuine inability (need help)? It takes time to discern, and we'll sometimes get it wrong. The key is maintaining patient love throughout the process of learning what they actually need.

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## The One Thing to Remember

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**Patience applies to everyone, even when we're addressing problems, and choosing good over retaliation breaks destructive cycles.**

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# Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

## Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between confronting problems and maintaining patience. Help them discover how breaking retaliation cycles in their own relationships requires both wisdom and grace.

## The Tension to Frame

How do we balance giving people what they need (sometimes difficult truth) with universal patience, especially when being direct feels impatient?

## Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their frustration with difficult people, patience doesn't mean pretending relationships are easy
- Honor the complexity, there's no simple formula for when to confront versus when to let things go
- Let them wrestle with examples from their own lives rather than lecturing about principles

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

Think about that one person in your life who just drives you crazy. Maybe it's someone at school who never does their part in group projects, or a family member who constantly interrupts, or that friend who's always complaining but never wants advice. You know the person I'm talking about, the one who makes you want to either snap at them or just avoid them completely.

Now imagine someone tells you: "Just be patient with them." Your immediate reaction is probably "Are you kidding me? Do you know what they're like?" It feels like being told to be a doormat, like you're supposed to just take whatever they dish out with a smile. And honestly, that advice feels pretty useless when you're actually dealing with the frustration.

But what if there was a way to address the actual problem, to be direct about what needs to change, while still maintaining patience? What if patience didn't mean avoiding difficult conversations but having them with a different attitude? That seems impossible when you're in the moment, but maybe there's something we're missing about what patience actually looks like.

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Today we're looking at Paul's instructions to a church that was dealing with exactly these kinds of frustrating people. Some were being lazy and disruptive, others were discouraged, still others were weak and struggling. Paul had to give them practical advice for handling all these different personalities while staying unified as a community.

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As we read, notice how Paul balances being direct about problems with maintaining grace. Pay attention to what he says about retaliation, why he makes such a big deal about not paying back wrong for wrong.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "admonish" or "sanctify." Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread verses 14-15. Let them feel the practical weight of these instructions.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What different types of people is Paul addressing, and what does he say to do with each?
  - Why does Paul single out "be patient with everyone", what makes that instruction special?
  - What's the connection between not retaliating and striving to do good?
  - How would you feel if someone treated you according to these instructions?
- 

### 1 Thessalonians 5:11-24 (NIV)

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*11 Therefore encourage one another and build each other up, just as in fact you are doing. 12 Now we ask you, brothers and sisters, to acknowledge those who work hard among you, who care for you in the Lord and who admonish you. 13 Hold them in the highest regard in love because of their work. Live in peace with each other. 14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient*

*with everyone. 15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*

*16 Rejoice always, 17 pray continually, 18 give thanks in all circumstances; for this is God's will for you in Christ Jesus. 19 Do not quench the Spirit. 20 Do not treat prophecies with contempt 21 but test them all; hold on to what is good, 22 reject every kind of evil. 23 May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. 24 The one who calls you is faithful, and he will do it.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for verses 14-15 since these are the core of our lesson.

**Reader 1:** Verses 11-13 (Building up and honoring leaders) **Reader 2:** Verses 14-15 (Different responses, universal patience, no retaliation) **Reader 3:** Verses 16-24 (Spiritual disciplines and God's faithfulness)

Listen for the contrast between specific responses to different people and the universal command that applies to everyone.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you?" or "What seemed hardest to actually do?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not just questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually curious about. For example: "How do you warn someone while staying patient?" or "Why is retaliation such a big deal?" You have 3 minutes, go.

## 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. Build on their insights.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board. Look for themes around patience/confrontation tension and retaliation. Start with questions most students will relate to.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What specific types of people does Paul mention, and what's he telling them to do with each?"
  - "Why do you think Paul says 'be patient with everyone' right after giving different responses to different people?"
  - "What's the difference between 'not paying back wrong' and 'striving to do good', why both?"
  - "How would warning someone while being patient actually look different from warning them impatiently?"
  - "What happens to relationships when someone breaks the retaliation cycle, when they choose good instead of getting even?"
  - "Think about social media or group chats, how do retaliation cycles typically play out there?"
  - "What if you warned someone and they got defensive or angry, how would patience change your response?"
  - "Why do you think Paul makes this such a big deal, what's at stake if we get this wrong?"
- 

### Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? Paul is giving them wisdom for different situations, some people need correction, some need encouragement, some need help, but patience cuts across all of it. He's saying you can be direct and still be gracious. And the retaliation thing? That's about breaking cycles that destroy relationships and communities. Someone has to choose good instead of payback, or the whole thing just spirals.

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see these retaliation cycles playing out? Where do you find yourself wanting to pay back wrong for wrong, or struggling to balance being direct with being patient? Think about school, family, friendships, social media, group projects, where does this actually matter?

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

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- That friend who constantly complains but gets defensive when you try to help
  - Family members who don't respect your boundaries or personal space
  - Group project partners who don't do their fair share of the work
  - Social media arguments where everyone just keeps escalating
  - Friend groups where gossip and subtle revenge create constant drama
  - Dealing with authority figures (teachers, coaches, parents) who seem unfair
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations are genuinely complex. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

### **Discussion Prompts**

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- "When have you seen someone break a retaliation cycle by choosing good instead of getting even?"
  - "What would help you stay patient when you need to confront someone about their behavior?"
  - "How do you discern when someone needs warning versus encouragement versus help?"
  - "What's the difference between patience and being a doormat, 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: Patience isn't about avoiding difficult conversations or letting people walk all over you. It's about maintaining grace in your attitude even when you need to address problems. And breaking retaliation cycles? That's powerful stuff. When someone chooses good instead of payback, it creates space for actual change instead of just escalation.

---

This week, pay attention to moments when your first instinct is to get even or snap back. Notice what it feels like to pause and choose a different response. Try asking yourself: "What does this person actually need, warning, encouragement, or help?" Experiment with staying patient even when you need to be direct.

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You had some really thoughtful discussions today. Keep wrestling with these questions. The world needs people who can break cycles of retaliation and choose good even when it's costly. I believe you can be those people.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that different people need different kinds of help, but we stay patient with everyone. Teach them that revenge makes things worse, while choosing good breaks bad cycles.

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### If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps being mean no matter how patient I am?"

Say: "Being patient doesn't mean letting people hurt you. It means getting help from adults when you need to, but not trying to hurt them back."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had a friend who seemed sad or upset a lot, and you weren't sure how to help them. Keep your hand up if you've ever had someone in your class who was being disruptive or not following rules, and the teacher had to deal with them. Now raise your hand if you've ever had someone be mean to you, and you really wanted to be mean right back to them.

---

Here's what's tricky: different people need different kinds of help, right? Sometimes your sad friend needs you to encourage them and remind them they're awesome. Sometimes the disruptive kid needs the teacher to give them clear rules and consequences. But what about when someone's mean to you? Part of you wants to help them, but another part just wants to get them back for being mean.

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It makes total sense to feel confused about this. When someone hurts your feelings or is unfair to you, your brain immediately starts thinking about how to hurt them back or get even. That's actually normal, everyone feels that way sometimes. And it seems like it would make you feel better, right? Like maybe they'd learn not to mess with you.

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This is like in the movie Inside Out, where Riley's emotions all have different ideas about how to handle her problems. Sometimes Anger wants to fight back, Fear wants to run away, Sadness wants to give up. But Joy keeps looking for ways to make things better for everyone. The tricky part is figuring out which emotion should be in charge when someone's being difficult.

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The problem is, when we get back at people who hurt us, it usually doesn't make things better. It just makes them want to get back at us, and then we want to get back at them even more, and pretty soon everyone's just being mean to everyone else. It's like a never-ending cycle of revenge.

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Today we're going to hear about what God says to do when we're dealing with difficult people, how to give them what they actually need while staying kind to everyone. Let's find out how to break those revenge cycles and make things better instead of worse.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate strongly to wanting revenge. Acknowledge those feelings as normal before moving to alternatives. Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Paul the apostle was like a spiritual father to many new churches around the world. He would start churches in different cities, teach people about Jesus, and then move on to the next place. But he never forgot about the people he'd helped, he kept writing them letters to help them figure out how to live together as Christians.

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One of his favorite churches was in a city called Thessalonica. These were good people who loved Jesus, but they were having some problems getting along with each other. Sound familiar? Even when people love Jesus, they still have to figure out how to deal with each other's annoying habits and difficult personalities.

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The Thessalonian church had all kinds of people in it. Some people were lazy and disruptive, they'd show up late to meetings, interrupt when others were talking, or not help when there was work to be done. Some people were really discouraged and sad, maybe they'd lost family members, or they were

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being persecuted for believing in Jesus, and they were having a hard time staying hopeful.

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Then there were people who were just weak and struggling. Not lazy, they really wanted to do the right thing, but they needed help. Maybe they were new Christians who didn't understand everything yet, or people who were dealing with difficult circumstances and needed extra support.

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Imagine being in a group with all these different people. The disruptive people would be frustrating because they'd make everything harder. The sad people might bring everyone else down. The weak people would need extra attention and help. It would be easy for everyone to get annoyed with each other.

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Paul knew this was happening, so he wrote them a letter with very specific instructions about how to treat each different type of person. But he also gave them one rule that applied to absolutely everyone, no matter what. Let's see what he said.

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#### **1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NIV)**

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*14 And we urge you, brothers and sisters, warn those who are idle and disruptive, encourage the disheartened, help the weak, be patient with everyone.*

Did you catch that? Paul said to give different responses to different people. Warn the disruptive ones, that means have a serious conversation with them about how their behavior affects everyone else. Encourage the sad ones, remind them that things will get better and that they matter. Help the weak ones, give them the support and assistance they need.

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But then he said something that applies to everyone: "Be patient with everyone." That means the disruptive people, the discouraged people, the weak people, even when they're driving you crazy, you stay patient with them. You don't give up on them or get mean with them, even when you need to correct them.

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But Paul wasn't done. He knew that people would want to get back at others who hurt them, so he gave them another crucial instruction.

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#### **1 Thessalonians 5:15 (NIV)**

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*15 Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong, but always strive to do what is good for each other and for everyone else.*

"Make sure that nobody pays back wrong for wrong." That means when someone hurts you, you don't try to hurt them back. When someone's mean to you, you don't get mean back to them. When someone embarrasses you, you don't try to embarrass them. You break the cycle.

And it's not just about not doing bad things back to them. Paul says to "always strive to do what is good for each other." That means you actively look for ways to help them and bless them, even when they don't deserve it. You choose good instead of revenge.

Now, this probably seemed really hard to the Thessalonians, just like it seems hard to us. When someone's disrupting everything, it's natural to want to snap at them. When someone hurts your feelings, it's normal to want to hurt theirs back. When someone's unfair to you, you want to be unfair to them.

But Paul knew something important: when we pay back wrong for wrong, it just makes everything worse. The disruptive person gets more defensive and disruptive. The sad person gets sadder. The weak person feels even weaker. Nobody actually gets better.

But when someone breaks the cycle, when they choose to be patient and do good even when someone's being difficult, something amazing happens. It creates space for people to change. It gives them room to become better instead of just getting more defensive.

The Thessalonians learned that you can be direct with people about problems while still being patient with them. You can tell someone they need to stop being disruptive while still caring about them as a person. You can set boundaries while still choosing good over revenge.

What we learn from Paul's letter is that love isn't just being nice to people. Sometimes love means having difficult conversations. But we can have those conversations with patience instead of anger. We can address problems without trying to hurt people. And we can choose to do good even when others don't deserve it.

This is how God treats us. Even when we're the disruptive ones, or the discouraged ones, or the weak ones, God stays patient with us and keeps choosing good for us. And he wants us to treat each other the same way.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Different Needs

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Imagine you're in a group project at school. One person keeps goofing off and distracting everyone. Another person seems really stressed and worried about getting a good grade. A third person really wants to help but doesn't understand the assignment and needs extra explanation. How would you help each of these people differently?

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**Listen For:** "Tell the goofy one to stop," "Help the worried one feel better," "Explain things to the confused one", affirm: "Yes! Different people need different things."

#### Question 2: The Patience Challenge

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Now imagine the goofy person gets mad when you ask them to stop goofing off, and they say something mean to you. Your first feeling is probably anger, you want to say something mean right back. But what if you stayed patient instead? How do you think that might change what happens next?

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**If They Say:** "It wouldn't work, they'd just keep being mean", respond: "Sometimes people need time to change. What matters is that you break the cycle instead of making it worse."

#### Question 3: The Revenge Cycle

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Think about a time when you got back at someone who was mean to you. Maybe you said something mean back, or you ignored them, or you told other people something embarrassing about them. How did it make you feel afterwards? Did it actually make things better between you two?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly why Paul said not to pay back wrong for wrong, it usually just makes everything worse for everyone."

#### Question 4: The Better Choice

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Paul didn't just say "don't do bad things back", he said "always strive to do what is good." What's the difference? If someone's mean to you and you choose to do something good for them instead of getting revenge, what might happen? How might that surprise them?

**If They Say:** "They might think you're weird", respond: "Sometimes being surprising in a good way is exactly what people need to help them change."

You guys had some great insights about how revenge usually makes things worse, but choosing good can break bad cycles. Now let's try an activity that will help us feel what it's like to need different things from people.

#### 4. Activity: The Helper Network (8 minutes)

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

##### **Purpose**

This activity reinforces that different people need different responses by having kids physically experience giving and receiving various types of help. Success looks like kids discovering that paying attention to what someone actually needs creates better outcomes than one-size-fits-all responses.

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

We're going to play "The Helper Network." I'm going to divide you into three groups, and each group will have a different challenge they're trying to solve. But here's the twist, you can only solve your challenge by getting help from people in the other groups.

Group 1, you're the "Encouragement Needers", your challenge is that you feel really discouraged about something, and you need people to remind you of your strengths and tell you that things will get better. Group 2, you're the "Direction Needers", you keep getting distracted and going off-task, and you need people to give you clear, gentle reminders to stay focused. Group 3, you're the "Support Needers", you have a task that's too big for one person, and you need others to actually help you accomplish it.

But you can only get your needs met if people give you the RIGHT kind of help. If someone tries to give you encouragement when you need direction, or direction when you need support, it doesn't count. And here's the key rule, everyone has to be patient and kind, even when someone asks for the wrong

type of help.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like Paul's instructions, different people need different things (warning, encouragement, help), but we stay patient with everyone while we figure out what they actually need.

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

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First phase, let them try to figure out what each group needs. Don't give hints yet. Watch as they try different approaches and sometimes give the wrong type of help. Let them experience the confusion for about 1 minute.

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The struggle phase, as they get frustrated with mismatched helping attempts, remind them of the patience rule. Watch for moments when someone gets irritated and wants to give up or get snippy. This is the key learning moment.

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Coaching phrases, say things like "I notice that person might need something different than what you're offering. What else could you try?" or "Remember, you can stay patient even when figuring out what someone needs is hard."

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The breakthrough, celebrate when kids start really listening to what each group is asking for and matching the right type of help to the right need. Highlight when someone stays patient despite initial frustration.

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Completion, once each group has received the help they need, have everyone notice how different the atmosphere feels when people get what they actually need versus when there's mismatched helping.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to stay patient and keep trying different approaches instead of getting frustrated, this is the physical representation of Paul's teaching about patience with everyone.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when people tried to help you in the wrong way versus when they gave you what you actually needed? And what was it like to stay patient when you were trying to figure out what someone needed? This is exactly what Paul was talking about, different people need different responses, but patience helps us keep trying until we get it right instead of giving up on people.

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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what we learned today: Different people need different kinds of help, some need encouragement, some need gentle correction, some need practical support. But everyone needs us to be patient with them, even when we're trying to help them with their problems.

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This doesn't mean letting people walk all over you or never standing up for yourself. It means getting help from adults when you need to, but not trying to hurt people back when they hurt you. When we choose to do good instead of getting revenge, we break bad cycles and give people room to change.

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The amazing result is that relationships actually get better instead of just getting worse and worse. People start trusting each other more, and everyone feels safer to be themselves and grow.

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

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This week, when someone's difficult or mean to you, try asking yourself: "What do they actually need, encouragement, gentle correction, or help?" Then try giving them that instead of just reacting to their behavior. And if your first instinct is to get them back for being mean, try choosing one small good thing to do for them instead.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for being patient with us even when we're the difficult ones. Help us learn to be patient with others, especially when they're being hard to deal with. When we want to get back at people who hurt us, help us choose to do good instead. Show us what people actually need from us. 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 be patient and kind with everyone, even when they're difficult or mean to us.

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## Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare being patient to how a good friend treats you when you make mistakes, they stay kind and help you do better next 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 kindness or patience. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love is Patient," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: point to others during "one another," make heart shapes with hands during "love," hug yourself during "patient."

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Great singing! Now everyone sit in a horseshoe shape on the floor so we can all see each other. Today we're going to hear about how to be patient and kind with everyone, even people who are being difficult!

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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 talking about encouragement, firm but kind when talking about warning people.

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who loved Jesus very much and helped lots of people learn about God.

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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Paul had friends in a city far away who loved Jesus too, but they were having some problems getting along with each other. Some people were being lazy and not helping with their work. Some people were very sad and needed cheering up. Some people were trying to do the right thing but needed extra help.

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*[Make a confused face and shrug]*

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Paul's friends didn't know what to do! Should they treat everyone the same way? Should they be firm with everyone? Should they be gentle with everyone? They were confused! So Paul wrote them a letter to help them know what to do.

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*[Move to center, speak like you're writing a letter]*

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Paul wrote: "Different people need different things. Some people need warnings when they're not doing their job. Some people need encouragement when they're sad. Some people need help when they're struggling."

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*[Move to other side, speak warmly]*

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But then Paul wrote something very important that applied to everyone: "Be patient with everyone!" Not just the nice people. Not just the people who deserve it. Everyone!

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**1 Thessalonians 5:14 (NIV)**

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*14 Be patient with everyone.*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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Do you think it's easy to be patient with people who are being mean or difficult? No way! It's really hard! Paul knew that, so he gave them another important rule.

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*[Move to center, speak with importance]*

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Paul said, "When someone is mean to you, don't be mean back to them. Instead, always try to do something good for them!" That means if someone pushes you, you don't push them back. If someone says something mean, you don't say something mean back.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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Paul knew that when we're mean back to people who are mean to us, it just makes everything worse. The mean person gets meaner, and pretty soon everyone is being mean to everyone!

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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But when we choose to be kind instead of mean, when we choose to help instead of hurt, something amazing happens. Sometimes the mean person stops being mean! Sometimes they become kind too!

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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Paul's friends learned that being patient doesn't mean letting people be mean to you. It means getting help from grown-ups when you need to, but not trying to hurt people back when they hurt you.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God wants us to be patient with everyone because that's how God treats us. Even when we make mistakes or do wrong things, God stays patient and loving with us.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school, kids might be mean to you or not share or be bossy. Sometimes at home, your brother or sister might bother you or take your toys. Your first feeling might be to be mean right back to them!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

But God says we can choose something different. We can choose to be patient and kind, even when other people aren't being kind to us. We can choose to do good things instead of trying to get back at them.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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When we do this, we're showing people what God's love looks like. And God will help us be patient and kind, even when it's really hard!

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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. 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 feel when someone is mean to you?
  2. What does it mean to be patient with someone?
  3. Is it easy or hard to be kind when someone's being mean to you?
  4. What would happen if you were kind to someone who was being mean?
  5. How does God treat us when we make mistakes?
  6. What's the difference between being patient and letting someone hurt you?
  7. Who is someone you need to be more patient with?
  8. What happens when everyone just keeps being mean back to each other?
  9. How can you be kind to someone who's having a bad day?
  10. What would you want someone to do if you were being difficult?
  11. How can grown-ups help when someone's being mean?
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12. What does it look like to "do good" to someone who's been mean?

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13. Why do you think God wants us to be patient with everyone?

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14. What helps you stay calm when you want to be mean back?

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15. How does it feel when someone is patient with you?

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16. What's a kind thing you could do for someone today?

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17. How can we pray for people who are mean to us?

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18. What would happen if everyone chose kindness instead of meanness?

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19. Who helps you be patient and kind?

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20. What did you learn about being patient today?

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

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness or patience. Suggestions: "The Fruit of the Spirit," "Love One Another," or "Be Patient and Kind." Use movements like gentle hand motions during "patient," reaching out to others during "love," and making growing motions during "fruit of the spirit."

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer. Remember to fold your hands and bow your heads quietly.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for being patient and kind with us every day.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us to be patient with everyone, especially when people are being difficult or mean to us. When we want to be mean back, help us choose kindness instead.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that you love everyone, even people who are hard to get along with. Show us how to do good things for others.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving us so much and for helping 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 being kind or patient. Examples: "Help me be nice to my brother" or "Thank you for being patient with me."

Remember to be patient and kind with everyone this week, just like God is patient and kind with you. Have a wonderful week, and I'll see you next time!

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# Divine Permission

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*When God Allows Hard Things, How Do We Tell the Difference Between Divine Purpose and Human Evil?*

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**2 Samuel 16:5-14**

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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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**2 Samuel 16:5-14 (NIV)**

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*5 As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. 6 He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. 7 As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! 8 The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!"*

*9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head!" 10 But the king said, "What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"*

*11 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has*

*told him to. 12 It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today." 13 So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. 14 The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination exhausted, and there he refreshed himself.*

## Context

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This confrontation happens during David's darkest hour, fleeing Jerusalem as his own son Absalom leads a rebellion against him. David is vulnerable, humiliated, and questioning whether God has abandoned him. The man attacking him, Shimei, represents Saul's family, still bitter about David's rise to power and blaming David for Saul's downfall.

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The immediate context is a public humiliation on the road to Bahurim. David's mighty warriors watch their king being cursed and pelted with stones by a single man. Abishai's offer to kill Shimei would be the expected response, swift, decisive, protective. But David chooses a radically different path that reveals his theological framework for understanding suffering.

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## The Big Idea

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**Sometimes accepting attack without retaliation, seeing it as divinely permitted rather than demanding justice, opens space for God's restoration.**

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This doesn't mean all suffering is God's will or that victims should never seek justice. David's response reveals a complex theology where he distinguishes between immediate retaliation and ultimate justice, recognizing that God might use even enemy attacks for larger purposes while still holding people accountable for their choices.

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## Theological Core

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- **Divine Sovereignty in Suffering.** God can work through human evil without endorsing it, and recognizing this possibility can change how we respond to attacks.
  - **Restraint Over Retaliation.** Choosing not to immediately strike back creates space for God to work and for perspective to develop.
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- **Hope in Misery.** Even in the darkest circumstances, faith can imagine God's restoration and intervention.
  - **Theological Interpretation of Events.** How we understand what's happening to us, whether we see divine purpose or only human malice, shapes our response.
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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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- Sometimes accepting suffering as potentially divinely permitted can enable spiritual growth and prevent destructive retaliation
  - Discerning between divine permission and divine will requires wisdom, not all suffering should be passively accepted
  - Choosing restraint over revenge creates space for God's justice and our own character development
  - Our interpretation of difficult events affects our response, seeing potential divine purpose can transform victimhood into faith
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- Sometimes the brave choice is not to fight back, especially when we trust God to handle the situation
  - When people are mean to us, we can choose how to respond, we don't have to be mean back
  - God sees when we're hurt and can bring good things even from bad situations
  - Our feelings about being hurt are okay, but we can still choose to do the right thing
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#### Grades 1, 3

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- When someone is mean to us, we don't have to be mean back
  - God loves us and helps us when people hurt our feelings
  - We can ask God to help the mean person and to help us feel better
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Victim-Blaming Theology.** Don't suggest that all suffering is God's will or that victims deserved their pain. David's interpretation is specific to his situation and relationship with God, not a universal mandate for passivity.
  - **Ignoring Justice.** David's restraint in the moment doesn't eliminate accountability, he later ensures consequences for Shimei. Acceptance doesn't mean abandoning all pursuit of justice.
  - **Romanticizing Abuse.** This passage isn't about tolerating ongoing abuse or toxic relationships. David had the power to stop Shimei but chose restraint; victims without power need protection, not theological pressure to endure.
  - **Oversimplifying Divine Permission.** Don't present an easy formula for when God "allows" suffering. David's discernment emerges from his unique relationship with God and understanding of his circumstances.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"If David thought God told Shimei to curse him, does that mean God wanted David to be hurt?"**

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David distinguishes between God allowing something and God directly commanding it. He suggests God might permit Shimei's curse for larger purposes, perhaps to humble David or test his character, without endorsing Shimei's hatred. This is the difference between God's permissive will (what God allows) and God's perfect will (what God desires). David chooses to trust that even this painful experience might serve God's bigger plan for restoration.

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**"Should we always just accept it when people are mean to us?"**

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No, and David's own story shows this complexity. Later, David ensures Shimei faces consequences for his actions. The key is David's timing and power, he had the ability to retaliate immediately but chose restraint to see what God might do. When we're in ongoing danger or abuse, God wants us to seek safety and justice. The wisdom is knowing when immediate retaliation might prevent God's better solution.

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**"How can we tell the difference between something God allows and something we should fight against?"**

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This requires spiritual discernment that grows over time. David had years of experience with God's guidance and understood his own role in Israel's story. Generally, we should resist evil and protect the vulnerable, while also staying open to how God might use difficult circumstances for growth or larger purposes. Prayer, wise counsel, and understanding our capacity to respond all factor into these decisions.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Trusting God's bigger picture can transform how we respond to attack, creating space for restoration rather than just revenge.**

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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 accepting difficult circumstances as potentially divinely permitted while still pursuing justice and protection. Help them explore David's theological reasoning without creating a simplistic formula for when to accept versus resist suffering.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we discern when suffering should be accepted as potentially serving God's purposes versus when we should actively resist and fight against it?

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## Discussion Facilitation Tips

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- Validate their experiences with injustice and the natural desire for immediate justice or retaliation
  - Honor the complexity, there's no easy formula for when to accept suffering versus when to resist it
  - Let them wrestle with David's reasoning rather than providing quick answers about divine will
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### 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Someone at school starts a rumor about you that's completely false. It spreads fast, and suddenly people you thought were friends are looking at you differently, whispering when you walk by. Your first instinct is probably to fight back, find out who started it, confront them publicly, maybe start a counter-rumor about them.

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That makes perfect sense. You've been attacked, your reputation damaged, and justice feels like striking back immediately. Everything in you wants to defend yourself, to make sure the person who hurt you faces consequences right away. The longer you wait, the more the damage spreads.

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Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the attack was public, physical, and came when he was already at his lowest point. His closest advisor was ready to end the threat immediately. But this leader chose a completely different response, one that reveals how spiritual wisdom can transform the way we handle being attacked.

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As we read, notice David's reasoning for why he stops his men from retaliating. Pay attention to how he interprets what's happening to him, not just the surface level of "someone is attacking me," but his deeper theological reflection on what God might be doing in this painful moment.

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Open your Bibles to 2 Samuel 16, starting at verse 5. Read silently through verse 14, and think about whether David's response makes sense to you or seems completely backwards.

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### 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This passage contains strong language and violent imagery that might surprise students. Help with names like "Abishai" and "Zeruiah." Let students feel the drama

and injustice of the scene.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly is Shimei doing to David, and how humiliating would this be for a king?
- Why does Abishai want to kill Shimei, and how reasonable does his offer sound?
- What reasoning does David give for stopping the retaliation, what's his theological interpretation?
- How would you feel if you were in David's position, being publicly attacked and humiliated?

### 2 Samuel 16:5-14 (NIV)

*5 As King David approached Bahurim, a man from the same clan as Saul's family came out from there. His name was Shimei son of Gera, and he cursed as he came out. 6 He pelted David and all the king's officials with stones, though all the troops and the special guard were on David's right and left. 7 As he cursed, Shimei said, "Get out, get out, you murderer, you scoundrel! 8 The Lord has repaid you for all the blood you shed in the household of Saul, in whose place you have reigned. The Lord has given the kingdom into the hands of your son Absalom. You have come to ruin because you are a murderer!"*

*9 Then Abishai son of Zeruiah said to the king, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord the king? Let me go over and cut off his head!" 10 But the king said, "What does this have to do with you, you sons of Zeruiah? If he is cursing because the Lord has said to him, 'Curse David,' who can ask, 'Why do you do this?'"*

*11 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. 12 It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today." 13 So David and his men continued along the road while Shimei was going along the hillside opposite him, cursing as he went and throwing stones at him and showering him with dirt. 14 The king and all the people with him arrived at their destination*

*exhausted, and there he refreshed himself.*

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

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

**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who are comfortable reading dramatically. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the intense cursing and dialogue sections.

**Reader 1:** Verses 5, 8 (Shimei's attack and accusations) **Reader 2:** Verses 9, 12 (The dialogue between Abishai and David) **Reader 3:** Verses 13, 14 (The continuing humiliation and journey)

Listen for the emotion and conflict here, this isn't just a disagreement, it's a moment of public humiliation, physical attack, and competing visions of how to respond to injustice.

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

**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about David's response?" or "What do you think motivated Shimei?"

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. Good questions might start with "Why did..." or "How could..." or "What if..." Focus on what you really want to understand, not what you think you should ask. You have three minutes.

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

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

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around David's reasoning, justice versus mercy, and the theology of divine permission. Start with questions most students connect with.

## Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that David is interpreting this attack spiritually rather than just politically?"
  - "How does David's comparison between Absalom and Shimei reveal his theological reasoning?"
  - "What's the difference between saying 'God caused this' versus 'God might be allowing this for a purpose'?"
  - "What tensions do you see in David's response, is he being wise or passive?"
  - "How might David's choice to accept this humiliation actually be a form of strength rather than weakness?"
  - "When have you seen someone choose not to retaliate when they clearly could have?"
  - "What would change if Shimei had been attacking someone powerless instead of the king?"
  - "Why might David's hope for restoration be connected to his willingness to endure the curse?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? David doesn't just accept the attack, he reinterprets it. Instead of seeing himself only as a victim of Shimei's hatred, he asks whether God might be using this painful moment for larger purposes. This doesn't make Shimei's attack right, but it changes how David responds. He creates space for God to work rather than demanding immediate justice.

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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, between wanting immediate justice when you're attacked versus stepping back to see if God might be working in the situation? Think about school, social media, family conflicts, friend drama, even larger issues in the world.

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- When someone spreads rumors about you online and you have screenshots that could destroy their reputation
  - When a family member constantly criticizes you and you want to cut them off completely
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- When a friend betrays your trust and you're deciding whether to expose their secrets in retaliation
- When you're bullied or discriminated against and weighing immediate confrontation versus longer-term strategies
- When you witness injustice in your school or community and are choosing between anger-driven action and strategic response
- When you're facing consequences for mistakes and deciding whether to blame others or accept responsibility

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to provide solutions. Acknowledge that different situations call for different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about always being passive.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose restraint over retaliation, and what was the result?"
- "What would help you pause and think spiritually when you're attacked, instead of just reacting emotionally?"
- "How do you discern between situations where you should accept difficulty versus situations where you should fight back?"
- "What's the difference between trusting God's justice and enabling people to continue hurting others?"

### 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: David's response shows us that how we interpret what's happening to us, whether we see only human malice or ask whether God might have larger purposes, completely changes our options. This doesn't mean accepting all suffering passively or letting people get away with hurting others. But it does mean that spiritual wisdom can transform victimhood into something that creates space for God's restoration.

This week, pay attention to moments when you feel attacked or treated unfairly. Before you react, ask yourself: "What if God wants to do something in this situation that immediate retaliation would

prevent?" Not because you have to be a doormat, but because you're powerful enough to choose your response instead of just reacting.

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The quality of thinking you've done today gives me confidence that you can handle this complexity. Keep wrestling with hard questions, and don't be afraid of situations that don't have easy answers. That's where real wisdom grows.

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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 sometimes the brave choice is not to fight back, especially when we trust God to handle the situation and bring good from difficult circumstances.

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### If Kids Ask "Why didn't David just stop the mean man?"

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Say: "David was strong enough to stop him, but he chose to trust God instead. Sometimes being really strong means choosing not to use our strength right away."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school say really mean things about you, maybe even things that weren't true. Keep them up, yeah, most of us have been there. It feels awful when someone attacks you with their words, especially when other people might hear and believe the lies.

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Now here's a harder question: what if the person being mean to you was someone you had the power to stop? Like, you could get them in huge trouble, or you could embarrass them back even worse, or you had friends who would stand up for you in a big way. Part of you thinks, "I should fight back right now and show them they can't mess with me." But another part thinks, "Maybe there's a better way to handle this."

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Those feelings make total sense. When someone hurts us, especially unfairly, we want them to stop right away and maybe even feel sorry for what they did. Nobody likes being attacked, and it's natural to

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want to defend yourself. Your feelings about being hurt are completely okay and normal.

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This is like in movies when the hero has to decide whether to use their super power right away to stop the villain, or whether to wait because using it now might make things worse later. Remember in Frozen when Elsa could have used her ice powers to stop people from being afraid of her, but she had to learn when to use her power and when to hold back?

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The tricky part is figuring out when to fight back immediately and when to step back and trust that God has a better plan, even when it's really hard to wait. Sometimes the bravest thing isn't fighting back right away, but trusting God to work things out in a way that's better than what we could do.

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Today we're going to hear about a time when King David, who was super strong and had lots of soldiers, was being attacked by someone throwing rocks and yelling horrible things at him. His best fighter wanted to protect him immediately, but David made a choice that surprised everyone. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to being hurt by words and wanting immediate justice. Acknowledge their experiences briefly: "Yeah, that's exactly the feeling we're talking about," then keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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King David was having the worst day of his life. His own son Absalom had turned against him and was trying to take over his kingdom. David had to leave his beautiful palace and all his comfortable things and run away to keep from being captured.

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Picture David walking along a dusty road with his loyal friends and soldiers. He's tired, sad, and probably wondering if God still loved him. His heart was broken because his own son wanted to hurt him. Have you ever had a day when it felt like everything was going wrong?

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Just when David thought things couldn't get worse, a man named Shimei came running out of the hills. Shimei was angry at David and had been waiting for a chance to attack him. Now that David was weak and running away, Shimei saw his opportunity.

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Imagine being kicked when you're already down, that's what was about to happen to David. Sometimes when we're already hurting, that's exactly when mean people choose to hurt us more. They wait until we're vulnerable.

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Shimei started yelling terrible things at David: "Get out! You're a murderer! You're a scoundrel!" These were lies and cruel words meant to hurt David's feelings and embarrass him in front of all his people. But Shimei didn't stop with just words.

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He started throwing rocks at David! Actual stones flying through the air, trying to hit the king. Then he threw dirt at him, covering David with dust and humiliating him even more. Shimei was literally attacking the king with rocks and dirt while screaming insults.

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David's soldiers watched this happening to their king. They loved David and hated seeing him attacked. One of his strongest warriors, Abishai, got really angry. You know how you feel when someone picks on your best friend? That's how Abishai felt, except ten times stronger.

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Abishai marched up to David with fire in his eyes and said something like, "King David, why are you letting this dead dog treat you like this? Just say the word, and I'll go cut off his head! No one should be allowed to curse my lord the king!"

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That sounds pretty reasonable, right? David was the king, Shimei was attacking him with rocks, and Abishai had the power to stop it immediately. In those days, attacking a king was something you could be killed for. Abishai was offering to protect David and bring quick justice.

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But then David did something that surprised everyone. Instead of saying "Yes, go stop him," David looked at his angry warrior and said something really interesting. He started thinking about this situation in a completely different way.

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David said, "Wait, Abishai. What if God is letting this happen for a reason? What if the Lord told Shimei to curse me? If God has a purpose in this, who are we to stop it?" David was asking whether God might be allowing this attack as part of a bigger plan.

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Then David said something even more surprising: "My own son is trying to kill me. If my own family is against me, why should I be shocked that this man from Saul's family is angry too? Leave him alone. Let him curse me, because maybe the Lord told him to."

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## **2 Samuel 16:11-12 (NIV)**

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*11-12 David then said to Abishai and all his officials, "My son, my own flesh and blood, is trying to kill me. How much more, then, this Benjamite! Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord*

*has told him to. It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today."*

Did you hear that amazing part? David said, "Maybe the Lord will look at my misery and give me his blessing instead of this curse." Even while being attacked, David was hoping that God would see his suffering and turn it into something good.

So instead of fighting back or letting his soldier kill Shimei, David kept walking. The Bible says Shimei followed them along the hillside, still cursing and throwing rocks and dirt. It must have been so hard for David to keep walking while being attacked.

David and his people finally reached their destination completely exhausted. Being attacked while walking a long distance had worn them out. But David refreshed himself there, he rested, ate, and regained his strength. Sometimes enduring something difficult makes us stronger, not weaker.

The amazing thing about David's choice was that he was strong enough to stop Shimei but chose not to. He trusted that God might be working in this painful situation, even though he couldn't see how. David believed God could bring good things even from this terrible day.

Sometimes in our lives, we face situations where someone is being mean to us, and we have the power to fight back immediately. But David shows us that sometimes the braver choice is to step back and trust God to work things out in His own way and time.

What David did that day teaches us that when we're hurt, we can choose how to respond. We don't have to be mean back to people who are mean to us. We can trust that God sees what's happening and can bring good things even from painful situations.

God can help us when mean people hurt us. He gives us strength to choose the right response instead of just reacting with anger. And sometimes, like David discovered, trusting God instead of fighting back immediately leads to better results than we could have imagined.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

### Question 1: The Feelings

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If you were David, getting rocks thrown at you while someone yelled mean things about you in front of all your friends, what would you be feeling? Remember, you're already having the worst day ever because your own son turned against you. Now this stranger is attacking you when you're down. What emotions would be going through your mind and heart?

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**Listen For:** "Angry," "Sad," "Embarrassed," "Want to fight back", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. Anyone would feel that way when being attacked unfairly."

### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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David had a really strong warrior who was ready to solve the problem immediately by stopping Shimei. Why do you think David told him to wait? What was David thinking about that made him choose not to fight back, even though he could have easily won?

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**If They Say:** "He was scared" or "He was weak", respond: "What do you think? David had soldiers with him. Do you think he was afraid, or was something else going on?"

### Question 3: Trusting God

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David said maybe God was letting this happen for a reason, and maybe God would turn his misery into blessing. What do you think David meant? How could something so painful become something good? Have you ever experienced something difficult that later turned out better than you expected?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what made David's choice so hard and so brave, trusting God when he couldn't see the good yet."

### Question 4: Our Choices

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Think about times when someone is mean to you, maybe a sibling, classmate, or even a stranger online. You usually have choices about how to respond. What are some different ways you could handle it, and which ways might be like what David did?

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**If They Say:** "Just let them keep being mean", respond: "That's not quite what David did. What's the difference between letting someone walk all over you and choosing to trust God with the situation?"

You know what's amazing? David showed that sometimes the strongest thing you can do is not use your strength right away. He trusted God to work in the situation instead of solving it immediately with force. That takes a different kind of courage.

#### **4. Activity: Trust and Choose (8 minutes)**

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

##### **Purpose**

This activity reinforces that choosing restraint when we have power requires trust and creates space for better solutions. Success looks like kids discovering that waiting and trusting can lead to better outcomes than immediate action, even when immediate action feels justified and possible.

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

We're going to play "Trust and Choose." Everyone stand in a big circle. I'm going to tap someone on the shoulder, you'll be the "David" for this round. Your job is to walk slowly around the inside of the circle while everyone else represents different choices you could make.

When I say "Attack!" everyone except David will step forward one step and point at David, like you're Shimei throwing rocks and yelling. David, you'll have three choices: you can point back and "fight" (step toward someone), you can run away (step outside the circle), or you can keep walking calmly and wait to see what happens.

Here's the twist: if David chooses to fight or run away, the round ends and David sits down. But if David chooses to keep walking and trust, after ten seconds I'll say "God's blessing!" and everyone steps back and claps for David's courage. We're doing this because it's exactly like David's situation, he had the power to fight but chose to trust God instead.

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

Start with your first David walking slowly around the circle. Call "Attack!" and watch their choice. Most kids will initially want to fight back or escape because that feels natural when surrounded. Let them experience the immediate consequence of losing the round.

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After a few rounds, kids will start to see the pattern, the only way to succeed is to keep walking and trust that something good will happen. This mirrors David's choice to endure the attack because he trusted God's bigger plan. It takes real courage to not react immediately.

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Coach them with phrases like "I notice when David chooses to trust instead of fighting back, something good happens..." or "It's hard to keep walking when you feel surrounded, but that's exactly what takes courage." Don't give away the strategy, let them discover it.

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Celebrate moments when a David chooses to keep walking despite feeling pressured to fight. These are the breakthrough moments when they physically experience what David did, choosing trust over immediate retaliation even when you have the power to fight back.

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As more kids succeed by choosing trust, the whole group will start to understand that sometimes the brave choice isn't the obvious choice. The activity shows them that waiting for God's timing can lead to better outcomes than immediate action.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to keep walking despite being surrounded, this is the physical representation of David's faith choice to trust God instead of retaliating immediately.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you wanted to fight back versus when you chose to trust and keep walking? The Davids who succeeded discovered the same thing real David did, sometimes trusting God instead of using your power right away leads to something better than you could have achieved by fighting immediately.

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

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Here's what we learned today: When someone is mean to us, we get to choose how to respond. We don't have to be mean back. David shows us that sometimes the bravest choice is trusting God to work in the situation instead of fighting back immediately, even when we have the power to fight.

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This doesn't mean we should let people keep hurting us or others. David's story is about choosing the right time and way to respond. Sometimes immediate action is right, and sometimes trusting God's timing leads to better solutions than we could create ourselves.

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The amazing result is that when we choose trust over revenge, God can bring good things even from painful situations. We become stronger, wiser, and more like Jesus, who also chose not to fight back when He had the power to do so.

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

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When someone is mean to you this week, maybe a sibling, classmate, or even someone online, before you react, ask yourself: "What would it look like to trust God with this situation?" You don't have to let them keep being mean, but see if trusting God first might lead to a better solution than immediately fighting back.

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

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*Dear God, thank you for David's example of trusting you even when people were being really mean to him. Help us remember that we don't have to be mean back to people who hurt us. Give us courage to trust you to work in difficult situations, and help us choose good responses even when our feelings are hurt. 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 when someone is mean to us, we don't have to be mean back, God can help us choose kindness instead.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

## If Kids Don't Understand

Compare Shimei throwing rocks to someone at school being mean with words, then ask "What could David do to be kind instead of mean back?"

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

**Formation:** Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love and help. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God Is So Good," or "He's Got the Whole World in His Hands." Use movements: point to Jesus during "Jesus loves me," hug yourself during "God is so good," and make big circles with arms during "whole world."

Great singing! Now let's sit in our special horseshoe shape for story time. We're going to hear about a king who made a very good choice when someone was being mean to him. Get ready to use your listening ears!

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

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

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound sad when David is sad, sound angry when Shimei is mean, sound strong when David makes his good choice.

Today we're going to meet King David, who was very sad because someone in his family was being mean to him.

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

King David had to leave his beautiful palace and walk on a dusty road. He felt really sad and tired. Have you ever had a day when everything felt wrong?

*[Use sad facial expression, walk slowly like you're tired]*

While David was walking and feeling sad, a mean man named Shimei ran out of the hills. Shimei was angry and wanted to hurt David's feelings really badly.

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to sound angry and mean]*

Shimei started yelling at David! "Get out! You're bad!" Then he picked up rocks and threw them at the king! He threw dirt too! That was very mean and dangerous.

*[Move to center, speak with authority like a strong warrior]*

David had a strong warrior friend named Abishai. He saw Shimei being mean to David and got really mad. "Let me stop him!" Abishai said. "I can make him quit being mean right now!"

*[Move to side, speak like David, wise and thoughtful]*

But David said something surprising. "Wait! Maybe God wants me to let this happen. Maybe God has a reason." David chose not to hurt Shimei back, even though he could have!

## **2 Samuel 16:11-12 (NIV)**

*11-12 "Leave him alone; let him curse, for the Lord has told him to. It may be that the Lord will look upon my misery and restore to me his covenant blessing instead of his curse today."*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

Do you think David was sad that someone was being mean to him? Yes! It's okay to feel sad when people are mean. Our feelings matter to God.

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

But even though David felt sad and hurt, he chose not to be mean back. He said, "Maybe God will see how sad I am and help me feel better instead of staying sad."

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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So David kept walking while the mean man followed him, still saying mean things. It was hard, but David chose to trust God instead of being mean back.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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When David and his friends finally got where they were going, they rested and felt better. David's good choice helped him feel peaceful in his heart, even after a hard day.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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David learned something amazing that day! He learned that even when people are mean to us, we can choose to be kind. We don't have to be mean back!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God can help us when mean people hurt our feelings. God loves us so much and wants to help us make good choices, even when it's hard.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes at school or at home, people might say mean things to us or be unkind. We might feel sad or angry. Those feelings are okay! But we can ask God to help us choose kindness instead of being mean back.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When someone is mean to you, you can choose to tell a grown-up, use kind words, or walk away. You can pray and ask God to help the mean person and to help you feel better too.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves you so much and gives you power to make good choices! Just like King David, you can trust God to help you when people are mean, and you can choose to be kind even when others aren't kind to 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 where you have space to talk! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk together.

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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.

### 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 David felt when Shimei was throwing rocks at him?
  2. When someone at school is mean to you, how does it make you feel?
  3. Why do you think David didn't want his soldier to hurt Shimei back?
  4. What would you do if someone threw things at you?
  5. What changed for David when he chose not to be mean back?
  6. How do you think God felt when He saw David being kind?
  7. What good things happened because David made a kind choice?
  8. What could you do at school when someone is mean to you?
  9. What could you do at home when a brother or sister is mean?
  10. Who can you tell when someone is being mean to you?
  11. Why is it sometimes hard to be kind when others are mean?
  12. How can God help us when we want to be mean back?
  13. What does it mean that God loves us even when we're sad?
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14. How can we ask God to help mean people be nicer?

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15. What does it mean to trust God when people are mean?

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16. What did David learn about making good choices?

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17. What do you want to remember about this story?

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18. How can we pray when someone hurts our feelings?

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19. What would happen if everyone chose to be kind instead of mean?

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20. How can we be like David when people are mean to us?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together in our circle. Who wants to share something you talked about with your partner? Remember, David showed us that we can choose to be kind even when others are mean to us!

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

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

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Choose songs about kindness and God's help. Suggestions: "I Will Be Kind," "God Will Take Care of You," or "Love, Love, Love." Use movements like hugging motions for love songs, pointing up for God songs, and gentle hand gestures for kindness songs.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's get ready for prayer time. Find a spot to sit criss-cross applesauce in rows. We're going to talk to God about being kind like David.

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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 King David who chose to be kind instead of mean...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that when people are mean to us, we don't have to be mean back. Give us kind hearts and help us make good choices like David did...*

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*[Pause]*

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*When our feelings get hurt, help us remember that you love us so much and want to help us. Please help mean people learn to be kind too...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you love us and help us every day to choose kindness. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind when others are mean. Examples: "God, help me be kind at school" or "Thank you that you love me when I'm sad."

Remember, you can choose to be kind even when others are mean to you, just like David did! God loves you and will help you make good choices. Have a wonderful week!

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