

Loving Difficult People

Volume 6

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Loving Difficult People

Volume 6

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About This Series

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

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

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

A Note on Scripture Sources

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

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

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

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

How to Use This Book

For Teachers and Group Leaders

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

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

For Individual Study

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

For Families

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

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

The 1611 Press Team

Help Your Enemy

Commanded Kindness, How can required assistance reshape our enemies into neighbors?

Exodus 23:1-9

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Exodus 23:1-9 (NIV)

1 Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. 2 Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, 3 and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.

4 If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help the owner with it.

6 Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. 7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. 8 Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. 9 Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

Context

This passage comes within the "Book of the Covenant" (Exodus 20:22-23:19), a collection of civil and social laws given after the Ten Commandments. These aren't abstract moral principles but practical laws for forming a just society in the promised land. The Israelites are transitioning from slavery to nationhood and need concrete guidance for daily interactions.

The specific commands about enemies' property stand within a larger section about justice and fairness in legal proceedings and daily life. What makes these verses striking is their assumption that enemies will continue to exist, the law doesn't require reconciliation first, but demands ethical behavior within ongoing conflict. These commands address the automatic human response to an enemy's misfortune: satisfaction, neglect, or even sabotage.

The Big Idea

God's law embeds relationship transformation into everyday encounters with enemies by commanding practical assistance regardless of personal feelings or relational status.

This isn't about becoming friends with enemies or pretending conflict doesn't exist. Rather, it's about maintaining ethical obligations even toward those who hate us. The genius is in the specificity, wandering livestock and fallen donkeys create opportunities for either cruelty or kindness, and God commands the latter even when our emotions pull toward the former.

Theological Core

- **Commanded Ethics Over Natural Impulse.** God's law requires behavior that contradicts natural human responses, establishing divine rather than emotional standards for treatment of enemies.
 - **Active Assistance Versus Passive Neglect.** The commands specify positive action ("be sure to return," "be sure you help") rather than merely avoiding harm, requiring energy and inconvenience on behalf of enemies.
 - **Practical Love in Ongoing Conflict.** The text assumes continuing enmity while demanding ethical behavior within it, showing that love can be expressed through actions even when feelings remain complicated.
 - **Transformation Through Obedience.** Required assistance has the potential to reshape both the helper's disposition and the enemy relationship over time, though this outcome isn't guaranteed or required.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Required assistance to enemies operates within ongoing conflict rather than requiring prior reconciliation
 - Commanded behavior has the potential to reshape our emotional reality over time, though this isn't guaranteed
 - Practical help matters more than emotional sincerity in demonstrating love toward enemies
 - Discernment involves recognizing genuine need versus manipulation while maintaining ethical obligations
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Grades 4, 6

- Helping someone who hurt us is hard but possible and often leads to surprising changes
 - Our feelings about enemies can change when we choose to help them practically
 - God cares more about our actions than our feelings when someone needs help
 - It's okay to still feel hurt while choosing to do the right thing
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to help people even when they're mean to us
 - God helps us be kind when it's hard
 - Helping someone who was mean can make both people feel better
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Demanding Emotional Transformation First.** The text assumes ongoing enmity and doesn't require feeling differently before acting ethically. Don't spiritualize the command by demanding internal change as a prerequisite for obedience.
 - **Ignoring the Enemy Category.** These aren't commands about helping friends or neutral neighbors, they specifically address how to treat active enemies. Don't soften the tension by pretending the relationship isn't genuinely difficult.
 - **Requiring Reconciliation Outcomes.** The commands focus on the helper's behavior, not the enemy's response or relationship repair. Don't promise that kindness will automatically lead to friendship or conflict resolution.
 - **Avoiding Practical Specificity.** The text gives concrete examples (livestock, fallen donkeys) rather than abstract principles. Help students identify specific "wandering ox" situations in their contemporary context rather than staying theoretical.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if helping my enemy just enables them to hurt me more?"

This is wise discernment that the command doesn't ignore. The examples given (returning lost property, helping with fallen loads) are specific situations where someone experiences genuine loss through no fault of their own. The command doesn't require enabling destructive behavior or ignoring personal safety. It does require distinguishing between genuine need and manipulation, and responding to authentic difficulty even from those who've hurt us. Wisdom involves both maintaining ethical obligations and practicing appropriate boundaries.

"How can I help someone I genuinely hate? Isn't that hypocritical?"

The text assumes genuine hatred exists, it doesn't ask you to pretend otherwise or manufacture feelings you don't have. What it requires is action in spite of feelings, not action that flows from feelings. Sometimes obedience leads to changed emotions over time, but that's a byproduct, not a requirement. Ethical behavior can be authentic even when it doesn't match our emotional state. The integrity lies in

choosing God's standard over our natural impulses.

"What if my enemy doesn't deserve help?"

The command operates on the basis of need rather than merit, the ox is wandering, the donkey has fallen, regardless of the owner's character. This reflects God's own pattern of blessing those who don't deserve it (including us). The question shifts from "does this person deserve help?" to "is there genuine need I can address?" This doesn't mean ignoring consequences or enabling harmful patterns, but it does mean responding to authentic difficulty regardless of our evaluation of the person's worthiness.

The One Thing to Remember

God commands practical help for enemies not because it's easy or natural, but because it embeds relationship transformation into ordinary moments of choice.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with how commanded behavior toward enemies can reshape internal disposition over time, helping them distinguish between feeling-based and action-based approaches to loving enemies.

The Tension to Frame

Can required assistance to enemies change our emotional reality over time, or does authentic love require spontaneous feeling first?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of genuine hurt and anger, don't minimize the reality of having enemies
 - Honor the complexity that enemies might not change just because we help them
-

- Let students explore the tension between commanded behavior and authentic feeling rather than rushing to easy answers
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You see your biggest rival at school struggling with a heavy backpack that just ripped open, spilling books and papers everywhere. Other students walk by pretending not to notice. You have two minutes before class starts and you're already running late. Part of you thinks "finally, something bad happened to them for once", and that feeling makes total sense given how they've treated you.

But another part of you knows they're genuinely struggling and could use help, even though they'd probably never do the same for you. You're standing there watching, and you have about ten seconds to decide whether to keep walking or stop to help. Your emotions are pulling one way, but something else might be pulling another direction entirely.

Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except instead of a broken backpack, it's wandering livestock and fallen donkeys. Instead of a school rival, it's someone described as your actual enemy. And instead of a ten-second decision, it's a command from God about how to live in ongoing conflict with people who genuinely hate you.

As we read, notice how specific these commands get, these aren't vague suggestions about "being nice." They're concrete situations where your automatic response would be to keep walking, maybe even feel satisfied that your enemy is experiencing difficulty. Pay attention to what God requires instead and why that might actually matter more than how you feel about the person.

Open your Bibles to Exodus 23 and start reading silently from verse 1 through verse 9. We'll focus especially on verses 4 and 5, but the whole passage helps us understand what kind of society God is trying to build.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with pronunciation of difficult words like "malicious" or "pervert." Let faster readers sit with the weight of the commands. This isn't comfortable material, that tension is part of the lesson.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific situations does this passage address and who's involved?
- What would be the natural human response to an enemy's wandering livestock or fallen donkey?
- What's surprising or difficult about these commands?
- How would you feel if you were required to help someone who hated you?

Exodus 23:1-9 (NIV)

1 Do not spread false reports. Do not help a guilty person by being a malicious witness. 2 Do not follow the crowd in doing wrong. When you give testimony in a lawsuit, do not pervert justice by siding with the crowd, 3 and do not show favoritism to a poor person in a lawsuit.

4 If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help the owner with it.

6 Do not deny justice to your poor people in their lawsuits. 7 Have nothing to do with a false charge and do not put an innocent or honest person to death, for I will not acquit the guilty. 8 Do not accept a bribe, for a bribe blinds those who see and twists the words of the innocent. 9 Do not oppress a foreigner; you yourselves know how it feels to be foreigners, because you were foreigners in Egypt.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the enemy commands in verses 4-5 since these are the central focus.

Reader 1: Verses 1-3 (Legal justice commands) **Reader 2:** Verses 4-5 (Enemy assistance commands)
Reader 3: Verses 6-9 (Social justice commands)

Listen for the contrast between what comes naturally and what God commands. This is law, not suggestion, notice the authority behind these words.

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 most about these commands?" Encourage questions they're genuinely curious about.

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about. These might be about specific words, about why God would command this, about how it would actually work, or about your own reactions to the passage. Take three minutes and come up with questions that reflect what you really want to understand.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Write them on the board and look for themes. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Help them wrestle with the tension between commanded behavior and authentic feeling.

Collecting Questions: Let's hear your questions. I'll write them on the board and we'll explore the ones that most of you are curious about.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that these commands assume the enemy relationship will continue?"
 - "What's the difference between helping a friend versus helping someone who hates you?"
 - "Why do you think God commands the action rather than the feeling here?"
 - "What's difficult about being required to help rather than choosing to help?"
 - "How might helping an enemy change the helper over time, even if the enemy doesn't change?"
 - "What current situations parallel wandering oxen and fallen donkeys?"
-

- "What would happen if everyone followed these commands regardless of their feelings?"
 - "Why might practical assistance matter more than emotional sincerity in loving enemies?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? God is embedding relationship transformation into ordinary moments of choice. Not by requiring you to feel differently first, but by commanding specific actions when your enemy experiences genuine need. The genius is that this changes you through the doing, not the feeling. Your disposition shifts as you repeatedly choose to help rather than neglect, regardless of how you feel about the person.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see wandering oxen and fallen donkeys in your world? I'm talking about specific situations where someone who's hurt you or treated you badly experiences genuine difficulty and you have the opportunity to help or ignore them. Think about school, family dynamics, social media, friendships, even broader social situations.

Real Issues This Connects To

- The student who bullied you struggles with an assignment you understand well
 - The family member who constantly criticizes you needs help with something you're good at
 - The friend who betrayed your trust faces a social crisis and could use support
 - Someone who mocked you online gets targeted by others and needs someone to speak up
 - A political opponent or ideological enemy faces genuine hardship or injustice
 - The teammate who undermined you gets benched and sits alone during lunch
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Acknowledge that some situations require different responses and help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about always helping everyone.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone help an enemy and what happened to both people?"
- "What would help you choose action over feeling in a difficult situation like this?"
- "How do you discern between genuine need and manipulation from someone who's hurt you?"
- "What's the difference between wise enemy-love and being a doormat?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God commands practical help for enemies not because it's easy or natural, but because it embeds transformation into ordinary moments of choice. You don't have to feel loving toward your enemies before you act lovingly, sometimes the feeling follows the action, and sometimes it doesn't, but the ethical obligation remains regardless.

This week, pay attention to moments when someone who's hurt you experiences genuine difficulty. Notice your automatic response, satisfaction, neglect, or the impulse to help. Don't put pressure on yourself to be perfect, but experiment with choosing the commanded response even when your emotions pull the other direction. See what happens to you in the process.

You've done excellent thinking today about one of the hardest teachings in Scripture. Keep wrestling with these questions, they don't have easy answers, and that's exactly why they're worth exploring. I have confidence in your ability to live this out with both wisdom and courage.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that helping people who hurt us is possible and often changes how both people feel, even when it's hard to do.

If Kids Ask "What if the person hurts me again after I help them?"

Say: "That's a really important question. God wants us to be wise and safe. We help when someone has a real problem, but we can still protect ourselves from being hurt on purpose."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school be mean to you or hurt your feelings. Keep your hands up, I see most of you have experienced this. Now raise your hand if you've ever seen that same person struggle with something or have a really bad day. Okay, you can put your hands down.

Now here's a harder question. Have you ever seen someone who was mean to you drop their lunch tray in the cafeteria, or forget their homework when the teacher's collecting it, or sit alone looking really sad? Part of you might think "good, now they know how it feels," but another part of you might wonder if you should help them. Those are confusing feelings.

It makes total sense to feel both ways. When someone hurts us, it's natural to feel satisfied when something bad happens to them. But it's also natural to feel a little sorry for them when they're really struggling. Both feelings are normal, and it's okay to have both at the same time.

This is like in movies you've seen, think about Frozen when Anna could have left Hans in trouble, or in Toy Story when Woody could have abandoned Buzz when he was broken. Characters often have to choose between getting revenge and helping someone who hurt them.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do when someone who was mean to you really needs help. Do you walk away and pretend you didn't see? Do you help them even though they weren't nice to you? It's one of the hardest decisions kids and grown-ups have to make.

Today we're going to hear about a time when God gave very specific instructions about this exact situation. He told his people what to do when they found their enemies in trouble. It might surprise you what God said, and it might help you figure out what to do when it happens to you. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to seeing enemies struggle. Some might share stories immediately, acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep moving toward the story to maintain momentum.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

A long time ago, God's people were learning how to live together in a new land. They had been slaves in Egypt for hundreds of years, and now they were free! But being free meant they had to figure out how to treat each other, how to solve problems, and how to live as neighbors.

God knew that even among his own people, there would be conflicts. Some neighbors would argue over property lines. Some would have business disagreements. Some people would just plain not get along with each other. God wasn't surprised by this, he knew that people sometimes become enemies, even when they're part of the same community.

But God also knew something else: he didn't want his people to let hatred grow and grow until it poisoned their whole community. So he gave them some very specific laws about how to treat people, even enemies, when they were in trouble.

Imagine you're a farmer in ancient Israel. You wake up one morning and discover that your neighbor's ox has wandered into your field. Now, this isn't just any neighbor, this is someone who has been mean to you, someone who maybe cheated you in business or said terrible things about your family. This person genuinely dislikes you.

You're standing there looking at this ox, and you start thinking. You could just ignore it and let it wander away forever. You could even chase it farther from home so your enemy loses it completely. After all, why should you help someone who's been horrible to you? It would serve them right to lose their valuable animal.

But then you remember what God said about this exact situation. Let me read you God's actual words from the Bible.

Exodus 23:4-5 (NIV)

4 If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help the owner with it.

Did you hear that? God said if you find your enemy's lost animal, you have to return it. Not "if you feel like it" or "if they've been nice to you lately." God said "be sure to return it." That means definitely do it, even though you don't want to.

And there's more. God said if you see your enemy's donkey that has fallen down and can't get up under its heavy load, you can't just walk by and ignore it. You have to stop and help get that donkey back on its feet, even though the donkey belongs to someone who hates you.

This was a shocking command! Animals like oxen and donkeys were incredibly valuable back then, they were like cars and trucks are today. Losing an ox could mean a family couldn't plow their fields and might not have enough food. A fallen donkey meant someone couldn't transport their goods to market and might lose their income.

So when God commanded his people to help their enemies in these situations, he was asking them to do something really significant. He was saying that even when someone hates you, you should help them when they're in real trouble.

But why would God command this? It seems so unfair! Why should you help someone who's been mean to you? God had some very good reasons. He knew that when you choose to help someone who hurt you, something amazing happens, not just to them, but to you.

When you help an enemy, you discover that you're stronger than your anger. You learn that you can choose to do good things even when your feelings are telling you to do something else. And sometimes, not always, but sometimes, the person you help starts to see you differently too.

God also knew that communities work better when people help each other, even during conflicts. When everyone follows these rules, neighbors might still disagree, but they don't let their disagreements turn into complete hatred that destroys everything.

Most importantly, God wanted his people to understand what he himself is like. God helps people even when they're not nice to him. God takes care of people who ignore him or even fight against him. When we help our enemies, we're acting like God acts.

This doesn't mean we have to become best friends with people who hurt us. It doesn't mean we pretend their meanness didn't happen. It means that when someone who's been mean to us faces real trouble, when they lose something important or need genuine help, we choose to help them anyway.

Sometimes in our lives, we see kids who were mean to us struggle with schoolwork, or family problems, or feeling left out. God's command tells us that's exactly when we should help, even though our feelings might tell us to walk away or feel glad that they're having trouble.

What we learn from this passage is that God cares more about our actions than our feelings. We might still feel hurt or angry, and that's okay. But we can choose to do the right thing even when we don't feel like it. And when we do, we often discover that helping others changes our hearts in ways we never expected.

The amazing truth is that God gives us the strength to be kind even when it's really hard. And when we choose to help instead of hurt back, we become more like God, who is always ready to help us even when we don't deserve it.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Let's say someone at school has been really mean to you, maybe they made fun of your clothes or excluded you from their group. Then one day you see them sitting alone at lunch looking really sad, or you see them drop their books and papers all over the hallway. What would you be feeling inside? What would be going through your mind about whether to help them or not?

Listen For: "I'd want to ignore them," "I'd feel mad still," "Maybe I'd feel sorry for them", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Your heart is trying to figure out what's right."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Why do you think God commanded his people to help their enemies instead of just suggesting it? What's different about being told "you have to help" versus "it would be nice if you helped"? How does it feel when someone requires you to do something kind instead of letting you choose?

If They Say: "It's not fair to be forced to help", respond: "That's honest. Sometimes God asks us to do things that feel unfair because he knows something good will come from it that we can't see yet."

Question 3: The Surprise

What do you think might happen to your feelings if you actually helped someone who had been mean to you? Not just once, but what if you helped them several times when they were in trouble? Do you think anything would change between you and that person, or inside your own heart?

Connect: "This is exactly why God's command is so powerful, it changes us as we do it, even when we don't expect it to."

Question 4: The Possibility

Can you think of a time when you saw someone help a person who had been mean to them? Or a time when someone helped you even though you hadn't been very nice to them? What happened? How did it make you feel, and how do you think it made the other person feel?

If They Say: "That never happens" or "People don't really do that", respond: "It's pretty rare, isn't it? That's what makes it so powerful when someone actually chooses to help anyway."

I'm hearing that you understand how hard this is, but also that you can imagine good things happening when people choose to help instead of hurt back. Let's try an activity that will help us feel what this kind of helping looks like.

4. Activity: The Burden Bearers (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of choosing help over neglect by having kids physically experience the difference between carrying burdens alone versus receiving unexpected assistance. Success looks like kids discovering that helping others feels good even when you don't expect anything in return.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Burden Bearers." Everyone find a partner, but here's the twist: pick someone you don't usually work with, or someone you've had a disagreement with recently. If you can't think of anyone like that, just pick someone you don't know very well.

One person in each pair will be the "Burden Carrier" and one will be the "Observer." The Burden Carrier will do wall sits or hold their arms straight out to the sides while counting to thirty out loud. The Observer will stand nearby and watch, but they're not allowed to help yet, they have to just watch their partner struggle.

Here's the important part: halfway through, when the Burden Carrier is getting tired and struggling, the Observer has a choice. They can keep watching, or they can choose to help by supporting their partner's arms or encouraging them. The challenge is that you have to choose to help without being asked, and even if your partner hasn't been particularly nice to you.

We're doing this because it's exactly like finding your enemy's fallen donkey. You can walk by and watch them struggle, or you can choose to help carry the load even though you don't have to.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start with the Observers just watching their partners do wall sits or hold their arms out. Let them see how hard it gets after about fifteen seconds. Don't let the Observers help yet, they need to feel the tension of watching someone struggle.

Now Observers, you have a choice. Your partner is genuinely struggling, and you could help them, but you don't have to. What are you going to do? Remember, this is like seeing your enemy's donkey fallen under its load. You could walk away, or you could choose to help.

I'm watching some Observers choose to help their struggling partners, and others are still just watching. Both choices tell us something about how hard it is to decide whether to help someone, especially when you don't have to and when they haven't necessarily been nice to you.

Look at the faces of the Burden Carriers who are getting help versus those who aren't. Notice how it feels to receive unexpected help when you're struggling. Also notice how it feels to give help when you choose to, versus being required to.

Now let's switch roles. The Observers become the Burden Carriers, and we'll see what choices the new Observers make. Remember, helping is a choice, not a requirement, and some of you might choose differently this time based on how your partner treated you in the first round.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to help their struggling partner, this is the physical representation of choosing assistance over neglect. Celebrate these moments without making non-helpers feel

guilty.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt to struggle while someone watched versus struggling while someone helped? How did it feel to make the choice to help someone who was struggling, even when you didn't have to? This is exactly what God was commanding his people to do, choose to help when they saw genuine struggle, even from enemies. You just experienced the difference between neglecting someone's burden and choosing to bear it with them.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to help people who need it, even when those people haven't been nice to us. This doesn't mean we pretend their meanness didn't happen or that we have to become best friends. It means we choose to do good things even when our feelings tell us to do something else.

This doesn't mean you should let people hurt you over and over again or ignore it when someone is being mean. God wants you to be wise and safe. But when someone who hurt you faces real trouble, when they lose something important or need genuine help, God wants you to help them anyway.

The amazing result is that when we choose to help instead of hurt back, something changes in our hearts. We become stronger than our anger. We become more like God, who helps us even when we don't deserve it. And sometimes, the person we help starts to see us differently too.

This Week's Challenge

This week, watch for someone who has been mean to you but needs help with something. It might be schoolwork, carrying something heavy, or just needing a friend. Instead of ignoring them or feeling glad they're struggling, try helping them once. Notice how it feels to choose kindness over anger, and see if anything changes in your heart or in how they treat you.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us how to treat people who hurt us. Help us choose to help instead of hurt back, even when it's really hard. Give us strong hearts that can be kind even when

we don't feel like it, and help us become more like you. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to help people even when they're not nice to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare helping someone mean to sharing toys with a sibling who broke yours, it's hard but it's what God wants us to do.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about loving others or being kind. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "If You're Happy and You Know It," or "Love, Love, Love." Use movements: point to others during "loves," clap hands during "happy," and hug yourself during "love" lyrics.

Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit down in our special horseshoe shape so I can tell you an amazing story about what God wants us to do when someone is mean to us. This might surprise you!

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 confused when talking about the hard choice, sound strong and clear when sharing God's command.

Today we're going to meet some people who had to make a very hard choice about helping someone who was mean to them!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

A long, long time ago, God's people lived in a place with farms and animals. They had cows and donkeys that helped them do their work. Sometimes neighbors would argue or be mean to each other, just like sometimes happens today.

[Use confused, worried facial expression]

One day, a man was walking to his farm when he saw something surprising. There was his neighbor's cow, wandering around lost! But here's the problem, this neighbor had been really mean to him. The neighbor said hurtful things and wasn't nice at all.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look thoughtful]

The man thought, "Hmm, what should I do? This person is mean to me. Maybe I should just let the cow stay lost. That would teach him!" Have you ever felt like that when someone was mean to you?

[Move to center, speak with authority but warmth]

But then the man remembered what God had told all his people. God said something very important about what to do in this situation. Let me tell you exactly what God said.

[Move to side, sound like you're making an important announcement]

God said, "If you find your enemy's lost animal, you must take it back to them. If you see their donkey fall down and can't get up, you must help it!" God said you have to help, even if that person is mean to you.

Exodus 23:4-5 (NIV)

4 If you come across your enemy's ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. 5 If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help the owner with it.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think that was hard for the man to hear? Yes! It's really hard to help someone who's been mean to you. It would be much easier to just walk away and pretend you didn't see anything.

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

But God has a very good reason for telling us to help mean people! God knows that when we choose to help instead of be mean back, something wonderful happens inside our hearts. We become stronger and kinder!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

God also knows that sometimes when we help someone who was mean to us, they start to feel sorry for being mean. They might even decide to be nicer! But even if they don't change, we still become more like God when we choose to help.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So the man decided to obey God. Even though it was hard, even though the neighbor had been mean, he caught the lost cow and brought it back. He chose to help instead of hurt back.

[Speak with excitement]

And do you know what happened? The man felt good inside because he did the right thing! He felt proud that he was strong enough to be kind even when it was hard. And the mean neighbor was so surprised by the kindness that he started thinking about how mean he had been.

[Pause dramatically]

God wants us to learn the same thing! When someone at school is mean to us, or when our brother or sister hurts our feelings, God wants us to help them when they need it instead of being mean back.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school you might see someone who was mean to you drop their lunch or lose their pencil or feel sad and alone. God wants you to help them, even though they weren't nice to you. That's what it means to be like God!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you and then needs help, you can choose to help them anyway. You can choose to be kind even when you don't feel like it. God will help you be strong and good!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we help people, especially when it's hard to do. And he promises to help us be kind and brave, just like the man who returned the lost cow!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the man felt when he first saw the lost cow?
 2. Have you ever had someone be mean to you at school or at home?
-

3. Why do you think the man wanted to just walk away from the cow?

4. What would you do if you found something that belonged to someone who was mean to you?

5. How do you think the man felt after he helped his mean neighbor?

6. How do you think God feels when we help someone who was mean to us?

7. What happened to the mean neighbor when someone was kind to him?

8. Can you think of a time when someone helped you even though you weren't very nice?

9. How does it feel when someone is kind to you after you were mean?

10. Who can help us be kind when we don't feel like it?

11. Why did God tell people they had to help their enemies?

12. What's the difference between helping someone and letting them be mean to you?

13. How can we be wise when someone who hurt us needs help?

14. What does it mean to be brave and kind like God?

15. Have you ever seen someone help a person who was mean to them?

16. How do you think helping mean people changes our hearts?

17. What should we remember when someone is mean to us?

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

19. What would happen if everyone helped people who were mean to them?

20. How can we be like God when someone hurts our feelings?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select songs about helping or being kind with movements. Choose "The Helping Song," "Love One Another," or "Be Kind to One Another." Include movements like reaching out to help during "helping," pointing to others during "love," and gentle hand gestures during "kind."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Remember how God wants us to help people even when they're not nice to us.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us to help people even when they're mean to us.

[Pause]

Help us to be kind and brave like you want us to be. When someone hurts our feelings, help us choose to help them anyway when they need it.

[Pause]

Help us remember that you help us even when we're not perfect, and help us be like you by helping others.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and making us strong enough to be kind even when it's hard. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping people who are mean. Examples: "Help me be kind to Tommy even when he's not nice" or "Thank

you for helping us help others."

Remember, God wants us to help people even when they're not nice to us, and he'll help you be brave and kind! Have a wonderful week, and I can't wait to see you next time!

Heart Check

When God's Standard Reaches Our Hidden Thoughts, Can we really control how we feel when enemies suffer?

Job 31:13-37

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Job 31:13-37 (NIV)

13 "If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they had a grievance against me, 14 what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

16 "If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, 17 if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless, 18 but from my youth I reared him as a father would, and from my birth I guided the widow, 19 if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or the needy without garments, 20 and his heart did not bless me for warming him with the fleece from my sheep, 21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, 22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint.

23 For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things. 24 "If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' 25 if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, 26 if I have regarded the sun in its

radiance or the moon moving in splendor, 27 so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, 28 then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.

29 "If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him, 30 I have not allowed my mouth to sin by invoking a curse against his life, 31 if those of my household have never said, 'Who has not been filled with Job's meat?', 32 but no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler, 33 if I have concealed my sin as people do, by hiding my guilt in my heart 34 because I so feared the crowd and so dreaded the contempt of the clans that I kept silent and would not go outside,

35 ("Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense, let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. 36 Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown. 37 I would give him an account of my every step; I would present it to him as to a ruler.)

Context

Job has endured devastating losses, his children, wealth, health, and social standing, while his friends insist his suffering must result from hidden sin. In this passage, Job delivers his final defense of his integrity, cataloging specific areas of conduct to demonstrate his righteousness. This oath of innocence follows ancient legal patterns where defendants would call down curses upon themselves if lying.

Immediately before this section, Job has expressed his frustration that God seems absent from his suffering while he maintains his innocence. Now he systematically examines his conscience across multiple areas of moral responsibility, from treatment of servants and the poor to attitudes toward enemies and wealth. This represents Job's ultimate appeal: if God examines every aspect of his conduct, including the hidden motives of his heart, he believes he will be vindicated.

The Big Idea

True righteousness extends beyond external actions to internal responses, even to how we feel when our enemies suffer.

Job's inclusion of his emotional response to enemies' misfortune reveals that he understood righteousness as comprehensive, reaching into areas others might consider morally neutral. The complexity lies in whether anyone can genuinely control such internal responses or if Job's standard exposes our universal moral failure and need for grace.

Theological Core

- **Comprehensive Integrity.** Righteousness cannot be compartmentalized, it includes thoughts, emotions, and words, not merely external actions.
 - **Internal Moral Responsibility.** God's standard encompasses our hidden responses, including natural satisfaction when enemies face trouble.
 - **Heart Examination.** True self-assessment requires honest evaluation of our internal responses, not just our public behavior.
 - **Verbal Restraint as Righteousness.** Controlling our speech about enemies' suffering represents active moral choice, showing that righteousness involves both what we don't say and what we don't feel.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- God's moral standard includes internal responses and emotions, not just external behavior
 - The natural satisfaction we feel at enemies' misfortune reveals the complexity of human nature
 - True integrity requires examining areas we might consider morally neutral or private
 - Job's standard may highlight our universal need for grace rather than providing an achievable benchmark
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Grades 4, 6

- God sees and cares about our thoughts and feelings, not just what we do
- We have choices about how to respond when someone who hurt us gets in trouble
- Our words matter, we can choose not to say mean things even when we feel them
- It's okay to have difficult feelings, but we can choose how to handle them

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to have kind hearts toward everyone, even people who are mean
- God sees our hearts and knows our thoughts
- We can ask God to help us have good thoughts about others

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Moral Perfectionism.** Don't present Job's standard as easily achievable or shame students for natural human responses. Acknowledge that this level of internal control may be impossible without divine transformation, pointing toward our need for grace.
- **Emotion Policing.** Avoid suggesting that having difficult feelings is sinful. The focus should be on what we do with those feelings and how we choose to respond, not on eliminating natural human emotions.
- **Missing the Context.** Remember that Job presents this as part of his defense of integrity, not as a universal standard he expects everyone to meet. His confidence in this area highlights the exceptional nature of his righteousness.
- **Simplistic Application.** Don't reduce this to "just be nice to mean people." The passage addresses the complex internal reality of satisfaction at others' suffering and the moral demand to examine even hidden responses.

Handling Hard Questions

"Is it actually possible to control how you feel when someone who hurt you gets in trouble?"

That's exactly the tension Job's statement creates. Most of us do feel some satisfaction when people who've wronged us face consequences, it's a natural human response. Job's standard may be pointing to an ideal that exposes our universal need for transformation rather than something we can achieve through willpower alone. The goal isn't to eliminate human emotions but to recognize how God's standard reaches even our hidden responses and drives us toward dependence on Him for heart change.

"Why does God care about our thoughts if we don't act on them?"

Our thoughts and feelings reveal the condition of our hearts, and ultimately our hearts drive our actions. When we genuinely examine our internal responses, like satisfaction at enemies' suffering, we discover areas where we need God's transformation. It's not that God is trying to police our emotions, but that true righteousness involves the whole person, not just external compliance. Our thoughts matter because they show who we're becoming.

"Doesn't this make everyone a failure since no one can control their emotions perfectly?"

Yes, and that may be part of Job's point. When we examine ourselves with complete honesty, including our hidden responses, we discover that righteousness is more comprehensive and challenging than external moral behavior. This doesn't lead to despair but to humility and recognition of our need for grace. Job's confidence in his integrity highlights his exceptional character while also revealing the depth of God's moral standard.

The One Thing to Remember

God's righteousness reaches into the hidden places of our hearts, including how we respond to our enemies' suffering, revealing both the depth of His standard and our need for His transforming grace.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between God's comprehensive moral standard and human limitations. Help them discover that Job's examination of his internal responses reveals both the depth of righteousness and the reality of our need for grace.

The Tension to Frame

Can we genuinely control how we feel when people who've hurt us face trouble, or does Job's standard expose something deeper about human nature and our need for transformation?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their honest responses about feeling satisfaction when enemies face consequences, this is normal and acknowledging it is the first step toward growth
 - Resist giving easy answers about "just controlling your emotions", lean into the complexity and difficulty of Job's standard
 - Let them wrestle with whether this standard is achievable rather than rushing to resolution, the struggle itself is valuable
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You're scrolling through social media and see that someone who treated you badly last year is having a really hard time, maybe they got cut from the team you both tried out for, or they're struggling in a class, or dealing with family drama. Your first internal reaction isn't sympathy. If you're honest, there's a small part of you that thinks, "Good. They deserve that after what they did to me." You don't post anything, you don't say it out loud, but you feel it.

This reaction makes perfect sense, they hurt you, and seeing them face consequences feels like justice. Your brain is wired to notice when people who wronged you experience setbacks. You're not celebrating their pain, exactly, but you're not feeling sorry for them either. Most people would say this internal response is completely normal and morally neutral since you're not acting on it.

Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except he believed that even his internal response to his enemies' troubles was a matter of moral significance. Job, a man who had lost everything and was defending his character, claimed that he had never even felt satisfaction when his enemies suffered, let alone acted on it or spoken about it.

As we read, pay attention to how Job examines not just his actions but his internal responses. Notice that he presents this as evidence of his righteousness, suggesting he believed such internal control was both possible and morally required. Ask yourself whether his standard reveals exceptional virtue or exposes something about human nature that we'd rather not examine.

Open your Bibles to Job 31 and begin reading silently at verse 13. I'll give you five minutes to work through this passage.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This is challenging ancient poetry, so help with difficult words. Watch for students who finish early and direct them to reread verses 29-30. Let them feel the weight of Job's comprehensive moral examination.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific areas of conduct is Job examining in his defense?
- Why does Job include his internal response to enemies alongside actions like caring for the poor?
- What's surprising or challenging about the standard Job sets for himself?
- How would you feel if someone examined your internal responses this thoroughly?

Job 31:13-37 (NIV)

13 "If I have denied justice to any of my servants, whether male or female, when they had a grievance against me, 14 what will I do when God confronts me? What will I answer when called to account? 15 Did not he who made me in the womb make them? Did not the same one form us both within our mothers?

16 "If I have denied the desires of the poor or let the eyes of the widow grow weary, 17 if I have kept my bread to myself, not sharing it with the fatherless, 18 but from my youth I reared him as a father would, and from my birth I guided the widow, 19 if I have seen anyone perishing for lack of clothing, or the needy without garments, 20 and his heart did not bless me for warming him

with the fleece from my sheep, 21 if I have raised my hand against the fatherless, knowing that I had influence in court, 22 then let my arm fall from the shoulder, let it be broken off at the joint.

23 For I dreaded destruction from God, and for fear of his splendor I could not do such things.

24 "If I have put my trust in gold or said to pure gold, 'You are my security,' 25 if I have rejoiced over my great wealth, the fortune my hands had gained, 26 if I have regarded the sun in its radiance or the moon moving in splendor, 27 so that my heart was secretly enticed and my hand offered them a kiss of homage, 28 then these also would be sins to be judged, for I would have been unfaithful to God on high.

29 "If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him, 30 I have not allowed my mouth to sin by invoking a curse against his life, 31 if those of my household have never said, 'Who has not been filled with Job's meat?', 32 but no stranger had to spend the night in the street, for my door was always open to the traveler, 33 if I have concealed my sin as people do, by hiding my guilt in my heart 34 because I so feared the crowd and so dreaded the contempt of the clans that I kept silent and would not go outside,

35 ("Oh, that I had someone to hear me! I sign now my defense, let the Almighty answer me; let my accuser put his indictment in writing. 36 Surely I would wear it on my shoulder, I would put it on like a crown. 37 I would give him an account of my every step; I would present it to him as to a ruler.)

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for verses 29-30 since they contain the key content.

Reader 1: Verses 13-23 (Treatment of servants and the poor) **Reader 2:** Verses 24-28 (Trust in wealth and idolatry) **Reader 3:** Verses 29-37 (Response to enemies and conclusion)

Listen for the progression in Job's self-examination, he moves from external actions to internal responses, from public behavior to private thoughts. This is a man examining his entire moral life.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. If a group is stuck, ask "What surprised you most about Job's standard?" or "What made you uncomfortable?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Don't ask questions you already know the answers to, ask about things that genuinely puzzle, challenge, or bother you. For example, you might ask about whether Job's standard is realistic, or why he includes internal responses alongside external actions, or what this reveals about righteousness. You have three minutes to generate questions that reflect what you're actually curious about.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive discussion with their questions while you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Honor their wrestling with difficult concepts.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board and look for themes. Start with questions most students can relate to about internal responses or moral standards.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see in the passage that Job considers internal responses morally significant?"
 - "Why might Job include his feelings about enemies' suffering alongside caring for the poor and avoiding idolatry?"
 - "Is Job describing an achievable standard or revealing something about the depth of God's moral requirements?"
 - "What's the difference between natural human responses and moral failure, or is there one?"
 - "How do you decide whether an internal response crosses a moral line when no one else can see it?"
-

- "When you're honest about your own internal responses to people who've wronged you, what do you discover?"
- "What would change if Job had admitted to feeling satisfaction at his enemies' troubles?"
- "Does this passage make righteousness seem impossible or just more comprehensive than we usually consider?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Job isn't just examining his actions, he's examining his heart. He moves from treatment of servants to care for the poor to attitudes toward wealth, and then to something most people would consider private: how he felt when his enemies faced trouble. He presents this comprehensive self-examination as evidence of his integrity, suggesting that true righteousness can't be compartmentalized. The question is whether his standard reveals exceptional virtue or exposes the impossibility of achieving righteousness through human effort alone.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. You encounter people who've hurt you, disappointed you, or treated you unfairly, at school, in your family, online, in sports or activities. When those people face setbacks, struggle, or experience consequences, you have internal responses. Job's standard challenges us to examine not just what we do, but what we feel and think.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When the kid who bullied you gets suspended or fails a test, and part of you feels like they got what they deserved
 - When a family member who's been difficult with you experiences disappointment or loss
 - When former friends who excluded you face social drama or personal problems
 - When you see people you dislike struggling on social media and you feel a small sense of satisfaction
 - When someone who got the opportunity you wanted faces failure or criticism
 - When you're in a position to help someone who's hurt you, and you have to examine your motives
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix their responses. Some situations call for different responses. Help them think through the complexity rather than giving simplistic advice about "just being nice."

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone respond to an enemy's misfortune with genuine compassion rather than satisfaction?"
 - "What would help you examine your internal responses with Job's level of honesty?"
 - "How do you distinguish between justice and revenge in your own thinking?"
 - "What's the difference between acknowledging difficult feelings and being controlled by them?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Job's standard challenges us to examine areas of our moral lives we might consider private or neutral, like how we respond internally when people who've wronged us face trouble. This isn't about achieving perfect control over your emotions, but about recognizing that God's righteousness is more comprehensive than external behavior. Job's confidence in this area highlights both his exceptional character and the depth of God's moral standard.

This week, pay attention to your internal responses when you see people you don't like facing difficulties. Don't try to eliminate natural human emotions, but notice them. Ask yourself what those responses reveal about your heart and what you might need from God in terms of transformation. This is about honest self-examination, not moral perfectionism.

I'm impressed by your willingness to wrestle with difficult questions today. Keep thinking about these things. The tension you feel about Job's standard isn't a problem to solve quickly, it's an invitation to deeper understanding of both God's righteousness and our need for His grace.

Grades 4, 6

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God sees and cares about our thoughts and feelings, not just our actions, and that we have choices about how to respond when people who hurt us get in trouble.

If Kids Ask "But why does God care about our thoughts if we don't do anything bad?"

Say: "Because our thoughts and feelings show what's in our hearts, and God wants to help our whole hearts be loving and good."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school be really mean to you, maybe they made fun of you, excluded you from games, or said something that hurt your feelings. Keep your hands up. Now raise your other hand if, when that person got in trouble later or something bad happened to them, part of you thought, "Good. They deserved that."

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever had thoughts like "I hope they fail their test" or "I hope they don't make the team" about someone who was mean to you. Or maybe you heard that someone who hurt you was having a hard time, and instead of feeling sorry for them, you felt like they got what they deserved.

These feelings make total sense. When someone hurts us, our brains want them to face consequences. It feels like fairness when people who are mean to us experience something difficult. You might not say anything mean out loud, but inside you're thinking, "Finally! Now they know how it feels." Those thoughts feel normal and justified because they hurt you first.

This is like what happens in movies when the bully finally gets caught by the teacher, or in stories like "Matilda" when the mean principal finally gets what's coming to her. We cheer when the villain faces consequences because it feels like justice. The problem comes when we realize that person is also someone God loves and cares about.

The tricky part is figuring out the difference between wanting justice and wanting revenge. How do we handle our thoughts and feelings when people who hurt us get in trouble? Is it okay to feel satisfied

when they face consequences, or does God expect something different from us?

Today we're going to hear about a man named Job who examined his own heart very carefully. He looked not just at what he did with his hands and said with his mouth, but at what he felt in his heart when his enemies got in trouble. Job believed that God cared about his thoughts and feelings just as much as his actions. Let's find out what he discovered about himself.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to the fairness issue but may resist the idea that their thoughts matter. Affirm their feelings while building curiosity about God's perspective.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Job was a man who had lost everything, his animals, his house, his children, even his health. His friends kept telling him that bad things happened to him because he must have done something wrong, but Job knew that wasn't true. He decided to prove his innocence by examining his entire life.

So Job sat down and began to think through every area of his life. He asked himself tough questions: "Have I been fair to my servants? Have I helped poor people? Have I shared my food with hungry families?" As he went through each area, he could honestly say he had done the right thing.

But then Job did something most people wouldn't think to do. He didn't just examine his actions, he examined his heart. He asked himself about his thoughts, his feelings, and his secret attitudes that no one else could see.

Think about what that would be like. Imagine examining not just what you did, but what you thought and felt about everyone in your life. Job was willing to do that because he believed God saw everything, including the parts of his heart that were invisible to other people.

When Job got to thinking about his enemies, people who had hurt him or treated him badly, he made an amazing claim. He said he had never felt happy when they got in trouble. Never felt satisfied when something bad happened to them. Never thought, "Good, they deserved that."

Most of us would say, "Come on, Job. Really? You never felt even a little bit of satisfaction when someone who hurt you faced consequences?" But Job was serious. He examined his memory and his heart.

Job thought about times when his enemies faced difficulties. Maybe they lost money, got sick, or had family problems. When Job heard about their troubles, what was his first reaction? Did he feel a little spark of satisfaction? Did he think they got what they deserved?

Job examined his heart and said, "No. I never rejoiced when my enemies suffered. I never gloated over their troubles."

But Job went even further. He said he had never even spoken badly about his enemies when they were in trouble. He never said things like, "I hope things get worse for them" or "Finally, they're getting what they deserve."

Job 31:29-30 (NIV)

29 "If I have rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him, 30 I have not allowed my mouth to sin by invoking a curse against his life"

Job was saying, "God, you can examine my heart completely. Look at how I felt when my enemies suffered. Look at what I said about them when they were in trouble. You'll find that I kept my heart and my mouth clean."

This was incredible because Job understood something important: God doesn't just care about what we do with our hands. God cares about what we think with our minds and feel with our hearts. God sees our thoughts when we're lying in bed at night. God knows our feelings when no one else is around.

Think about how different this is from how most people think about right and wrong. Most people say, "As long as I don't hit someone or say something mean out loud, my thoughts don't matter." But Job understood that God's standard was bigger than that.

Job knew that our thoughts and feelings matter because they show what's really in our hearts. If we're secretly happy when people who hurt us get in trouble, it shows we care more about revenge than about love. If we think mean thoughts about our enemies, it reveals that our hearts need to grow in kindness.

The amazing thing about Job's claim is that he wasn't just talking about being polite or following rules. He was talking about having genuine care for people who had hurt him. When his enemies faced trouble, instead of feeling satisfied, he felt concerned. Instead of thinking, "They deserve it," he thought, "That's hard for them."

Job could make this claim because he had spent his whole life asking God to help his heart stay kind and loving toward everyone, even people who were mean to him. He had practiced feeling compassion instead of revenge. He had trained his mind to think good thoughts instead of mean ones.

When Job finished examining his heart, he was able to say to God, "Look at everything about me, my actions, my words, my thoughts, and my feelings. Even in the areas where no one else can see, I have tried to live with integrity."

This teaches us something amazing: God wants our whole hearts to be good, not just our outside behavior. Sometimes we think we can be mean in our thoughts as long as we're polite with our words, but God cares about both. God wants to help us have kind hearts even toward people who hurt us.

Just like Job, we can ask God to help us examine our hearts and grow in love for everyone, even people who are difficult. We can ask God to help us feel compassion instead of satisfaction when others face trouble. We can learn to have thoughts that are as kind as our actions.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Heart Check

Job examined not just his actions but his heart. Imagine God gave you the power to look inside your own heart and see all your thoughts and feelings about people who have hurt you. What do you think you would find? Would you find thoughts like "I hope they get in trouble" or feelings of satisfaction when they face consequences? Be honest, remember, God already sees those thoughts anyway.

Listen For: Honest admissions like "I do want them to get in trouble" or "I would feel happy." Affirm: "Thank you for being honest. That's exactly how most people feel, and it's the first step to growing."

Question 2: The Difference

What do you think is the difference between wanting justice (like wanting a bully to be stopped) and wanting revenge (like wanting them to suffer)? Job seemed to care about people who hurt him instead of wanting them to get what they deserved. How is that different from just letting people get away with being mean?

If They Say: "But it's not fair if they don't get in trouble", respond: "You're right that actions should have consequences. Job didn't want bad people to get away with being bad, but he also didn't want them to suffer just so he could feel better."

Question 3: The Challenge

Job claimed he never felt happy when his enemies got in trouble. Does that seem possible to you? What would it take for someone to genuinely care about people who hurt them instead of wanting those people to face consequences? How do you think Job developed that kind of heart?

Connect: "This is exactly what made Job so special, he had learned to have God's kind of heart toward everyone, even enemies."

Question 4: The Goal

If God wants our hearts to be kind toward people who hurt us, what would that look like in your life? Think about someone who has been mean to you. What would change if you genuinely wanted good things for that person instead of wanting them to get in trouble?

If They Say: "But I don't want good things for them!", respond: "That's honest, and God can work with honest. The first step is admitting how we really feel and asking God to help our hearts grow."

Job's example challenges us to examine not just our actions but our hearts. God wants to help us grow in love for everyone, even people who are difficult. The goal isn't to pretend we don't have hard feelings, but to ask God to help us have hearts like His.

4. Activity: Heart Mirror (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the lesson that God sees our hearts, not just our actions, by having kids physically experience the difference between outer behavior and inner attitudes. Success looks like kids discovering that what we show on the outside might be different from what we feel on the inside, and

that God wants both to be good.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Heart Mirror." Find a partner and stand facing each other. One person will be the "Actor" and the other will be the "Heart Mirror." I'm going to give you scenarios, and the Actor will show what their face and body language would look like in that situation, their outside behavior.

Here's the twist: the Heart Mirror will show what the Actor might really be feeling on the inside, even if it's different from what they're showing on the outside. For example, if the Actor is being polite to someone they don't like, the Actor might smile and wave, while the Heart Mirror might cross their arms and frown to show the Actor's real feelings.

After each scenario, we'll talk about the difference between what we show on the outside and what we feel on the inside. The goal is to discover that God sees both, and He wants both our actions and our hearts to be loving. We're doing this because it's exactly like how Job examined both his outward behavior and his inner feelings toward his enemies.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Scenario 1: "The kid who was mean to you just dropped their lunch tray and food went everywhere. Show your outward response." Watch how some kids show helpful behavior while their Heart Mirrors show satisfaction or amusement. Let this play out for 30 seconds, then switch roles.

Scenario 2: "Someone who excluded you from a game is now sitting alone at recess looking sad. Show how you would act." Notice the gap between polite behavior and internal responses. Some Actors will show concern while Heart Mirrors show indifference or even happiness about the person being alone.

Coaching phrases: "Heart Mirrors, show what the Actor might really be feeling, even if it's different from their actions." "Actors, show what you would actually do in that situation." "What do you notice about the difference between the Actor and the Heart Mirror?"

The breakthrough moment comes when kids realize they can have kind actions but unkind hearts, and that both matter to God. Celebrate when someone recognizes this gap and expresses that both need to be good.

For the final scenario, have both partners try to match, show the same kindness on the outside and inside. Notice how this requires intentional choice and often feels harder than just being polite while

harboring negative feelings.

Watch For: The moment when someone realizes their Heart Mirror shows different feelings than their Actor shows, this is the physical representation of Job's comprehensive self-examination.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about the difference between what the Actor showed and what the Heart Mirror showed? Most of the time, our outside behavior was kinder than our inside feelings. Job understood that God sees both the Actor and the Heart Mirror, our actions and our hearts. God wants both to show love and kindness, even toward people who hurt us. That's what made Job special: his heart matched his actions.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God cares about our thoughts and feelings, not just our actions. Job was special because he had learned to have a kind heart even toward people who hurt him. When his enemies got in trouble, he didn't feel happy or satisfied, he felt concerned for them.

This doesn't mean you're bad if you have angry or mean thoughts about people who hurt you. It means God wants to help your heart grow so that both your actions and your feelings can be loving. God sees everything about us, our kindness and our meanness, our love and our anger, and He wants to help us become more like Him.

The amazing thing is that when our hearts become genuinely kind, it makes us happier and more peaceful. Holding onto anger and wanting revenge actually hurts us more than it hurts the people who were mean to us.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you have mean thoughts about someone who hurt you, try this: tell God about those feelings honestly, then ask Him to help your heart grow in kindness. You don't have to pretend you don't have hard feelings, but you can ask God to help you want good things for that person instead of wanting them to get in trouble.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for loving us even when our hearts have mean feelings. Help us to have kind hearts like Job did, even toward people who are mean to us. When someone who hurt us gets in trouble, help us to care about them instead of feeling happy about their problems. Make our hearts more like yours. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to have kind hearts toward everyone, even people who are mean to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare God seeing our hearts to how parents can tell when we're upset even when we say "I'm fine," then ask "How does God want our hearts to feel?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or having kind hearts. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God's Love Is So Wonderful." Use movements: point to hearts during words about love, spread arms wide for "everyone," make gentle hand gestures for kindness.

Great singing! God loves to hear us praise Him. Now let's sit in our story horseshoe because I have an amazing story to tell you about a man who had a very kind heart.

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 thoughtful when you're Job examining his heart, sound gentle when talking about kindness.

Today we're going to meet a man named Job who had something very special, a kind heart.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Job had been through some really hard times. He lost his house, his animals, and even got very sick. Some people said mean things to him and blamed him for his troubles.

[Use sad facial expression]

Job felt sad about all the hard things that happened to him. But do you know what was amazing about Job? Even when people were mean to him, he kept his heart kind.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, point to your heart]

One day, Job decided to think about his whole life. He wanted to make sure he had been good in every way possible. So he started thinking about how he treated everyone.

[Move to center, speak thoughtfully]

Job thought about poor people. "Did I help them?" Yes, he did! Job thought about hungry people. "Did I feed them?" Yes, he did! Job thought about sad people. "Did I comfort them?" Yes, he did!

[Move to side, speak more seriously]

But then Job thought about something else. He thought about people who had been mean to him. People who said hurtful things. People who were unkind to him.

Job 31:29 (NIV)

29 "I have not rejoiced at my enemy's misfortune or gloated over the trouble that came to him"

[Pause and look around at each child]

Job said, "When people who were mean to me got in trouble, I didn't feel happy about it. When bad things happened to them, I didn't think 'Good! They deserved that!'" Do you think that was hard for Job to do? Yes!

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

You know what? When someone is mean to us, it's natural to want them to get in trouble. If someone pushes you on the playground, part of you might hope they get a time-out. That's normal!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

But Job had learned something special. He had learned to have the same kind of heart that God has. God loves everyone, even people who do bad things. God wants everyone to learn and grow and become better.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So when Job heard that his enemies were having troubles, instead of feeling happy, he felt sorry for them. Instead of thinking "They deserve it," he thought "That's sad for them."

[Speak with excitement]

This made Job very special! Most people feel good when someone who hurt them gets in trouble. But Job had such a kind heart that he wanted good things for everyone, even people who were mean to him.

[Pause dramatically]

Job could do this because he knew God sees everything, not just what we do, but what we think and feel in our hearts. God loved that Job had such a kind heart toward everyone.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes kids at school are mean to us, or our brothers and sisters hurt our feelings, or someone says something that makes us sad. When that happens, we might want them to get in trouble.

[Move closer to the children]

But God wants to help our hearts be like Job's heart. When people who hurt us have problems, God wants us to feel sorry for them instead of happy. God wants us to hope they learn to be kinder.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

The wonderful thing is that God can help our hearts grow! When we ask God to help us be kind, He makes our hearts more and more like His heart. God wants us to love everyone, just like He does.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand together. I'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 with your partner.

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 Job felt when people were mean to him?
2. What would you want to happen if someone was mean to you?
3. Why do you think Job didn't want bad things to happen to mean people?
4. What would you do if someone who hurt you got in trouble?
5. How do you think Job's heart became so kind?

6. What does God see when He looks at your heart?

7. How can we have kind hearts like Job?

8. What would happen if everyone had kind hearts toward people who hurt them?

9. How does it feel when someone is kind to you after you make a mistake?

10. What can you do when you feel angry at someone who was mean?

11. Why does God want us to be kind to everyone?

12. How can God help our hearts grow?

13. What does it mean to love your enemies?

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

15. What would Job do if someone hurt his feelings?

16. How can we be like Job?

17. What makes it hard to be kind to mean people?

18. How does God help us when someone hurts us?

19. What would you want God to help you with?

20. How can we remember to have kind hearts every day?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about kindness or loving others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Include movements: hug yourselves for love, open arms wide for including everyone, point to hearts for kind hearts.

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

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for Job and his kind heart.

[Pause]

Help us to have kind hearts like Job, even when people are mean to us. When someone hurts our feelings, help us to still want good things for them.

[Pause]

Help us remember that you see our hearts, and you want our hearts to be full of love for everyone, just like your heart is.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and helping our hearts grow to be more like yours. Make us kind and loving like you are. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about having kind hearts. Examples: "Help me be kind to everyone" or "Help my heart be like Job's heart."

Remember, God wants to help you have a kind heart toward everyone, even people who are mean. Ask Him to help you this week, and He will! Have a wonderful week, and I'll see you next time!

God's Heart for Enemies

Divine Compassion vs. Human Categorization, Who deserves God's concern when we wish them destroyed?

Jonah 4:1-11

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Jonah 4:1-11 (NIV)

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

4 But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

Context

Jonah has just witnessed the most successful evangelistic mission in biblical history, an entire enemy nation has repented and turned to God. The Assyrian capital of Nineveh, known for its brutal military campaigns against Israel, has experienced total spiritual transformation. But instead of celebrating, Jonah is furious that God has spared his enemies from destruction.

This final chapter reveals Jonah's true motivation for running from God's initial call. He feared not failure but success, he knew God's compassionate nature would extend mercy to Israel's oppressors if they repented. Now, sitting outside Nineveh hoping for its destruction, Jonah becomes the unwitting participant in God's final object lesson about divine versus human perspectives on enemies.

The Big Idea

God challenges our automatic categorization of enemies by revealing divine concern for those we wish destroyed.

This isn't a simple call to "love your enemies", it's a fundamental challenge to how we categorize people as deserving destruction. God sees confusion where we see malice, ignorance where we see evil intent. The tension remains unresolved because the book ends with Jonah (and us) faced with God's logic but not yet transformed by it.

Theological Core

- **Divine versus human categorization.** God's categories for people (confused, needing guidance) differ radically from human categories (enemy, deserving destruction).

- **Compassion for confused enemies.** Those who "cannot tell their right hand from their left" are seen by God as needing instruction, not punishment.
- **Misplaced concern.** Jonah's grief over a plant exposes the moral distortion of valuing personal comfort over human lives, even enemy lives.
- **Unresolved tension.** The story's open ending forces readers to wrestle with God's challenge to their own automatic enmity toward certain groups.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- God's compassion extends to enemy nations and groups we categorize as deserving destruction
 - Those we see as malicious enemies may be viewed by God as confused people needing guidance
 - Our automatic enmity toward certain groups conflicts with divine perspective and demands examination
 - The story's open ending requires us to choose our response to God's challenging logic
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Grades 4, 6

- People who hurt us or seem scary might be confused about right and wrong rather than truly evil
 - God asks us to care about difficult people, not just ignore or wish bad things for them
 - Sometimes our feelings about enemies need to change when we understand God's feelings about them
 - Caring about our own comfort more than other people's lives shows mixed-up priorities
-

Grades 1, 3

- God loves and cares about everyone, even people we don't like or who are mean to us
 - God wants to help people learn to do good instead of punishing them
 - We can ask God to help us care about people we usually don't want to care about
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying enemy categorization.** Don't suggest that all enemies are simply confused or that evil doesn't exist. The passage challenges automatic categorization, not the reality that some people do choose evil. Focus on examining our assumptions rather than dismissing genuine threats.
 - **Rushing to resolution.** The book deliberately ends without showing Jonah's response, leaving readers to wrestle with God's challenge. Don't tie this up with a neat bow, let the tension remain and invite students into ongoing discernment about their own automatic enmities.
 - **Ignoring the plant lesson.** Jonah's grief over personal comfort while wishing destruction on 120,000 people reveals moral distortion. This isn't just about loving enemies, it's about examining what we actually care about and what we're willing to sacrifice for.
 - **Making it purely personal.** While individual application matters, this passage specifically addresses attitudes toward groups, nations, and peoples. Include discussion of collective enemies, not just personal conflicts with individuals.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What about terrorists or people who do really evil things? Doesn't God want them punished?"

This passage doesn't eliminate justice or suggest that evil actions don't have consequences. Nineveh faced judgment because of real oppression and violence. But notice that God's first response was to call them to repentance rather than immediate destruction. The challenge is whether we're willing to see some of our "enemies" as potentially confused rather than irredeemably evil. Even when consequences are necessary, God's heart is for transformation, not destruction.

"How do we know who's confused versus who's actually choosing evil?"

This is exactly the discernment challenge the passage poses. Jonah couldn't see past his enemy category to recognize that Ninevites might be capable of repentance. We need wisdom to distinguish between people who are genuinely harmful and those who might change if given opportunity. The key is examining our automatic assumptions and being open to God's perspective, which often sees possibility where we see only threat.

"Isn't it natural to want bad people to be punished? Why is Jonah wrong for that?"

Jonah's desire for justice wasn't wrong, but his inability to see Ninevites as people capable of change revealed a heart problem. He valued his own vindication over their potential transformation. The passage challenges us when our desire for others' punishment becomes more important to us than their potential redemption. Sometimes our "justice" is really about our comfort or superiority rather than genuine concern for right and wrong.

The One Thing to Remember

God challenges our automatic enmity by seeing confused people where we see enemies deserving destruction.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between their automatic categorization of enemies and God's perspective on those same people. Help them discover that God sees confusion and need where they see malice and threat.

The Tension to Frame

If God's compassion extends to enemy nations and groups we wish destroyed, how do we respond to those we categorize as deserving punishment?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Honor their real experiences with harmful people while challenging automatic categorizations
- Let them wrestle with the story's open ending rather than providing easy answers
- Focus on examining assumptions rather than dictating conclusions about specific conflicts

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: You're scrolling through social media and see news about a group of people you really dislike, maybe a political party you think is destroying the country, or protesters whose methods you hate, or people from a country your nation is fighting. And you catch yourself thinking, "They deserve whatever bad thing happens to them." Maybe you even hope they get what's coming to them.

That feeling makes sense, right? When people hurt things you care about or threaten what matters to you, wanting them to face consequences feels normal. Justice should happen. Bad actions should have bad results. Your anger at people who cause harm shows you actually care about what's right.

Today we're looking at someone who had that exact feeling, except his enemies really were brutal oppressors. The Assyrians had conquered, tortured, and displaced thousands of his people. His desire for their destruction was completely understandable, until God challenged the way he was categorizing them.

As we read, notice how Jonah reacts when God spares his enemies. Pay attention to God's final question about the plant versus the people. And watch for the tension between human justice and divine compassion, it's not resolved easily.

Turn to Jonah chapter 4 and read silently through the whole chapter.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students. Help with difficult words like "abounding" or "relents." Watch for early finishers, encourage them to reread and think about Jonah's emotions. Let them feel the shock of Jonah's anger at God's mercy.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specifically makes Jonah angry about God's decision?

- Why does Jonah care more about the plant than about 120,000 people?
- What's God trying to get Jonah to see in the final comparison?
- How would you respond to God's final question if you were Jonah?

Jonah 4:1-11 (NIV)

1 But to Jonah this seemed very wrong, and he became angry. 2 He prayed to the Lord, "Isn't this what I said, Lord, when I was still at home? That is what I tried to forestall by fleeing to Tarshish. I knew that you are a gracious and compassionate God, slow to anger and abounding in love, a God who relents from sending calamity. 3 Now, Lord, take away my life, for it is better for me to die than to live."

4 But the Lord replied, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

5 Jonah had gone out and sat down at a place east of the city. There he made himself a shelter, sat in its shade and waited to see what would happen to the city. 6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant. 7 But at dawn the next day God provided a worm, which chewed the plant so that it withered. 8 When the sun rose, God provided a scorching east wind, and the sun blazed on Jonah's head so that he grew faint. He wanted to die, and said, "It would be better for me to die than to live."

9 But God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" "It is," he said. "And I'm so angry I wish I were dead."

10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with emotion. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for Jonah's angry speeches.

Reader 1: Verses 1-3 (Jonah's angry prayer) **Reader 2:** Verses 4-8 (The plant episode) **Reader 3:** Verses 9-11 (God's final challenge)

Listen for the emotion here, Jonah is furious, God is persistent, and there's real tension between human justice and divine compassion.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, not questions you already know the answers to, but things you're genuinely curious about. For example, "Why does Jonah care more about a plant than about people?" or "What does it mean that they 'cannot tell their right hand from their left'?" Focus on what actually puzzles you about this story. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with their questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Let them wrestle with God's challenge.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board. Look for themes around justice, enemies, God's character, and priorities. Start with questions most students connect with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that Jonah knew God would spare Nineveh all along?"
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- "How does God's description of the Ninevites as people who 'cannot tell their right hand from their left' change how we should view enemies?"

- "What's the moral problem with caring more about your own comfort than about thousands of people's lives?"

- "Why might God have left Jonah's response out of the story? How does that affect us as readers?"

- "When do you find yourself hoping certain groups of people get what they 'deserve'?"

- "What's the difference between wanting justice and wanting destruction?"

- "If someone had hurt your family or country, how would you respond to God saying they're just confused?"

- "How do we balance God's call to compassion with the need for protection from genuinely dangerous people?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? God is challenging Jonah's entire way of categorizing people. Jonah sees enemies who deserve destruction. God sees confused people who need guidance. Jonah's category leads to hoping for death. God's category leads to offering life. The question for us becomes: which lens are we using when we look at people we consider enemies?

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about groups of people you really dislike, political parties, protesters, people from certain countries, even bullies at school. When do you catch yourself hoping they get what they deserve?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Political opponents whose policies you think are harmful to the country

- Family members who hold views you find offensive or dangerous

- Students at school who bully others or create hostile environments

- Online communities that spread hate or misinformation

- Nations or ethnic groups involved in conflicts you care about
 - Religious groups whose practices you find harmful or wrong
-

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone change from 'enemy' to 'person who needed help' in your own experience?"
 - "What would help you distinguish between people who are genuinely dangerous and people who might just be confused or misinformed?"
 - "How do you balance wanting justice with being open to people changing?"
 - "What's the difference between protecting yourself and hoping for someone else's destruction?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God challenges our automatic categorization of enemies by seeing confused people where we see threats deserving destruction. This doesn't mean being naive about genuine dangers, but it does mean examining our assumptions about who deserves compassion and who deserves punishment.

This week, pay attention to moments when you find yourself hoping certain people or groups get what they "deserve." Ask yourself: am I seeing enemies who deserve destruction, or confused people who need guidance? What would it look like to hold both justice and compassion together?

You did excellent thinking today, especially with the hard questions that don't have easy answers. Keep wrestling with how God's perspective challenges your automatic responses to people you dislike. That wrestling is exactly what the story is designed to create.

Grades 4, 6

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that people who seem mean or scary might be confused about right and wrong rather than truly evil, and that God asks us to care about difficult people.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is really dangerous and hurts people?"

Say: "God still wants to protect people from being hurt. But God also hopes that even dangerous people can learn to do better instead of just being punished forever."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been really angry at someone who was mean to you or someone you care about. Maybe someone bullied your friend, or you saw a news story about people doing terrible things, or someone in your family got hurt by another person's choices.

Now here's a harder question: Have you ever found yourself wishing something bad would happen to the person who was mean? Like hoping they'd get in trouble, or get hurt back, or just... go away? Part of you knows that's not nice to think, but another part of you feels like they deserve it for being so awful.

Those feelings make complete sense. When someone hurts people you love, or when you see unfairness happening, getting angry shows that you care about what's right. Wanting bad people to face consequences is normal. Your heart is working correctly when it gets upset about meanness and cruelty.

This reminds me of movies like *The Lion King*, where Scar hurts Simba's family and takes over the pride. We want Scar to get what he deserves, right? Or in any superhero movie where we're cheering for the villain to be defeated. Sometimes people really do need to be stopped from hurting others.

The tricky part is figuring out when someone is truly choosing to be evil versus when they're just really confused about what's right and wrong. Sometimes people who seem like enemies are actually just lost and need help learning how to do better.

Today we're going to hear about a man named Jonah who was furious that God didn't destroy his enemies. These enemies really had done terrible things to his people. But God surprised Jonah by showing him a different way to think about enemies. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids may share personal examples of being hurt. Acknowledge briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep momentum toward the story. Some may get stuck on wanting villains punished, validate but redirect.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Our story takes place in a time when the Israelites had terrible enemies called the Assyrians. These people had hurt Jonah's family and friends, taken over their cities, and been really cruel to anyone who tried to stop them. So when God told Jonah to warn the Assyrian capital city of Nineveh that they needed to change their ways, Jonah was not happy.

Jonah was a prophet, which means God spoke through him to give people important messages. But Jonah really, really didn't want to help his enemies. He actually ran away and ended up in the belly of a giant fish! Eventually he did go to Nineveh, and you know what happened? The entire city, all 120,000 people, said they were sorry and changed their ways.

You'd think Jonah would be excited, right? The most successful mission ever! But instead, Jonah was furious. Not just disappointed, absolutely livid. He sat outside the city hoping God would change His mind and destroy Nineveh anyway.

Imagine sitting in the hot desert sun, sweating and miserable, just waiting for your enemies to get what you think they deserve. That's exactly what Jonah was doing. He was so angry he told God, "I'd rather be dead than watch you be nice to these awful people!"

God asked Jonah, "Is it right for you to be this angry?" But Jonah didn't answer. He just sat there in his shelter, watching and waiting and hoping for destruction.

Then something interesting happened. God made a large, leafy plant grow up quickly to give Jonah shade. Suddenly Jonah was comfortable and happy! The plant blocked the blazing sun, and Jonah felt so much better. For the first time in days, he smiled.

Jonah 4:6 (NIV)

6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

But the very next morning, God sent a little worm to eat the plant. The beautiful shade plant died overnight! Then God sent a hot, scorching wind, and the sun blazed down on Jonah's head until he felt faint and sick.

Now Jonah was angrier than ever, not just about Nineveh, but about his plant! He shouted at God, "I'm so angry about this plant that I wish I were dead!" Can you picture him? Red-faced, sweating, furious about a plant that had only existed for one day.

That's when God taught Jonah the most important lesson of his life. God said something that completely changed how we should think about enemies and difficult people. Listen carefully to what God said.

Jonah 4:10-11 (NIV)

10 But the Lord said, "You have been concerned about this plant, though you did not tend it or make it grow. It sprang up overnight and died overnight. 11 And should I not have concern for the great city of Nineveh, in which there are more than a hundred and twenty thousand people who cannot tell their right hand from their left, and also many animals?"

Do you see what God was saying? "Jonah, you're heartbroken about a plant that lived for one day. You cared about your own comfort more than you cared about 120,000 people's lives. Those people you call enemies? They're like children who don't even know their right hand from their left, they're confused, not evil."

God was showing Jonah that the Assyrians weren't monsters who enjoyed being cruel. They were people who had never learned how to live right. They were like kids who had never been taught the rules, so they kept making terrible choices that hurt others.

Think about when you were really little and didn't know that pulling someone's hair would hurt them. Once someone taught you, you stopped doing it (hopefully!). God was saying the Ninevites were like that, they needed teaching, not destroying.

The story ends right there. We never find out how Jonah responded to God's question. But God was asking him, and asking us, to see confused people instead of evil enemies. To care about their lives even when they've done wrong things.

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who seem really mean or do things that hurt us. This story teaches us to wonder: are they truly choosing to be evil, or are they just confused about what's right? And either way, God cares about them and wants them to learn how to do better.

What we learn is that God's heart is always hoping people will change and grow, not hoping they'll be destroyed. Even when people have done terrible things, God sees the possibility that they could learn to do better.

The amazing truth is that when we start seeing confused people instead of enemies, we can actually help them learn better ways instead of just wishing they'd go away.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Plant vs. The People

Imagine you had a favorite toy or game that got broken, and on the same day you heard that 120,000 people in another country were in danger. If you cared more about your broken thing than about all those people, what would that say about your heart? How do you think Jonah felt when God pointed out what he was really caring about?

Listen For: "Embarrassed," "Ashamed," "Confused", affirm: "Yes, it's shocking to realize what we actually care about most. Sometimes our hearts care about the wrong things."

Question 2: The Confused Enemies

God said the Ninevites "cannot tell their right hand from their left", meaning they were like little kids who didn't know right from wrong. Think about someone who's been mean to you. Is it possible they were confused about how to treat people rather than just evil? How could you tell the difference?

If They Say: "But they hurt me on purpose!" respond "Sometimes people do mean things because they're hurting inside or because no one taught them better. It doesn't make it okay, but it might mean they could change."

Question 3: Wanting Justice vs. Wanting Revenge

There's a difference between wanting bad people to be stopped from hurting others and wanting them to suffer because you're angry. What do you think that difference is? When Jonah wanted Nineveh destroyed, which one was he feeling?

Connect: "Jonah was more interested in his enemies suffering than in people being protected. That's what made his heart different from God's heart."

Question 4: The Open Ending

The story doesn't tell us how Jonah responded to God's question. If you were Jonah, sitting there realizing that God cared about your enemies and saw them as confused rather than evil, what would you say back to God? What would be hard about accepting God's perspective?

If They Say: "I'd still be mad" or "It's too hard", respond "That's honest! God's way of thinking is really different from our natural way. It takes time and God's help to learn to see people the way He sees them."

You've shared some really thoughtful ideas. The big lesson is that God wants us to see confused people who need help rather than enemies who deserve punishment. That doesn't mean letting people hurt others, but it does mean hoping they can learn to do better. Now let's try an activity that shows what this looks like.

4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces God's perspective on enemies by having kids physically experience moving from separation and suspicion to connection and cooperation. Success looks like kids discovering that people they initially saw as obstacles can become partners when they shift their perspective from enemy to confused person needing help.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Bridge Builders. I need you to form two groups on opposite sides of the room. Your group's job is to build a "bridge" to reach a treasure in the middle of the room, but you can only use your bodies, no props.

Here's the challenge: both groups want the same treasure, and at first you might see the other group as your enemy trying to steal what's yours. You'll probably start by trying to beat them to it or block them from getting the treasure.

But here's the twist that makes this like Jonah's story: the treasure is too heavy for one group to carry alone, and the bridge is too long for one group to build by themselves. You'll need both groups working together, but first you have to stop seeing the other group as your enemy.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Jonah's situation, he saw enemies who needed to be defeated, but God saw confused people who could become partners in building something good.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Let them start with competitive energy, trying to beat the other group, blocking each other, focusing on winning. Give this about 1-2 minutes to develop naturally. Watch for frustration as they realize they can't succeed alone.

As they struggle, some may start to realize they need the other group. Watch for the first signs of someone reaching across the divide or suggesting cooperation instead of competition.

Use coaching phrases like: "I notice you're having trouble reaching the treasure... I wonder if there's another way to think about the people on the other side... What if they're not your enemies but people who could help you?" Don't give the answer directly.

Celebrate the moment someone suggests working together! Say "Look what's happening here, someone just stopped seeing enemies and started seeing potential partners!" This is your key lesson moment.

Once they're cooperating, have them notice the difference in how it feels to work with people instead of against them. Point out how much more they can accomplish together.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses cooperation over competition, this is the physical representation of moving from seeing enemies to seeing confused people who need partnership.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were trying to beat the other group versus when you started working together? At first, you saw enemies who were trying to steal from you. But when you realized you needed each other, they became partners who could help you succeed. That's exactly what God was trying to show Jonah, enemies can become partners when we see them as confused people who need help instead of threats who need to be defeated.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God asks us to see confused people who need help instead of enemies who deserve punishment. When people are mean or do wrong things, sometimes they're not truly evil, they just never learned how to do better. God's heart is always hoping they can change.

This doesn't mean we let people hurt others or that we ignore dangerous behavior. We can protect ourselves and others while still hoping that difficult people will learn to do right. The difference is whether we're wishing for their destruction or hoping for their growth.

The amazing result is that when we see confused people instead of enemies, we might actually help them learn better ways instead of just staying angry at them forever.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you encounter someone who's being mean or difficult, ask yourself: "Are they choosing to be evil, or are they just confused about how to treat people?" Try praying for one person who's been difficult for you, asking God to help them learn how to do better instead of just hoping they get in trouble.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, help us see people the way you see them. When someone is mean to us, help us remember that they might just be confused about how to be kind. Give us hearts like yours that hope for people to change instead of just wanting them to be punished. Help us care about other people's lives, not just our own comfort. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God loves and cares about everyone, even people we don't like.

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 mean people to lost puppies who bark because they're scared, then ask "How can we help lost puppies feel safe?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

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

Beautiful singing! Now sit down in our story horseshoe so you can see me really well. Today we're going to hear about a man who forgot that God loves everyone, even people we don't like.

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 grumpy when you're Jonah, sound patient and kind when you're God.

Today we're going to meet a man named Jonah who got really, really grumpy with God!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

There was a big city called Nineveh where people were being very mean to each other. They didn't know how to be kind. They hurt people and took things that weren't theirs.

[Make a worried face]

Jonah was supposed to go tell them that God wanted them to stop being mean and start being good. But Jonah really didn't want to help these people. He didn't like them at all!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, sound excited]

But you know what happened? When Jonah finally told the people God's message, ALL of them said "We're sorry! We want to be good!" Every single person in the whole city!

[Move to center, speak with authority]

God was so happy! He said, "I won't punish you because you want to change. I'll help you learn to be kind instead."

[Move to side, sound grumpy like Jonah]

But Jonah was NOT happy. He was mad! He said, "God, I don't want you to be nice to these people! I want them to get in trouble!" Jonah was so angry that he stomped outside the city and sat down with his arms crossed.

Jonah 4:6 (NIV)

6 Then the Lord God provided a leafy plant and made it grow up over Jonah to give shade for his head to ease his discomfort, and Jonah was very happy about the plant.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think it was okay for Jonah to want people to get in trouble instead of wanting them to learn to be good? No! But God was patient with grumpy Jonah.

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

God made a beautiful plant grow to give Jonah shade from the hot sun. Jonah loved that plant! It made him comfortable and happy.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

But the next day, the plant died. Now Jonah was even more grumpy! He cried about his plant and said he was so sad he wanted to give up.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

That's when God taught Jonah the most important lesson ever. God said, "Jonah, you're crying about one little plant that lived for one day."

[Speak with gentle amazement]

"But there are 120,000 people in that city, moms and dads and kids and babies and even animals! Shouldn't I care about all of them?"

[Pause dramatically]

God was saying, "Those people aren't bad people, Jonah. They're just confused. They never learned how to be kind. They need help, not punishment!"

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who are mean to us. Maybe someone takes our toy or says something that hurts our feelings. But God loves those people too, even when they're being mean.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean, instead of wishing they would get in trouble, we can ask God to help them learn how to be kind. God wants everyone to be happy and good!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God has a big heart with room for everyone, even people who make mistakes or don't know how to be nice yet. And God wants our hearts to be big like His!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll give each pair one question to talk about. 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 Jonah felt when his plant died?
2. Why was God happy that the mean people said sorry?
3. What's better, people getting in trouble or people learning to be good?
4. How do you feel when someone is mean to you?
5. Can mean people change and become nice?
6. Who does God love, just good people or everyone?
7. What happened when the people in the city said sorry to God?
8. If someone took your toy, what would you want to happen to them?

9. How can we help someone who's being mean learn to be nice?

10. Does God stop loving people when they make mistakes?

11. Why did Jonah care more about his plant than about people?

12. What would you say to someone who's being mean?

13. How does it feel when someone forgives you for doing something wrong?

14. What's the difference between being angry and wanting to help?

15. Why do you think some people don't know how to be kind?

16. What did God want Jonah to understand?

17. How can we have big hearts like God?

18. What should we do when we don't like someone?

19. Can you think of someone who was mean but then became nice?

20. How can we ask God to help mean people change?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about God's love or helping others. Suggestions: "I've Got Peace Like a River" (with hand motions), "This Little Light of Mine" (pointing to others), or "Love, Love, Love" (hugging motions). Include movements like reaching out to others during verses about love.

Wonderful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Fold your hands and bow your heads like we're talking to God.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for loving everyone in the whole world.

[Pause]

Help us remember that even when someone is mean to us, you still love them and want them to learn to be good.

[Pause]

Give us big hearts like yours that want to help people instead of wanting them to get in trouble.

[Pause]

*Thank you that you love us even when we make mistakes, and help us love others the same way.
In Jesus's name, Amen.*

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about loving difficult people. Examples: "Help me be nice to kids who are mean to me" or "Help mean people learn to be good."

Remember, God loves everyone and wants us to have big hearts too! When someone is mean this week, you can ask God to help them learn to be kind. Have a wonderful week!

Love Your Enemies

Beyond Natural Response, How Do We Love Those Who Hurt Us?

Luke 6:20-36

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Luke 6:20-36 (NIV)

20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. 25 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

27 But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand

it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Context

Jesus has just chosen his twelve disciples and come down from the mountain to a level place where large crowds have gathered, people seeking healing and teaching. This sermon comes at a pivotal moment when Jesus is establishing the radical nature of his kingdom. He's speaking primarily to his disciples but within earshot of curious crowds who aren't sure what to make of his message.

The immediate context moves from the Beatitudes and Woes (verses 20-26) to this section on enemy love. Jesus has just blessed the poor, hungry, weeping, and hated, those society overlooks, while warning the rich, well-fed, laughing, and popular. Now he turns to the most challenging relational teaching: how his followers should respond to those who actively oppose them.

The Big Idea

Jesus commands four active, positive responses to four levels of opposition: love enemies, do good to haters, bless cursers, and pray for mistreaters.

This isn't passive endurance or mere tolerance, it's comprehensive initiative toward those acting against us. The pattern escalates both the opposition (from enemy to mistreater) and the response specificity (from love to prayer), showing that worse treatment requires more intentional positive action. Jesus knows this teaching is optional in that it requires genuine listening and response, not everyone will choose this path.

Theological Core

- **Comprehensive Positive Response.** Every form of opposition, enemy, hater, curser, mistreater, requires a specific positive response, creating a complete framework for handling relational breakdown.
- **Initiative Toward Opposition.** We don't wait for enemies to change or for relationships to improve naturally; we take the first step toward reconciliation and healing through our positive actions.
- **Divine Character Reflection.** This enemy love mirrors God's kindness to the ungrateful and wicked, making us "children of the Most High" who reflect our Father's merciful nature.
- **Kingdom Distinctiveness.** Since even sinners love those who love them back, kingdom people must operate by a radically different standard that confounds natural expectations and reveals God's heart.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Enemies, haters, cursers, and mistreaters require love, good actions, blessing, and prayer, even when we're protecting ourselves
- This teaching is "optional" in that it requires genuine listening and response, not everyone will choose this difficult path
- Boundaries and enemy love can coexist; we can protect ourselves while still praying for those who harm us
- True discipleship means reflecting God's character toward the ungrateful and wicked, which requires wisdom and courage

Grades 4, 6

- When someone is mean to us, we can choose to respond with kindness instead of meanness back
-

- Our hurt feelings are real and okay, but we don't have to let them control how we treat others
- Good actions toward mean people can sometimes help relationships get better, and always help our hearts stay soft
- Choosing kindness when it's hard makes us more like Jesus, who was kind to everyone

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind to people who are mean to us
- We can pray for people who hurt our feelings
- Jesus shows us how to love everyone, even when it's hard

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Enabling Abuse.** This passage doesn't require us to stay in harmful situations or enable destructive behavior. Loving enemies can include setting healthy boundaries and sometimes means loving from a distance while still praying for their transformation.
- **Emotional Suppression.** Jesus isn't commanding us to feel happy about mistreatment or pretend it doesn't hurt. Acknowledging pain while choosing positive response shows emotional maturity, not weakness.
- **Universal Application.** The phrase "to you who are listening" suggests this teaching requires a mature response to Jesus' call. Not everyone is ready for this level of discipleship, and pushing it prematurely can create false guilt or dangerous situations.
- **Instant Results.** Enemy love doesn't guarantee that opponents will change or relationships will be restored. The command focuses on our response and character development, not on controlling others' reactions or creating specific outcomes.

Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't this make us doormats for people to abuse?"

Jesus calls us to positive response, not passive endurance of harm. Loving enemies can include protecting ourselves and others from ongoing damage. We can pray for someone's transformation while refusing to enable their destructive behavior. Sometimes the most loving response is establishing clear boundaries or removing ourselves from harmful situations while continuing to hope for their eventual healing and change.

"What if someone has really hurt me or my family, how can I possibly bless them?"

This command doesn't minimize real pain or demand instant emotional forgiveness. Blessing someone who has caused deep hurt might begin with simply praying that God would work in their life to prevent them from harming others. It's a process that often takes time and may require help from counselors, pastors, or trusted friends. The goal is our own freedom from bitterness, not excusing or forgetting serious wrongs.

"Why does Jesus say 'to you who are listening', doesn't this apply to everyone?"

Jesus recognizes that this teaching requires genuine spiritual maturity and readiness to follow him regardless of the cost. Not everyone who hears these words will choose to live them out. The phrase acknowledges that true discipleship is a choice, we must actively listen and respond rather than just hear the words. This isn't elementary-level Christianity; it's the advanced course for those committed to reflecting God's character in a broken world.

The One Thing to Remember

Jesus calls those willing to listen to respond positively to every level of opposition, knowing this path requires courage but leads to becoming children of the Most High.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle honestly with the tension between loving enemies and protecting themselves, helping them discover that this teaching requires mature spiritual discernment rather than naive

compliance.

The Tension to Frame

How do we love, bless, and pray for those who actively oppose or harm us while still maintaining healthy boundaries and protecting ourselves from abuse?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate that this is genuinely difficult, don't rush to easy answers or suggest it's simple
 - Honor the complexity of real relationships and situations where abuse, betrayal, or ongoing harm are involved
 - Let students explore the tension rather than lecturing about what they should do
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine someone at school has been spreading lies about you for weeks, saying things that damage your reputation and hurt your friendships. Every time you walk by, they make comments loud enough for others to hear. Your friends start asking if the rumors are true. You feel humiliated, angry, and betrayed. Your natural instinct might be to fight back, spread counter-rumors, or find a way to get revenge.

That impulse makes complete sense. When someone attacks our reputation, hurts our relationships, or causes us real social pain, our brain immediately wants to protect us and retaliate. The anger feels justified, they started it, they're the problem, they deserve whatever they get back. Most people would understand if you fought fire with fire.

But today we're looking at someone who faced exactly this kind of opposition, people spreading lies, trying to destroy his reputation, actively working against him, except his response was completely different. Jesus gave his followers instructions that go against every natural instinct for self-protection and retaliation.

As we read, pay attention to how specific and comprehensive his instructions are. Notice that he's not talking about accidentally mean people or one-time conflicts. He's addressing ongoing, intentional opposition. And watch for the phrase about "listening", there's something significant about who this teaching is actually for.

Open your Bibles to Luke 6:27-36. We'll read silently first, then discuss what you notice and what questions come up for you.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage often provokes strong reactions, some students may look confused or frustrated. Let them sit with those feelings. Help with vocabulary if needed (mistreat, ungrateful, merciful). Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread verses 27-28 specifically.

As You Read, Think About:

- What are the four different types of opposition Jesus mentions?
- What specific responses does he command for each type?
- What feels challenging or confusing about these instructions?
- Who is Jesus actually talking to in verse 27?

Luke 6:20-36 (NIV)

20 Looking at his disciples, he said: "Blessed are you who are poor, for yours is the kingdom of God. 21 Blessed are you who hunger now, for you will be satisfied. Blessed are you who weep now, for you will laugh. 22 Blessed are you when people hate you, when they exclude you and insult you and reject your name as evil, because of the Son of Man. 23 Rejoice in that day and leap for joy, because great is your reward in heaven. For that is how their ancestors treated the prophets.

24 But woe to you who are rich, for you have already received your comfort. 25 Woe to you who are well fed now, for you will go hungry. Woe to you who laugh now, for you will mourn and weep. 26 Woe to you when everyone speaks well of you, for that is how their ancestors treated the false prophets.

27 But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if they prefer not to read. Choose confident readers for the main teaching section since it's the heart of the lesson.

Reader 1: Verses 20-26 (Beatitudes and Woes) **Reader 2:** Verses 27-31 (Enemy Love Commands)

Reader 3: Verses 32-36 (Rationale and Divine Standard)

Listen for the progression in Jesus' voice, from blessing to warning to challenging command. This isn't casual advice; it's the cost of following him.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen for genuine confusion or resistance, these are the questions to explore. If a group is stuck, ask "What's the hardest part of this passage for you?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just heard. Not questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually confused about, curious about, or struggling with. For example: "How is this different from being a pushover?" or "What if someone is actually dangerous?" You have three minutes to discuss and identify your real questions.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students lead with their questions, you facilitate deeper exploration. Guide discovery rather than providing answers. Let them wrestle with the tension between love and boundaries.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around boundaries, practicality, safety, and emotional authenticity. Start with questions most students can relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between enemies, haters, cursers, and mistreaters? Why does Jesus use four different terms?"
 - "Notice verse 27 says 'to you who are listening', who is Jesus actually talking to here?"
 - "How can you love someone while protecting yourself from their harmful behavior?"
 - "What's the difference between being merciful and being naive about someone's capacity to hurt you?"
 - "Jesus mentions that even sinners love those who love them back, what makes kingdom love different?"
 - "If you prayed for someone who mistreated you, what would you actually pray for?"
 - "What would it look like to 'do good' to someone who actively opposes you?"
 - "How do we balance this teaching with Jesus' other instructions about being wise as serpents?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus isn't giving us one simple rule, he's creating a comprehensive response system. As opposition gets more personal and harmful, our positive response becomes more specific and intentional. Enemy becomes hater becomes curser becomes mistreater, and love becomes good action becomes blessing becomes prayer. He's teaching us to take initiative toward

those acting against us, to go first in breaking the cycle of retaliation.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this pattern of opposition playing out? Think about school relationships, family dynamics, social media interactions, or even broader social conflicts. Where are you dealing with people who oppose, hate, curse, or mistreat you or others you care about?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Former friends who turned against you and spread rumors or secrets
 - Family members who consistently criticize, belittle, or emotionally manipulate you
 - Online trolls or cyberbullies who target you or your friends with harassment
 - Teachers, coaches, or authority figures who seem to have it out for you
 - Social or political opponents who attack your values, beliefs, or identity
 - People who have genuinely hurt or betrayed you in ways that still cause pain
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Validate that these situations are genuinely difficult. Help them think about what "loving from a distance" might look like rather than suggesting they should just forgive and forget.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose a positive response to opposition, and what was the result?"
 - "What would help you pray for someone who has really hurt you or someone you love?"
 - "How do you discern when to engage with opposition and when to protect yourself by creating distance?"
 - "What's the difference between wisdom about people's capacity to harm and closing your heart to the possibility of change?"
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5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus calls us to a kind of love that goes beyond what feels natural or safe, love that takes initiative even toward those acting against us. This isn't about being naive or ignoring real danger. It's about refusing to let other people's brokenness make us broken too. It's choosing to reflect God's character even when it's costly.

This week, pay attention to moments when you encounter opposition, someone being hostile, critical, or hurtful toward you. Notice your first instinct, then ask yourself: "What would it look like to choose a positive response here?" Maybe it's refusing to retaliate online, maybe it's praying for someone who hurt you, maybe it's doing something kind for someone who's been unkind to you.

You wrestled with hard questions today and didn't settle for easy answers. That kind of thinking will serve you well as you figure out how to live with both courage and wisdom. This teaching isn't for everyone, but it is for those willing to listen and follow Jesus into the difficult work of reflecting God's heart in a broken world.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that they can choose positive responses when someone is mean to them, even when their feelings are hurt and their first instinct is to be mean back.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is really hurting me or my family?"

Say: "Jesus wants us to have kind hearts, but that doesn't mean we let people hurt us. We can stay safe and still pray for them to change."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone be really mean to you at school, maybe they called you names, left you out on purpose, or said something that hurt your feelings. Keep your hand up if you

wanted to be mean right back to them. Yeah, most of us have felt that way.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where someone was mean to you, and part of you wanted to be mean back, but another part of you thought "Maybe I should be nice instead", and you felt really confused about what to do. That torn feeling where your heart wants to do the right thing, but your hurt feelings want to get revenge?

Those feelings make total sense. When someone hurts us, our brain immediately wants to protect us and hurt them back. It's like our heart has an automatic "fight back" button that gets pushed whenever someone is unfair to us. The anger and hurt feelings are completely normal and understandable.

It's like in Toy Story when Woody gets jealous of Buzz and starts being mean to him, or in Inside Out when Anger takes control and wants Riley to fight back against her parents. Sometimes the "fight back" feeling is so strong it feels like the only choice we have.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do when someone keeps being mean to you. Do you be mean back? Do you ignore them? Do you tell on them? Do you try to be nice even though they're being awful? It's genuinely confusing because there's no easy answer that always works.

Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus was talking to his friends about exactly this situation, when people are mean to you, when they say awful things about you, when they try to hurt your feelings on purpose. His advice was so surprising that some people thought he was crazy. Let's find out what he said.

What to Expect: Kids will readily identify with being hurt and wanting revenge. Some may share specific examples, acknowledge them briefly but keep moving toward the story to maintain momentum and hope.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a huge crowd of people gathered on a hillside, sitting on the grass and rocks, all listening to Jesus teach. These weren't just his close friends, there were hundreds of people who had heard amazing things about this teacher and wanted to hear for themselves.

Many people in the crowd had been hurt by others. Some had enemies who were trying to ruin their lives. Others had people who hated them for following Jesus. Some had been cursed at and called terrible names. Others had been mistreated by powerful people who could get away with being cruel.

Jesus looked out at all these hurting people and began to teach them something that no one expected to hear. He talked about the poor, the hungry, and the sad, telling them that God had not forgotten them and that better days were coming.

Imagine being in that crowd, maybe nursing a bruised heart from someone who had been cruel to you. You're hoping Jesus will tell you how to protect yourself, or how to get back at the people who hurt you, or at least how to make them stop.

But then Jesus said something that made everyone's eyes go wide. He was about to give instructions that would change everything about how his followers treated people, even the worst people.

Jesus looked straight at his disciples, the people who had chosen to follow him no matter what, and he said something incredible. He raised his voice so everyone could hear, and these words rang across the hillside.

This wasn't advice for everyone. This was specifically for people who were really listening, people who wanted to live differently than everyone else in the world.

Here's what Jesus said to those who were willing to listen:

He said that when people hurt you, hate you, curse you, or mistreat you, you don't fight back the way everyone expects you to.

Jesus told them about four different types of people who might be mean to them, and what to do with each one.

Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)

27 But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.

Can you imagine how the crowd reacted? People probably looked at each other like, "Did he just say what I think he said?" Love your enemies? Do good things for people who hate you? Bless people who curse you? Pray for people who mistreat you?

This was the exact opposite of what everyone expected. Most teachers back then would say, "Protect yourself from your enemies" or "Stay away from people who hate you." But Jesus said to love them and

do good things for them.

But Jesus wasn't done. He kept explaining why this was so important.

Luke 6:32-33 (NIV)

32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that.

Jesus was saying, "Look, everyone already knows how to be nice to people who are nice to them. That's easy! Even people who don't follow God can do that. But my followers are different."

Then he told them the amazing reason behind this hard teaching. He explained that when we love our enemies and do good to people who hate us, we become like God himself.

Jesus said that God is kind to ungrateful people and wicked people. God doesn't just love the people who love him back, he loves everyone, even people who ignore him or hate him.

When we choose to be kind to people who are mean to us, when we pray for people who hurt us, when we do good things for people who hate us, we're acting just like our heavenly Father.

This doesn't mean we let people keep hurting us or that we pretend it doesn't hurt. Jesus knew it would be hard and painful. But he was teaching them that they could choose a different way.

Imagine what started happening when some of those people actually tried this. Instead of getting revenge, they chose kindness. Instead of hating back, they chose love. Instead of cursing back, they chose blessing.

Some of the people who had been mean to them were so shocked by this kindness that they wondered, "Why is this person being nice to me when I've been awful to them?" And sometimes, those mean people started to change.

But even when the mean people didn't change, the people following Jesus found something amazing: their own hearts stayed soft and kind instead of becoming hard and angry.

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who are mean to us, who say cruel things, or who try to hurt our feelings. When that happens, we have a choice. We can choose to be mean back, or we can choose the Jesus way.

The Jesus way means that when someone is mean to us, we can choose kindness. When someone hates us, we can choose to do good things. When someone says mean things about us, we can choose to say good things about them. When someone mistreats us, we can choose to pray for them.

This is one of the hardest things Jesus ever taught, but it's also one of the most powerful. When we choose kindness over meanness, love over hate, and blessing over cursing, we show the whole world what God is like.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine you're sitting in that crowd listening to Jesus, and you've got someone at school who has been really mean to you all week, spreading rumors, calling you names, making you feel terrible. When Jesus says "Love your enemies," what do you think you would have felt? Would you have wanted to raise your hand and say, "But Jesus, you don't understand how mean they've been!"?

Listen For: "That's too hard," "I'd be confused," "I'd be mad", affirm: "Those feelings make sense. Jesus knew this would be really hard."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Think about the difference between your first feeling when someone is mean to you, and what you choose to do about it. Your first feeling might be anger or hurt, and that's okay. But what are some ways you could choose to respond with kindness even when you're feeling hurt or angry inside?

If They Say: "Just ignore them", respond "That's one way. What are some ways to actually do something kind or good for them?"

Question 3: The God Connection

Jesus said that when we're kind to people who are mean to us, we're acting like God. What do you think it means that God is kind to people who don't love him back? Why would God choose to love people who ignore him or even hate him?

Connect: "This is exactly what makes God's love so amazing, it's not based on whether we deserve it."

Question 4: The Results

What do you think might happen if you actually tried this? If someone was being mean to you and you chose to do something kind for them instead of being mean back, what are some possible results, both for them and for your own heart?

If They Say: "They might think I'm weird", respond "They might! But they also might be so surprised that it changes how they see you."

You're thinking about this really well. Jesus wasn't saying this would be easy or that everyone would understand. But he was showing us a way to keep our hearts soft and loving, even when others choose to be hard and mean. Let's try an activity that shows us how this works.

4. Activity: The Kindness Bridge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of responding to opposition with positive action by having kids physically experience how kindness can bridge gaps that meanness creates. Success looks like kids discovering that positive responses create connection while negative responses create more distance.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do an activity called "The Kindness Bridge." I need you to form pairs and stand facing each other about arm's length apart. One person will be Person A, the other will be Person B. Person A

represents someone who's been hurt or treated meanly, and Person B represents the person who was mean to them.

Here's the challenge: Person A gets to choose how to respond to being treated meanly. If they choose a mean response back, Person B has to take one step backward. If they choose a kind response, Person B can take one step forward. The goal is to see what happens to the distance between you based on the choices Person A makes.

But here's the twist: Person A has to make these choices while dealing with real hurt feelings, they'll need to decide if they want the relationship to get better or if they want to stay far apart. Person B will respond based on what Person A chooses.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus was teaching, our responses to meanness either create more distance or help build bridges back to relationship.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

I'll call out scenarios where Person A has been treated meanly, and Person A will choose to respond either with meanness (causing Person B to step back) or kindness (allowing Person B to step forward). Watch what happens to the space between you after three or four choices.

Let's see what different choices create. Notice how it feels when the gap gets bigger versus when you're able to come closer together. Person A, you'll probably feel the tension, part of you might want to choose meanness because you're hurt, but notice what that does to your relationship.

I'm watching for the moment when someone realizes they have power over whether the relationship gap grows or shrinks. Person A, pay attention to how your choices affect not just Person B's position, but how you feel about the relationship too.

Great! Now I can see some pairs are close together and others are far apart, depending on the choices that were made. This is exactly what happens in real relationships when we choose our responses.

Let's switch roles quickly so everyone gets to experience both being the hurt person who gets to choose, and being the person whose position depends on how others respond to conflict.

Watch For: The moment when kids realize that choosing kindness brings people closer while choosing meanness pushes them further away. This is the physical representation of how enemy love creates possibility for

reconciliation.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you chose mean responses versus kind responses? Did you see how your choices actually controlled whether the relationship got better or worse? This is exactly what Jesus was teaching, when someone is mean to us, we get to choose whether we make the gap bigger with meanness back, or whether we build a bridge toward them with kindness. We have more power than we think!

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: When someone is mean to us, we have a choice. We can choose to be mean back, which usually makes things worse, or we can choose the Jesus way, responding with love, kindness, good actions, and even prayer. It's hard, and our hurt feelings are real and okay, but we don't have to let someone else's meanness make us mean too.

This doesn't mean we let people keep hurting us or that we pretend it doesn't hurt when someone is cruel. We can protect ourselves and still choose kindness. We can keep ourselves safe and still pray for people who hurt us to change and become better.

The amazing result is that when we choose kindness over meanness, our hearts stay soft and loving instead of becoming hard and angry. And sometimes, our kindness surprises mean people so much that they start to wonder why we're different, and they begin to change too.

This Week's Challenge

This week, if someone is mean to you or hurts your feelings, try to do one small kind thing for them instead of being mean back. It might be as simple as saying something nice about them to someone else, helping them with something, or even just praying that God would help them be happier so they don't need to be mean to others.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us through Jesus that we can choose kindness even when people are mean to us. Help us remember that our hurt feelings are okay, but we don't have to let them control how we treat others. When it's hard to be kind, help us remember that this is what makes us like you. Help us be brave enough to choose love. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind to people who are mean to us, and that we can pray for them.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

Compare being kind to mean people to sharing your toys with someone who took yours, then ask "How do you think that would make them feel?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or being kind to others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God is So Good." Use movements: point to others during "loves me," hug yourself during "kind," raise hands during "good."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit in our horseshoe so I can tell you an amazing story about Jesus and what he taught about being kind to everyone, even people who aren't kind to us.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound gentle and loving when you're Jesus, sound sad when talking about mean people, sound excited when talking about kindness.

Today we're going to meet Jesus when he was teaching a big crowd of people something very special!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Picture hundreds and hundreds of people sitting on a big hill, all listening to Jesus teach. Many of these people had been hurt by others. Some people had been mean to them. Some people had said mean words to them.

[Look sad and speak gently]

You know how it feels when someone is mean to you, right? Maybe they say something that hurts your feelings, or they won't share, or they're not kind. It makes you feel sad and maybe angry too.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look thoughtful]

Well, all these people were probably hoping Jesus would tell them how to stay away from mean people, or maybe how to be mean back to them.

[Move to center, speak with warm authority like Jesus]

But Jesus said something that surprised everyone! He looked at the people who really wanted to follow him, and he said something amazing about how to treat people who are mean to us.

[Speak clearly and kindly like Jesus]

Jesus said: "Love your enemies. Do good things for people who hate you. Say nice things about people who say mean things about you. Pray for people who are mean to you."

Luke 6:27-28 (NIV)

*27 But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28
bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you.*

[Pause and look around at each child with wide eyes]

Can you imagine how surprised those people were? They probably thought, "Did Jesus really say to be KIND to people who are MEAN to us?"

[Move to center, speak with gentle excitement]

Yes! That's exactly what Jesus said. He told them that when someone is mean to you, you can choose to be kind back. When someone says mean words, you can choose to say kind words about them.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Jesus explained why this was so special. He said, "Everyone knows how to be nice to people who are nice to them. That's easy! But God's children are different. They can be kind even to people who aren't kind to them."

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Jesus said that when we're kind to people who are mean to us, we're acting just like God! God loves everyone, even people who are mean to him. God is kind to everyone, even people who don't say thank you.

[Speak with excitement and gesture big]

So when we choose to be kind to someone who was mean to us, we're showing everyone what God is like! We're being like our heavenly Father who loves everyone.

[Pause dramatically]

Now, this doesn't mean we have to let people keep being mean to us. We can ask for help from grown-ups, and we can stay safe. But we can still have kind hearts toward them.

[Speak directly to the children with warmth]

Sometimes in our lives, someone might be mean to us at school, or at home, or on the playground. When that happens, we can remember what Jesus taught. We can choose to be kind instead of mean back.

[Move closer to the children]

We can pray for people who are mean to us. We can ask God to help their hearts become kind. We can do good things for them. We can say nice things about them to other people.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

When we do this, something wonderful happens. Our hearts stay happy and kind instead of becoming sad and angry. And sometimes, the mean people are so surprised by our kindness that they start being kind too!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the people felt when Jesus said to love people who are mean to them?
2. Tell about a time when someone was kind to you when you were grumpy.

3. What would you think if someone was kind to you after you were mean to them?

4. If someone took your toy, what are some kind things you could do?

5. How do you think it makes God feel when we're kind to everyone?

6. What happens to your heart when you choose to be kind instead of mean?

7. Why do you think Jesus wants us to pray for people who are mean?

8. What's something kind you could do for someone at school?

9. How could you be kind to a brother or sister who was mean to you?

10. What would you pray for someone who hurt your feelings?

11. Why is it harder to be kind to mean people than nice people?

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

13. What does it mean that God is kind to everyone?

14. How can we trust God to help us be kind?

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

16. How can we ask grown-ups for help when someone is being mean?

17. What should we remember when our feelings get hurt?

18. How can we pray for our own hearts to stay kind?

19. What would change if we always chose kindness?

20. How can we be like Jesus when someone is mean to us?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about kindness or being like Jesus. Suggestions: "I Want to Be Like Jesus," "Love, Love, Love," or "Be Kind." Include movements: point to yourself during "I want," hug during "love," wave hands gently during "be kind."

Beautiful! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Sit criss-cross-applesauce in your rows and fold your hands quietly while I pray for us.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about kindness through Jesus.

[Pause]

Help us remember to choose kindness even when someone is mean to us. Help our hearts stay soft and loving like yours.

[Pause]

When our feelings get hurt, help us remember that we can still choose to be kind. Help us pray for people who are mean so their hearts can become kind too.

[Pause]

Thank you that you love everyone and that you help us be kind like you. Help us show everyone what you're like. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about kindness. Examples: "Help me be kind to everyone" or "Help mean people become nice."

Remember, God wants us to choose kindness even when it's hard. You can be kind like Jesus! Have a wonderful week, and look for ways to show God's love to everyone you meet.

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Beyond Easy Love

When Love Gets Challenging, What separates kingdom love from ordinary friendship?

Luke 6:27-36

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Luke 6:27-36 (NIV)

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

Context

Jesus delivers this teaching during his Sermon on the Plain (Luke 6:17-49), the parallel to Matthew's Sermon on the Mount. He has just chosen his twelve apostles and descended to a level place where crowds gather. This is not private instruction but public teaching to "a large crowd of his disciples and a great number of people." The setting positions this as foundational kingdom ethics for all followers, not advanced discipleship for the inner circle.

Immediately before these verses, Jesus has pronounced woes on the wealthy and comfortable (6:24-26), creating tension about who truly belongs to God's kingdom. Now he pivots to practical ethics, defining what kingdom living actually looks like in relationships. The teaching flows from blessing and woe pronouncements into concrete behavioral expectations, showing how kingdom citizens relate to both friends and enemies.

The Big Idea

Jesus systematically removes credit from reciprocal relationships, loving those who love us back, helping those who help us, lending with guaranteed return, because these represent automatic, self-serving patterns that require no moral courage or spiritual transformation.

The challenge lies in Jesus' triple emphasis: "what credit is that to you?" This isn't dismissing kindness to friends but revealing that reciprocal relationships offer no evidence of kingdom transformation. The ethical frontier begins precisely where reciprocity ends, in loving the unloving, serving the ungrateful, and giving without return.

Theological Core

- **Reciprocity as Moral Baseline.** Even those outside the kingdom naturally practice mutual care and fair exchange, making reciprocal love morally unremarkable and spiritually insufficient.
 - **Credit and Achievement.** Jesus uses economic language ("credit," "reward") to show that kingdom ethics operate by different accounting principles where love's value increases precisely when return is unlikely.
 - **Universal versus Distinctive Behavior.** Kingdom citizens must transcend universal human patterns of mutual benefit to demonstrate the distinctive character of God's love that extends beyond deserving recipients.
 - **Boundary of Ethical Challenge.** True spiritual and moral growth occurs at the uncomfortable edge where natural self-protection and reciprocal fairness no longer provide guidance for our
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responses.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Reciprocal relationship maintenance represents no moral achievement or spiritual evidence, since even those outside the kingdom practice mutual care naturally.
 - The ethical challenge begins precisely where comfort and fairness end, in extending love, good deeds, and generosity to those who cannot or will not return them.
 - Kingdom living requires transcending universal human patterns to demonstrate God's distinctive character that loves the ungrateful and wicked.
 - Sustainable kingdom ethics demands spiritual transformation, not just moral effort, since human reciprocity instincts work against unconditional love.
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Grades 4, 6

- Being nice to people who are nice to us is normal and expected, even people who don't know God do that naturally.
 - Real Christian love means choosing kindness even when others are mean, rude, or unfair to us first.
 - When we help only people who help us back, or are kind only to people who are kind to us, we're acting like everyone else instead of like God.
 - It's okay to feel hurt or angry when someone is mean to us, but we can still choose to respond with love because that's how God treats us.
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Grades 1, 3

- Jesus wants us to be kind to everyone, even people who are mean to us.
 - God loves people who are nice and people who are not nice, and he wants us to love like he does.
 - When someone is mean to us, we can choose to be kind instead of being mean back.
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Dismissing Reciprocal Love.** Jesus isn't condemning friendship or mutual care but showing that these represent the starting point, not the destination, of kingdom ethics. Don't make students feel guilty for enjoying reciprocal relationships.
 - **Weaponizing the "Sinners" Comparison.** The rhetorical function is leveling and universal, not demeaning. Jesus isn't saying "sinners are bad" but "reciprocal love is so natural that moral distinction requires more."
 - **Demanding Impossible Standards.** Present this as spiritual direction and growth, not legal requirement. The goal is transformation of heart that enables supernatural love, not moral perfectionism through human effort.
 - **Ignoring Sustainability Questions.** Don't gloss over the genuine difficulty of these teachings. Acknowledge that kingdom ethics require spiritual resources beyond human willpower and social wisdom about appropriate boundaries.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't this teaching just enable people to take advantage of us?"

Jesus isn't teaching unlimited tolerance of abuse or poor boundaries. The context shows love that seeks the good of others, including appropriate consequences for harmful behavior. Kingdom love is wise love that sometimes protects people from their own destructive choices while maintaining genuine care for their wellbeing. This teaching challenges our motives and methods, not our discernment.

"If even non-Christians can love their friends, what's special about being a Christian?"

Jesus is precisely making this point, reciprocal love doesn't distinguish kingdom citizens from anyone else. What's special is the supernatural ability to love beyond reciprocity, to extend grace to those who don't deserve it, and to reflect God's character by loving the ungrateful and wicked. This reveals transformation that only comes through relationship with God.

"How can we love people who are genuinely harmful or dangerous?"

Kingdom love doesn't require naive trust or removing all boundaries. Loving enemies can include appropriate consequences, protective distance, and honest confrontation of harmful behavior. The heart change is wanting their ultimate good while protecting yourself and others from their current destructive patterns. Love seeks transformation, not permission for harm.

The One Thing to Remember

The love that everyone can give, to friends, family, and those who treat us well, requires no spiritual transformation, but kingdom love begins where comfort ends.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to examine their own relationships and discover where genuine ethical challenge exists versus comfortable reciprocal maintenance. Help them wrestle with the tension between kingdom ideals and practical sustainability without providing easy answers.

The Tension to Frame

If "even sinners" practice reciprocal ethics naturally, what distinguishes kingdom relationships from ordinary friendship, and how do we live this out without becoming doormats or burning out?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with difficult people while challenging their comfort zones with easy relationships
- Honor the real complexity of boundaries, wisdom, and sustainability without undermining Jesus's challenging call
- Let students discover the pattern rather than lecturing, their own relationship analysis will be more powerful than your explanations

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about your friend group for a minute. You probably have people you text regularly, sit with at lunch, hang out with on weekends. You're nice to them, they're nice to you. You help each other with homework, share food, have each other's backs. It's a pretty good system, right? Everyone gets what they need.

Now here's where it gets interesting. What would happen if one of those friends suddenly stopped being nice to you? Maybe they started ignoring you, or talking about you behind your back, or just being generally difficult. Would you keep being nice to them? Would you still share your lunch, still help with homework, still have their back? Most of us would probably pull back, right? That makes sense.

But Jesus apparently has thoughts about this whole system. In today's passage, he's basically saying that the way most of us handle relationships, being nice to people who are nice to us, isn't particularly impressive. In fact, he says even people who don't follow God do exactly the same thing. So if that's true, what makes Christian relationships different?

As you're reading today, I want you to notice something: Jesus uses this phrase "what credit is that to you?" three different times. He's talking about credit like you'd get credit for an assignment, or recognition for an achievement. Pay attention to what he says deserves credit and what doesn't.

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 6, starting with verse 27. Read through verse 36 silently first, and see if you can spot the pattern Jesus is building.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage challenges comfortable assumptions about relationships, so let students feel the weight of Jesus's words. Some may react with confusion or pushback, that's exactly what should happen.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors does Jesus question in verses 32-34?
- What reasons does he give for why these behaviors aren't particularly impressive?
- What alternative does he suggest, and how does it differ from the norm?
- How would following this teaching change your actual relationships?

Luke 6:27-36 (NIV)

27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you, 28 bless those who curse you, pray for those who mistreat you. 29 If someone slaps you on one cheek, turn to them the other also. If someone takes your coat, do not withhold your shirt from them. 30 Give to everyone who asks you, and if anyone takes what belongs to you, do not demand it back. 31 Do to others as you would have them do to you.

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful."

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. This passage builds dramatic tension through repetition, so encourage readers to emphasize the repeated phrases.

Reader 1: Verses 27-31 (The challenging commands) **Reader 2:** Verses 32-34 (The triple "what credit is that to you?") **Reader 3:** Verses 35-36 (The alternative vision)

Listen to the tone and rhythm here. This isn't casual advice, Jesus is building an argument step by step.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen for genuine confusion or pushback. Help stuck groups start with "What surprised you most?" or "What bothered you about this passage?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about or bothered by. Maybe something confused you, or struck you as unfair, or seemed impossible. You have 3 minutes. Go.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Look for moments when they discover the pattern themselves, that's more powerful than you explaining it.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board. Look for themes around fairness, reciprocity, sustainability, or the "sinners" comparison. Start with questions most students can relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What pattern do you notice in verses 32, 33, and 34? What's Jesus's point about loving, doing good, and lending?"
- "Why does Jesus keep saying 'even sinners' do these things? What's he trying to prove?"
- "Is Jesus saying it's wrong to have close friendships or expect people to treat you fairly?"
- "When you think about your own relationships, where do you see reciprocity versus non-reciprocal love?"

- "What would change in your actual life if you took verse 35 seriously?"
- "How is loving enemies different from just being nice to difficult people?"
- "If this teaching is true, what would happen to someone who followed it completely?"
- "What's the difference between kingdom love and just letting people walk all over you?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus is systematically removing credit from the relationships most of us think make us good people. Loving people who love us back, helping people who help us, being generous when we know we'll get something in return, Jesus says this is just basic human behavior. The ethical challenge begins where our comfort zone ends. That's where kingdom love actually shows up.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see this playing out? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, friend groups. Where are you operating in the "easy love" zone, and where might you actually be challenged to love beyond reciprocity?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Group projects where someone doesn't pull their weight, do you still help them, or write them off?
 - Family members who constantly create drama but never appreciate what others do for them
 - Friends who only reach out when they need something but disappear when you need support
 - Social media relationships based entirely on mutual validation and likes
 - School social dynamics where kindness depends entirely on someone's social status or how they treat you
 - Dating relationships built primarily on what you get rather than what you give
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix everything. Some situations require wisdom about boundaries. Help them think through how to love wisely rather than giving blanket advice about always saying yes.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone love beyond reciprocity? What did that look like?"
- "What would help you love someone who consistently doesn't love you back?"
- "How do you tell the difference between wise love and being a doormat?"
- "What's the difference between kingdom love and just being nice?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you today: The love that everyone can give, to friends, family, people who treat us well, requires no spiritual transformation. Jesus isn't dismissing that love, but he's saying it's just the starting point. Kingdom love begins where comfort ends, where fairness stops providing guidance, where our natural instincts would tell us to pull back.

This week, pay attention to your relationship patterns. Notice where you operate in reciprocal mode versus where you might be called to love beyond return. Don't try to fix everything at once, just start noticing. Ask yourself: Where am I playing it safe relationally? Where might God be calling me beyond my comfort zone?

I'm genuinely impressed by the thinking you did today and the hard questions you asked. These aren't easy teachings, and you shouldn't expect them to feel comfortable. Keep wrestling with them. The fact that this feels challenging means you're taking Jesus seriously, and that's exactly where transformation begins.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids recognize the difference between easy kindness to people who are nice to them and challenging love that chooses kindness even when others are mean or ungrateful.

If Kids Ask "Why should I be nice to someone who's mean to me?"

Say: "That's exactly the question Jesus wants us to think about. It's hard, but that's how we show God's love is different and special."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you have a best friend or someone you really like spending time with. Keep your hands up! Now, raise your hand if you're usually pretty nice to that person. Of course you are! You share your snacks, you play together, you help each other. That feels good, right?

Now here's a trickier question. Think about someone at school who maybe isn't very nice to you. Maybe they cut in line, or they never include you in games, or they sometimes say mean things. How do you usually treat that person? Do you still share your snacks with them? Do you still try to help them? Or do you kind of ignore them or avoid them? Be honest, there's no wrong answer here.

That makes total sense, by the way. It's natural to be nice to people who are nice to us, and it's natural to not want to be around people who are mean to us. Your feelings about that are completely normal. But sometimes our feelings tell us to protect ourselves when God might want us to do something different.

This is like in movies too. Think about Frozen, Anna keeps being kind to Elsa even when Elsa is scared and pushing everyone away. Or in Toy Story, when Woody helps Buzz even though Buzz was kind of mean to him at first. The characters who grow the most are the ones who choose kindness even when it's hard.

The tricky part is figuring out when we should protect ourselves and when we should choose to be kind even when someone isn't kind back. Sometimes it's hard to know which choice shows God's love best.

Today we're going to hear about what Jesus said about this exact situation. He had some pretty surprising things to say about the difference between easy kindness and challenging love. Let's find out what happened when he taught about loving people who aren't very lovable.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to the unfair treatment scenarios. Acknowledge their experiences briefly but keep building toward the story. Some may resist the idea of being kind to mean people.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture this: Jesus had been traveling from town to town, teaching people about God and healing sick people. Word had spread everywhere about this amazing teacher.

So many people wanted to hear him that he couldn't even stay in one place for very long. Crowds followed him everywhere he went, not just his twelve special friends, but hundreds and hundreds of people.

On this particular day, Jesus had been up on a mountain choosing twelve men to be his closest helpers. But when he came back down, there was this enormous crowd waiting for him in a flat area.

Imagine being in that crowd! People pressing in from all sides, everyone trying to get closer to Jesus, kids on their parents' shoulders trying to see over the adults, people calling out questions. It must have been exciting but also a little overwhelming.

Jesus looked out at all these faces, rich people and poor people, young people and old people, people who had been following him for months and people who had just heard about him that day. And he decided to teach them something really important about how to live.

But what he said next wasn't what anyone expected. Instead of talking about being nice to nice people, he started talking about enemies. "Love your enemies," he said. "Do good to people who hate you. Pray for people who are mean to you."

You can imagine how the crowd reacted to that! Some people probably looked confused. Others might have thought he was joking. Love your enemies? Do good to people who hate you? That sounds crazy!

But Jesus wasn't joking. He kept going with even more challenging examples. "If someone hits you," he said, "don't hit them back. If someone takes your coat, give them your shirt too. If someone asks you for something, give it to them."

By now, people in the crowd were probably whispering to each other: "Did he really just say that? Does he know how hard that would be?" Because Jesus was asking them to do the opposite of what felt natural and safe.

But then Jesus said something that helped explain why he was giving such difficult advice.

Luke 6:32-34 (NIV)

32 "If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full."

Do you hear what Jesus was saying? He was pointing out that being nice to people who are nice to you isn't particularly special. Even people who don't know God do that! It's the most natural thing in the world.

Jesus wasn't saying it's wrong to love your friends or be kind to people who are kind to you. But he was saying that's just the beginning, not the end goal. Anyone can do that!

It's like if your teacher gave you credit for writing your name on your paper. That's something you should do, but it's not really an achievement worth celebrating, right? Jesus was saying that loving people who love you back is like writing your name on your paper, it's good, but it doesn't take any special skill or courage.

But then Jesus told them what would be impressive, what would actually show God's love in the world. He said, "Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting anything back."

This was different from anything anyone had ever heard! Most teachers and religious leaders taught people to be fair, treat others the way they treat you. But Jesus was teaching something much more challenging and much more beautiful.

He was saying that God's love is so big and so generous that it doesn't depend on whether someone deserves it or not. God loves people who don't love him back. God is kind to people who ignore him or even hate him.

And if God's children want to be like their heavenly Father, they need to love like he does, beyond what's easy, beyond what's fair, beyond what makes sense to everyone else.

The people in that crowd realized Jesus wasn't just teaching them about being nice. He was teaching them about becoming the kind of people who could love like God loves, with a love so big and generous

that it surprises everyone, including the person receiving it.

This is what makes God's love special and different from ordinary human love. Anyone can be nice to their friends. But it takes something supernatural to be genuinely kind to someone who's been mean to you.

That's the kind of love that changes the world. That's the kind of love that shows people what God is really like.

Sometimes in our lives, we get to choose between easy love and challenging love. Easy love is what we give to people who are already nice to us. Challenging love is what we give to people who might not deserve it or appreciate it.

Jesus wants his followers to be known for challenging love, because that's the kind of love he shows to us every single day. Even when we mess up, even when we ignore him, even when we make bad choices, God keeps loving us.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Imagine someone at school has been really mean to you all week. They cut in front of you in line, they didn't include you in their game at recess, and yesterday they laughed when you dropped your lunch tray. How would you feel about that person? What would you want to do when you saw them the next day?

Listen For: "Angry," "avoid them," "be mean back", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Anyone would feel that way when someone treats them unfairly."

Question 2: The Natural Response

Most people would probably decide to just stay away from that mean person, right? Maybe ignore them, or only be nice to people who are nice to them. According to what Jesus taught, why isn't that good enough? What did he say about loving people who love you back?

If They Say: "It's easier to just avoid mean people", respond: "You're absolutely right. That's exactly why Jesus's way is so different and so hard."

Question 3: The God Connection

Jesus said that even people who don't know God are nice to their friends and family. So what makes Christian love different? What happens when we choose to be kind to someone who's been mean to us?

Connect: "This is exactly what shows people that God's love is real and powerful and different from ordinary human love."

Question 4: The Big Picture

What do you think would happen in our school, or our families, or our neighborhoods if more people started choosing challenging love instead of just easy love? How might things change?

If They Say: "People might take advantage", acknowledge: "That's a real concern. Loving like Jesus does also means being wise about how and when to show that love."

You've really been thinking hard about this! Jesus knew this wouldn't be easy, but he also knew it would be beautiful. When we love beyond what's easy or fair, we get to show people what God's love looks like. Now let's try an activity that will help us understand what this looks like in practice.

4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of moving from reciprocal kindness to challenging love by having kids physically experience the difference between helping people who help them versus helping people who don't. Success looks like kids discovering that choosing to help everyone creates stronger community than only helping those who help back.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Bridge Builders. I need everyone to spread out around the room. You're all islands, and your goal is to build bridges to other islands by reaching out and connecting hands with someone near you.

Here's the challenge: In round one, you can only build bridges with people who built bridges with you first. So if someone reaches toward you, you can connect. But if someone doesn't reach for you, you can't reach for them either. You can only connect with people who are already being nice to you.

In round two, we'll change the rule. You can reach toward anyone, even if they haven't reached toward you yet. You can choose to build bridges with anyone, whether they've been nice to you or not. We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus was teaching about loving everyone, not just people who love us first.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round one starts now. Remember, only connect with people who reach for you first. Let me watch what happens when we only help people who help us back. Notice who gets left out and how the bridges form.

Look around, do you see what's happening? Some of you are connected in small groups, but some people are still alone. That's because everyone's waiting for someone else to reach first. It's hard to build a big community when everyone's playing it safe.

Round two! Now you can reach toward anyone, even if they haven't reached toward you. Try connecting with someone who might be left out. See what happens when you take the first step toward someone who hasn't been reaching for you.

This is beautiful! Look how much bigger your bridge network is getting! When some of you decided to reach first instead of waiting, you helped people connect who couldn't connect before. That's exactly what Jesus was talking about.

Now everyone freeze and look around. Do you see the difference between our first round and our second round? In round one, we had small separate groups. In round two, we have one big connected community.

Watch For: The moment when someone reaches first toward someone who hasn't reached toward them, this is the physical representation of choosing challenging love over easy reciprocal kindness.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt in round one when everyone was waiting for someone else to reach first? What about round two when some of you decided to reach out first? That's exactly what Jesus was teaching, when we wait for people to be kind to us first, some people get left out. But when we choose to reach out first, we can build bridges that wouldn't exist otherwise. That's the difference between easy love and challenging love.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Being nice to people who are nice to us is normal and good, but it's just the starting point. Even people who don't know God do that naturally. What makes God's love special is that it reaches beyond what's easy or fair or comfortable.

This doesn't mean we have to let people hurt us or that we can't have boundaries. But it does mean we get to choose challenging love sometimes, being kind even when someone isn't kind back, helping even when we won't get helped in return.

The amazing result? When we love like this, we show people what God's love is really like. We help build the kind of community where everyone belongs, not just the people who are easy to love.

This Week's Challenge

Look for one person this week who might not expect kindness from you, maybe someone who's been mean, or someone who gets ignored, or someone who doesn't have much to give back. Find one small way to show them challenging love. It could be as simple as including them in a conversation or helping them with something.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for loving us even when we don't deserve it. Help us be brave enough to love like you do, beyond what's easy, beyond what's fair. Show us who needs challenging love this week, and give us hearts big enough to reach out first. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that Jesus wants us to be kind to everyone, even people who are mean to us, because that's how God loves.

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 loving mean people to sharing toys with someone who doesn't share back, then ask "How does that make you feel?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or being kind to others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "If I Were a Butterfly," or "God's Love is So Wonderful." Use movements: arms wide open during "love" lyrics, pointing to friends during "others" lyrics, hands on heart during "Jesus" lyrics.

Great singing, everyone! I love how you used your hands to show God's big love. Now let's sit in our story circle because I have an amazing story about Jesus and love to tell you. Come sit in our horseshoe so everyone can see!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound gentle when talking about God's love, sound confused when talking about the crowd's reaction.

Today we're going to meet Jesus when he was teaching a great big crowd of people about love!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Jesus had been up on a mountain praying and choosing special helpers. But when he came down, wow! There were hundreds and hundreds of people waiting for him in a big open area.

[Spread arms wide and look amazed]

Can you imagine that many people? Kids and moms and dads and grandparents, all crowded together, all wanting to hear what Jesus would say. They had heard he was the most wonderful teacher ever!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak warmly]

Jesus looked at all those faces and his heart was full of love for them. He wanted to teach them something very important about how God loves people.

[Move to center, speak clearly]

So Jesus began to teach them. But what he said was very surprising! He said, "Love your enemies. Be good to people who are mean to you."

[Look confused and scratch head]

The people in the crowd probably looked very confused! Love your enemies? Be good to mean people? That doesn't sound like what most teachers would say!

Luke 6:32 (NIV)

If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what Jesus was saying? He was saying that it's easy to love people who love you back! Even people who don't know God do that. Your friends are nice to you, so you're nice to them. That makes sense!

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

But Jesus wanted his friends to love in a special way. He wanted them to love like God loves. And God loves everyone, even people who are not nice to him!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

God loves people who say mean things. God loves people who ignore him. God loves people who make bad choices. God's love never stops, even when people are not loving back.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Jesus told the people, "If you want to be like God, you need to love like God loves. Be kind to people who aren't kind to you. Help people who don't help you back."

[Speak with excitement]

This was a brand new idea! No one had ever heard a teacher say anything like this before. But Jesus knew that when people love this way, something beautiful happens!

[Pause dramatically]

When we choose to be kind to someone who's mean to us, we show them what God's love looks like. When we share with someone who doesn't share back, we show them God's big heart!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at home or at school, someone might not be very nice to you. They might take your toy without asking, or say something that hurts your feelings, or not include you in their game.

[Move closer to the children]

When that happens, you can choose to be kind anyway. You can choose to share, or say something nice, or include them in your game. That's how you love like Jesus loves!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

It's not always easy, but God will help you. And when you love this way, you help people learn what God's love feels like. You show them that God's love is bigger and better than any other love!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Everyone stand up and find a friend to talk with! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about for one minute. There are no wrong answers, just tell your friend 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 feel when someone is mean to you?
 2. What does it mean to love someone who isn't nice to you?
 3. Who in the story loved people even when they weren't nice back?
 4. What would you do if someone took your toy without asking?
 5. How does God feel about people who are mean to him?
 6. Why did Jesus want people to be kind to mean people?
 7. What happens when we choose to be kind to someone who's mean?
 8. Can you think of someone at school who might need extra kindness?
 9. How can we show God's love to someone who's not nice to us?
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10. What would happen if everyone chose to be kind to mean people?

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

12. What can we do when it's hard to be kind?

13. How does God help us love people who are mean?

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

15. Who can you be extra kind to this week?

16. What makes God's love different from regular love?

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

18. What's the hardest part about loving everyone?

19. How can we remember to be kind even when someone is mean?

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

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about loving others or God's love. Suggestions: "Love, Love, Love," "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," or "I've Got the Joy." Include movements: hug yourself during "love" lyrics, point outward during "others" lyrics, march in place during upbeat sections.

Beautiful singing! I can see God's love in your faces. Now let's sit quietly for our prayer time. Sit criss-cross applesauce and fold your hands.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for loving us so much, even when we make mistakes...

[Pause]

Help us to be kind to everyone, even people who are sometimes mean to us. Give us brave hearts like Jesus had...

[Pause]

Help us remember that when we choose kindness, we show people what your love looks like. Thank you for helping us love like you do. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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

Remember, God wants us to love everyone, even people who aren't always nice. You can ask God to help you this week! Have a wonderful week showing God's love to everyone you meet.
