

Loving Difficult People

Volume 7

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Loving Difficult People

Volume 7

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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

Moving On

When Rejection Hurts, What do we do when people refuse Jesus?

Luke 9:51-56

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 9:51-56 (NIV)

51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went to another village.

Context

This encounter occurs as Jesus makes his final journey to Jerusalem, where he knows he will die. The narrator emphasizes Jesus's resolve, he "resolutely set out." This isn't a casual travel story; it's Jesus moving toward the cross with determination. The Samaritans' rejection is particularly stinging because it's based on his destination, they won't help him because he's going to worship in Jerusalem rather than on their mountain.

James and John's response reveals something crucial: they assume rejection warrants destruction. They even have biblical precedent, Elijah called down fire to consume soldiers who opposed him. Their question isn't whether to destroy, but whether Jesus wants them to. The shock comes in Jesus's rebuke.

He doesn't explain why destruction is wrong; he simply makes clear that this impulse itself needs correction.

The Big Idea

When people reject Jesus or his followers, the appropriate response is to move on to new opportunities, not to seek their destruction or punishment.

This challenges our natural instinct for retaliation when we're rejected, especially when we believe our cause is righteous. Jesus's rebuke suggests that the impulse to destroy rejectors, even when we have the power to do so, reflects a spirit contrary to his mission. The silence around his reasoning emphasizes that non-destruction is simply the Jesus way, regardless of our feelings about justice or precedent.

Theological Core

- **Rejection without retaliation.** Even legitimate rejection of Jesus's message doesn't justify destructive responses toward those who reject.
 - **Moving forward over punishment.** Jesus's pattern is redirection of energy toward new opportunities rather than dwelling on those who refuse.
 - **Rebuke of destructive impulses.** The desire to punish rejectors is itself something that needs correction, not validation or theological justification.
 - **Contrast with human precedent.** Even biblical examples of divine judgment (like Elijah's fire) don't automatically translate into appropriate responses for Jesus's followers.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Rejection of our beliefs or values doesn't automatically justify aggressive responses toward rejectors
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- The impulse to "destroy" those who oppose us needs examination and often rebuke
- Sometimes the wisest response to rejection is redirecting energy toward more receptive opportunities
- Discerning when to persist versus when to "move to another village" requires wisdom and spiritual sensitivity

Grades 4, 6

- When people are mean to us or reject us, we don't get to be mean back
- Sometimes the best choice is to find different people to spend time with
- Being angry about unfair treatment is normal, but hurting others because we're hurt is wrong
- We can feel disappointed and still choose to be kind

Grades 1, 3

- Jesus wants us to be kind even when others aren't kind to us
- When someone says "no" to playing or being friends, we can find someone else to play with
- Jesus helps us choose good responses when our feelings are hurt

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying "moving on."** This isn't about avoiding all conflict or never addressing injustice. Some situations require persistence and advocacy. The point is about destructive versus constructive responses.
- **Ignoring legitimate anger.** The passage doesn't condemn feeling upset about rejection. It addresses the impulse to harm rejectors. Validate the pain while redirecting the response.
- **Creating blanket rules.** "Always walk away" isn't the message. Jesus himself didn't always move on immediately from opposition. The key is avoiding destructive retaliation.

- **Dismissing power dynamics.** This passage addresses those who have power to harm (like the disciples with supernatural authority). It's not about victims accepting abuse but about powerful people choosing restraint.
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Handling Hard Questions

"But what about standing up for yourself? Sometimes people will just walk all over you."

That's a great question that shows you're thinking carefully about this. Jesus isn't teaching us to be doormats or to never address problems. He's addressing the specific impulse to destroy or harm people who reject us. There's a difference between setting boundaries, advocating for justice, and seeking someone's destruction. Notice that Jesus's response wasn't to accept mistreatment, he simply redirected his mission to people who would receive it. Sometimes the most powerful response to rejection is not needing to punish the rejector.

"What about when someone rejects the gospel? Are we supposed to just give up on them forever?"

This passage is about immediate response to rejection, not lifetime strategy. Jesus himself returned to places that initially rejected him. The key insight is that rejection doesn't justify destructive responses. We can continue to love and pray for people who reject our message without needing to force acceptance or punish refusal. Moving to "another village" might mean taking a break from direct evangelism while maintaining relationship, or it might mean focusing energy on more receptive people while remaining open to future opportunities.

"How do you know when to 'move on' versus when to keep trying?"

That's exactly the right question and there isn't a simple formula. What this passage makes clear is what not to do, don't respond to rejection with attempts to harm or destroy. Beyond that, we need wisdom about timing, relationship, and God's leading. Sometimes persistence is faithful; sometimes it becomes harassment. Sometimes moving on is wisdom; sometimes it's giving up too easily. The key is ensuring our motives aren't about punishing rejectors but about genuinely seeking their good and following God's direction.

The One Thing to Remember

Rejection of our message never justifies destructive responses toward the rejector, even when we have the power to harm and feel it would be justified.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between righteous anger at rejection and Jesus's call to non-destructive responses. Help them discover when "moving on" is wisdom versus avoidance, and when their impulses toward retaliation need rebuke rather than justification.

The Tension to Frame

When is rejection grounds for "moving on," and when does it call for persisting through opposition? How do we respond to rejection without destroying rejectors?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of rejection while challenging destructive responses
 - Honor the complexity of discerning when to persist versus redirect
 - Let students wrestle with the ambiguity rather than providing simple formulas
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You post something you care deeply about on social media, maybe about your faith, maybe about a cause that matters to you, maybe just sharing something meaningful. And the comments start rolling in. Not just disagreement, but mockery. Not just "I see it differently" but "you're an idiot for believing that." People sharing it to make fun of you. Your notifications become a stream of rejection and ridicule.

Here's the thing, you have power in that moment. You could screenshot their profiles and blast them to your followers. You could dig into their post history and find embarrassing things to share. You could rally your friends to flood their comments with attacks. You have the tools to hurt them back, and part of you thinks they deserve it. They started it, right?

Today we're looking at Jesus's disciples in a similar moment, except their power to destroy was literal, not just digital. They've been rejected, they're angry, they have supernatural authority to call down fire from heaven, and they think it would be justified. But Jesus's response isn't what they expect.

As we read this, I want you to notice two things: first, how quickly the disciples move from rejection to destruction. Second, Jesus's reaction, not to their anger about being rejected, but to their solution for handling it.

Open your Bibles to Luke 9:51-56 and read it silently first.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students. This passage is short but dense with implications. Let them sit with the shock of Jesus's rebuke. Some may finish quickly, encourage them to read it again and think about the disciples' mindset.

As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly happened that triggered the disciples' anger?
 - Why did James and John think calling down fire was a reasonable suggestion?
 - What's surprising about Jesus's response to their question?
 - How would you have felt if you were one of the disciples in this moment?
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Luke 9:51-56 (NIV)

51 As the time approached for him to be taken up to heaven, Jesus resolutely set out for Jerusalem. 52 And he sent messengers on ahead, who went into a Samaritan village to get things ready for him; 53 but the people there did not welcome him, because he was heading for Jerusalem. 54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to

call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them. 56 And they went to another village.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Choose confident readers who can bring drama to this moment. The disciples' question should sound indignant, Jesus's rebuke should feel sharp and final.

Reader 1: Verses 51-53 (Setting up Jesus's journey and the Samaritan rejection) **Reader 2:** Verse 54 (James and John's destructive suggestion) **Reader 3:** Verses 55-56 (Jesus's rebuke and their response)

Listen for the emotion in this story. This isn't a calm theological discussion, there's rejection, anger, shock, and tension.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about Jesus's reaction?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 questions that you're genuinely curious about from this passage. Not questions you think I want to hear, but things you're actually wondering about. For example: "Why were the disciples so quick to suggest destruction?" or "What made Jesus so angry about their suggestion?" You have three minutes, what are you really curious about?

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Resist the urge to lecture. Guide discovery through follow-up questions.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around rejection, retaliation, Jesus's response, and practical application. Start with questions most students will connect

with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see in the text about why the Samaritans rejected Jesus?"
 - "Why do you think the disciples thought destruction was a reasonable response to rejection?"
 - "What does it reveal about Jesus that he rebuked the disciples rather than the Samaritans?"
 - "Where do you see the pattern of 'rejection leads to destruction impulse' in our world today?"
 - "How do you decide when to 'move to another village' versus when to persist through rejection?"
 - "What's the difference between setting boundaries and seeking destruction?"
 - "If Jesus had said yes to their request, how would that have changed everything about his mission?"
 - "Why does this story matter for us when we face rejection today?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? The disciples see rejection and immediately jump to destruction. They don't even question whether that's appropriate, they just ask for permission. But Jesus's response suggests that this impulse itself is the problem. He doesn't explain why destruction is wrong; he rebukes the impulse. It's like he's saying, "That's not who we are. That's not how we respond." Sometimes the most Christ-like response to rejection is simply moving our energy to where it's welcomed.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same pattern playing out? Someone rejects your faith, your values, your friendship, your ideas, and suddenly you want them to pay for it. Maybe not with literal fire from heaven, but with social destruction, reputation damage, exclusion, or revenge.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When classmates mock your faith and you want to find ways to hurt their social standing
 - When family members dismiss your beliefs and you stop speaking to them as punishment
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- When friends reject your invitation to church and you write them off or gossip about their choices
- When someone unfriends or blocks you online and you screenshot their posts to mock them
- When people oppose causes you care about and you want to "cancel" or destroy their opportunities
- When romantic interests reject you and you spread rumors or try to turn others against them

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to provide answers. Acknowledge that some situations are more complex than others. Help them think about motives and outcomes rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose to 'move to another village' instead of seeking revenge?"
- "What would help you recognize when your anger at rejection is turning into destructive impulses?"
- "How do you discern when rejection means 'redirect your energy' versus 'this relationship needs work'?"
- "What's the difference between protecting yourself from harmful people and punishing people for rejecting you?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: rejection is going to happen. People are going to say no to your faith, your values, your friendship, your ideas. And in those moments, you'll have power to respond destructively, social media, gossip, exclusion, whatever. Jesus's rebuke to his disciples is a rebuke to us: that impulse to destroy rejectors isn't righteous anger, it's something that needs correction.

This week, pay attention to your first impulse when someone rejects something important to you. Notice the urge to hurt them back, to make them pay, to destroy their reputation or opportunities. In those moments, remember Jesus turning to rebuke that impulse. Ask yourself: "Is this about loving them or punishing them? Am I seeking their good or their destruction?"

You've wrestled with hard questions today and I'm impressed by your honesty about how difficult this is in practice. Keep wrestling. The questions don't have simple answers, but Jesus's model is clear: rejection doesn't justify destruction. Sometimes the most powerful response is simply moving your energy to people who will receive it.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that being rejected or hurt by others doesn't give us the right to hurt them back, even when we're angry and even when we think they deserve it.

If Kids Ask "But what if they're being really mean and unfair?"

Say: "It's normal to feel angry when people are unfair to us. But Jesus teaches us that our hurt feelings don't give us permission to hurt others. We can be sad and angry and still choose to be kind."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been really excited to invite someone to something, your birthday party, a sleepover, a fun event, and they said no. Not just "I can't come" but more like "That sounds boring" or "Why would I want to do that?" Keep your hands up if their rejection made you feel angry, hurt, or embarrassed.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if in that moment, part of you wanted to get them back somehow. Maybe not invite them to something else, or say something mean about them to other friends, or find a way to make them feel as bad as they made you feel. It's okay to be honest, this is a normal feeling.

What makes this tricky is that our feelings make sense. When someone rejects us or is mean to us, it hurts. And when we're hurt, our brain sometimes thinks, "Well, they deserve to be hurt back!" It feels fair. It feels like justice. But there's this voice in our heart that knows hurting others isn't really what we want to do.

This reminds me of Frozen 2, when Elsa discovers that her grandfather destroyed the Northuldra people's forest because he was afraid of their magic. The spirits were so angry they trapped everyone in the forest for decades. The Northuldra had every reason to want revenge when they learned the truth. But instead of destroying, they chose to help Elsa and Anna fix what was broken.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do with our hurt feelings when people reject us or treat us badly. Do we hurt them back? Do we try to get revenge? Or is there another way to handle the situation?

Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus's best friends wanted to hurt people who rejected Jesus. They had good reasons to be angry, and they had the power to really hurt these people. But Jesus's response was surprising. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will likely relate strongly to rejection scenarios. Some may share specific stories. Acknowledge briefly and keep momentum moving toward the Bible story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Jesus was on a very important journey. He was walking toward Jerusalem, where he knew something difficult was going to happen to him. But he was determined to go because it was part of God's plan.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

As Jesus and his disciples traveled, they needed places to stay overnight and get food. So Jesus sent some of his friends ahead to a Samaritan village to ask if they could stay there. The disciples knocked on doors, explained who they were, and asked for help.

[Change to a disappointed, frustrated voice]

But the people in the village said, "No way. We don't want Jesus here. We don't like where he's going. He can't stay in our village." They slammed their doors shut. They refused to help. They rejected Jesus before they even met him, just because they didn't like his plan to go to Jerusalem.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, sound angry and indignant]

When Jesus's friends James and John heard what happened, they were furious. "This is so unfair!" they thought. "Jesus is the most loving, kind, amazing person in the world, and these people won't even give him a chance! They're being mean and unfair!" Their anger felt completely justified.

[Move to center, speak with confident authority]

Now here's something important to know: James and John had special power from God. They could do miracles. They could call down fire from heaven if they wanted to. So they marched up to Jesus with a plan. "Lord," they said, "do you want us to call fire down from heaven and destroy this whole village? We can do it! They deserve it for rejecting you!"

[Move to side, sound shocked and firm]

But Jesus turned around and looked at James and John with surprise and disappointment. He didn't say, "Good idea!" He didn't say, "Well, they started it." Instead, he rebuked them. That means he corrected them firmly, like when your parents say, "No, that's not okay" about something you've done.

Luke 9:54-55 (NIV)

54 When the disciples James and John saw this, they asked, "Lord, do you want us to call fire down from heaven to destroy them?" 55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think James and John were surprised by Jesus's reaction? They probably thought Jesus would be proud of them for wanting to defend him! They thought their anger was right and their plan made sense. But Jesus saw something different.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Jesus understood that just because someone rejects you or treats you badly doesn't mean you get to hurt them back. Even when you have the power to hurt them. Even when they "deserve" it. Even when your feelings are hurt and your anger feels justified.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

So what did Jesus do instead of destroying the village? Something much simpler and much wiser. He and his disciples simply went to a different village. They didn't spend time being angry or planning revenge. They didn't try to force the Samaritans to change their minds. They just moved on to people who would welcome them.

Luke 9:56 (NIV)

56 And they went to another village.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

What a different way to handle rejection! Instead of trying to hurt the people who hurt them, Jesus simply found different people to spend time with. Instead of getting stuck in anger and revenge, he focused his energy on people who would appreciate his love.

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what? In that other village, Jesus was able to help people, teach people, and show them God's love. If he had spent his time destroying the first village, he never would have had those beautiful opportunities in the second village.

[Pause dramatically]

Jesus learned that sometimes when people say no to us, or reject us, or are mean to us, the best response isn't to hurt them back. The best response is to find people who will say yes to our friendship and kindness.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, people will reject us too. Kids at school might not want to be our friends. Family members might not understand things that are important to us. People might say mean things about our faith or our values. It hurts. It's not fair. And it's normal to feel angry.

[Move closer to the children]

But Jesus teaches us that when people hurt us, we don't get to hurt them back. Even when we're really angry. Even when they "started it." Even when it feels unfair. We can choose to find different people to be with instead.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

And here's the amazing thing: when we choose kindness instead of revenge, when we "go to another village" instead of destroying the one that rejected us, we often find wonderful new friendships and opportunities we never would have discovered otherwise. That's the Jesus way of handling rejection.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Angry Feelings

Imagine your best friend didn't invite you to their birthday party, but they invited other kids from your class. You found out when you saw the photos on social media. How do you think you would feel, and what thoughts might go through your head about what to do?

Listen For: "Hurt," "angry," "left out," "want to hurt them back", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Your heart is trying to protect you from pain."

Question 2: The Revenge Ideas

James and John thought calling down fire was a good idea because they had the power to do it and the people "deserved it." What are some ways kids your age might want to "get back at" someone who rejected or hurt them? What would those look like at school or with friends?

If They Say: "Spread rumors," "exclude them," "be mean back", respond "Those are exactly the kinds of things our hurt feelings tell us to do. What did Jesus think about those impulses?"

Question 3: The Jesus Way

Jesus chose to "go to another village" instead of destroying the one that rejected him. What would the kid version of "going to another village" look like? How could you handle rejection by finding new opportunities instead of seeking revenge?

Connect: "This is exactly what made Jesus's choice so different from what our feelings tell us to do."

Question 4: The Amazing Result

What do you think might have happened if Jesus had let James and John destroy the Samaritan village? How would that have changed the story? And what good things happened because they chose to move

on to different people instead?

If They Say: "People would be scared of Jesus," "It wouldn't be loving", affirm "You're understanding why Jesus's way is better for everyone, even when it's harder."

You've all given such thoughtful answers about how hard this is and how much sense our hurt feelings make. The good news is that Jesus understands those feelings but shows us there's a better way than hurting people back. Now let's experience what that looks like.

4. Activity: Village to Village (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity helps kids physically experience the choice between seeking revenge when rejected and redirecting energy toward new opportunities. Success looks like kids discovering that moving on to receptive people creates better outcomes than trying to force or punish rejecting people.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Village to Village." Half of you will be travelers with good news to share, and half will be villagers. Travelers, your job is to visit villagers and share your good news, you can make up what it is. Villagers, your job is to either welcome travelers warmly or reject them completely.

Here's the challenge: when a villager rejects you, you have two choices. Choice one: you can stay and try to convince them, argue with them, or get other travelers to help you pressure them. Choice two: you can simply move on to a different villager and share your good news with someone who wants to hear it.

The twist is this: only villagers who are genuinely welcomed (not pressured or forced) can become new travelers to help spread good news. If you spend your time fighting rejection, you miss the chance to find people who will become your partners.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Jesus's choice, he could have forced the Samaritans to accept him, but instead he moved on to people who would receive his love willingly.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start by having about half the kids be rejecting villagers and half be welcoming villagers. Watch as travelers approach, some will likely get stuck trying to convince rejecting villagers, while others will quickly move on to find welcoming ones.

As travelers get stuck with rejecting villagers, coach them: "I notice you've been trying to convince this villager for a while. I wonder if there are others who might be excited to hear your good news." Don't give the answer directly, let them discover the principle.

When travelers find welcoming villagers, celebrate the connection: "Look how excited this villager is to hear from you! This villager, you can now become a traveler too and help share good news with others!"

As more welcoming villagers become travelers, the group of people sharing good news grows rapidly. Meanwhile, travelers who stayed arguing with rejecting villagers have made no progress and gained no new partners.

After about 3 minutes, pause and have everyone notice the difference: "Look how many travelers we have now! And look, these villagers are still rejecting, but instead of fighting them, we found amazing partners elsewhere."

Watch For: The moment when kids realize that engaging receptive people multiplies their impact while arguing with rejecting people wastes energy and creates no positive change.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you spent time trying to convince rejecting villagers versus when you moved on to find welcoming ones? Which approach led to more people hearing good news and becoming part of the mission? This is exactly what Jesus discovered, sometimes the most loving thing is to give our energy to people who want to receive it rather than fighting those who don't.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when people reject us or are mean to us, we don't get the right to be mean back, even when our feelings are hurt and even when they "deserve it." Jesus shows us that there's a better way, we can choose to find different people who will welcome our friendship and kindness.

This doesn't mean our hurt feelings are wrong or that we should pretend rejection doesn't hurt. It means that we don't let our hurt feelings turn into hurting others. We can be sad and disappointed and still choose to be kind.

The amazing thing is that when we choose Jesus's way of "going to another village," we often discover wonderful friendships and opportunities that we never would have found if we'd stayed focused on the people who rejected us.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone at school, at home, or anywhere else rejects you or is mean to you, try the "go to another village" approach. Instead of trying to get them back or force them to change, look for different people who would appreciate your kindness and friendship. See what happens when you give your energy to people who welcome it.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us a better way to handle rejection and hurt feelings. When people are mean to us or reject us, help us remember your example. Help us choose kindness instead of revenge, and help us find good friends who will welcome our love. Give us brave hearts to "go to another village" when we need to. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that Jesus wants us to be kind even when other people aren't kind to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle
 - **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher
-

- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other
- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines
- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare being rejected to someone saying "I don't want to play with you," then ask "What does Jesus want us to do when that happens?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness or being like Jesus. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "This Little Light of Mine." Use movements: point to others during "be kind," hold hands during "Jesus loves me," make light motions during "little light."

Great singing! Now come sit in our story circle. We're going to hear about a time when Jesus taught his friends how to be kind even when other people weren't kind to them. This is going to be exciting!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound disappointed when villagers reject Jesus, sound angry when disciples want revenge, sound firm when Jesus corrects them.

Today we're going to meet Jesus and his best friends, who were called disciples!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Jesus was walking to a big city called Jerusalem. He needed to find a place to sleep and get some food. So he sent his friends ahead to ask people in a village, "Can Jesus stay with you tonight?"

[Change to a mean, rejecting voice]

But the people in the village said, "No! We don't want Jesus here! Go away!" They slammed their doors shut. They were mean and said no to Jesus before they even met him!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, sound upset and angry]

Jesus's friends James and John were so angry! They said, "That's not fair! Jesus is wonderful and kind, and these people are being mean to him! We should do something about it!"

[Move to center, speak with bold voice]

James and John had special power from God. They could do amazing things! So they marched up to Jesus and said, "Jesus, do you want us to make fire come down from the sky and destroy that whole village? We can do it! They're being mean to you!"

[Move to side, sound surprised and firm]

But Jesus turned around and looked at his friends. He wasn't happy with their idea at all! Jesus said, "No! That's not what we do!"

Luke 9:55 (NIV)

55 But Jesus turned and rebuked them.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think James and John were surprised? They thought Jesus would say, "Yes! Good idea!" But Jesus said no. He taught them that we don't hurt people even when they're mean to us first.

[Move to center, speak with gentle voice]

Jesus said, "When people are mean to us, we don't get to be mean back. Even when we're angry. Even when it's not fair. We choose to be kind anyway."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

So what did Jesus do instead? Did he make fire come down? Did he hurt the mean people? No! He did something much better. Jesus and his friends simply walked to a different village.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

In the new village, the people said, "Yes! We want Jesus to stay with us! We're so happy to see him!" And Jesus was able to help them and show them God's love.

[Speak with excitement]

What a smart idea! Instead of fighting with mean people, Jesus found kind people to spend time with. Instead of being angry and mean, he shared love and kindness with people who wanted it!

[Pause dramatically]

Jesus taught his friends that day that being mean back to mean people is not the right choice. The right choice is to keep being kind and find people who will be kind back.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes kids at school or in our neighborhood might be mean to us. They might say, "I don't want to play with you!" or "Go away!" It makes us feel sad and angry. And sometimes we want to be mean right back to them.

[Move closer to the children]

But Jesus teaches us that when someone is mean to us, we can choose to be kind anyway. We can find different friends who want to play with us and be nice to us. We can "go to a different village" just like Jesus did!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

And you know what? When we choose to be kind even when others are mean, we often find wonderful new friends and have amazing adventures that we never would have had if we stayed angry at the mean people. That's what Jesus wants for us!

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 a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think Jesus felt when the village people said no to him?
2. What would you do if someone said "I don't want to play with you"?
3. Why do you think James and John wanted to hurt the mean people?
4. What did Jesus think about their idea to make fire come down?
5. What happened when Jesus went to a different village?
6. Why was Jesus's idea better than James and John's idea?
7. When has someone been mean to you at school or home?
8. How does it feel when someone rejects you or says go away?
9. What does Jesus want us to do when people are mean to us?
10. Who are some people who are always kind to you?
11. How can you "go to another village" when kids are mean to you?
12. What good things happen when we choose to be kind?
13. How does Jesus help us when our feelings are hurt?
14. What would you tell a friend who wanted to be mean back to someone?
15. Why is it hard sometimes to be kind when others are mean?

16. What makes you happy about Jesus's way of handling mean people?

17. How can we remember to be kind like Jesus?

18. What would happen if everyone chose to be kind instead of mean?

19. Who can you be extra kind to this week?

20. How does God help us be kind even when it's hard?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about kindness or following Jesus. Suggestions: "Be Kind," "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam," or "Love One Another." Include movements: hug yourself during "love," point to others during "be kind," make sunshine motions during "sunbeam."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Remember to use quiet voices and still bodies.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear Jesus, thank you for teaching us to be kind even when others are mean to us.

[Pause]

When someone at school or home is mean to us, help us remember your example. Help us choose to be kind instead of being mean back.

[Pause]

Help us find good friends who want to be kind to us, just like you found people who welcomed you in the other village.

[Pause]

Thank you for always being kind to us and for helping us be kind to others. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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

Remember, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose to be kind like Jesus and find people who want to be your friend. Have a wonderful week being kind to everyone!

Breaking Cycles

Beyond Fairness, How do we respond when resisting evil might actually enable it?

Matthew 5:38-42

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

Matthew 5:38-48 (NIV)

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' **39** But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. **40** And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. **42** Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' **44** But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, **45** that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. **46** If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? **47** And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? **48** Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

Context

This teaching appears in the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus systematically reframes the moral foundation of the Kingdom of Heaven. He's speaking to Jewish listeners who understand the "eye for eye" principle as divine law, a significant advance from cycles of escalating revenge that had previously governed human relationships. The original law represented proportional justice: punishment should match the crime, not exceed it.

Jesus introduces this radical teaching by acknowledging the familiar legal principle, then completely transforming it. He's not critiquing the law itself but revealing that Kingdom ethics transcend even proportional justice. The specific examples he gives, being slapped, sued, forced into labor, were common experiences in first-century Palestine under Roman occupation, making his teaching immediately relevant and startling.

The Big Idea

Jesus replaces the principle of proportional response with disproportionate grace that breaks cycles of retaliation by exceeding demands rather than matching them.

This isn't passive acceptance of abuse but active transformation of conflict through unexpected generosity. The tension lies in distinguishing between this transformative approach and enabling injustice. Each scenario demonstrates creative excess: offering more than demanded disrupts the power dynamic and creates space for unexpected outcomes.

Theological Core

- **Proportional versus Disproportionate Response.** "Eye for eye" represented moral progress, limiting retaliation to match the offense. Jesus introduces something greater: disproportionate grace that exceeds the offense entirely.
 - **Cycle-Breaking Through Excess.** Each example shows how exceeding demands, rather than matching or resisting them, has the power to transform the dynamic and break patterns of escalation.
 - **Superseding Justice with Mercy.** Jesus doesn't eliminate justice but reveals that Kingdom ethics transcend even fair treatment, moving toward transformative generosity that reflects God's character.
 - **Creative Non-Resistance.** This teaching offers a third way between violent resistance and passive acceptance: active response that subverts oppression through unexpected generosity and
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dignity.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Disproportionate grace can transform conflicts by disrupting patterns of retaliation and creating unexpected outcomes
 - There's a difference between transformative non-resistance and passive enabling of injustice, wisdom is required to discern appropriate responses
 - Jesus' examples show creative ways to maintain dignity while exceeding demands, offering a third way beyond fight or flight
 - Kingdom ethics transcend even fairness, calling us to reflect God's generous character in our responses to difficulty
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Grades 4, 6

- Responding with extra kindness instead of getting even can surprise people and change the whole situation
 - When someone is mean, we have choices: be mean back, do nothing, or do something surprisingly kind
 - Jesus teaches us to break bad patterns by doing more good than people expect
 - Sometimes our feelings want revenge, but choosing kindness anyway can lead to better results for everyone
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Grades 1, 3

- Jesus wants us to be extra kind, even when people are not kind to us
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- God helps us choose kindness instead of being mean back
 - Being extra kind can make bad situations turn into good ones
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Promoting Doormat Theology.** This passage isn't about accepting abuse or injustice passively. Emphasize the active, creative nature of Jesus' examples, these responses maintain dignity while transforming dynamics through unexpected generosity.
 - **Ignoring Power Dynamics.** Jesus' examples assume the person has agency to respond creatively. In situations of severe abuse or oppression, safety and justice may require different responses. Honor the complexity of real-world applications.
 - **Missing the Transformation Goal.** This isn't about personal sacrifice for its own sake but about responses that have the power to break cycles and create possibilities for relationship restoration and justice.
 - **Oversimplifying Context.** The specific examples Jesus gives were culturally loaded, a right-cheek slap was an insult, Roman soldiers could compel civilians into service, legal systems often favored the powerful. Understanding context helps us apply principles appropriately today.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Does this mean we should let bullies hurt us and never stand up for ourselves?"

Jesus isn't teaching passive acceptance of abuse. Notice that each example involves creative response that maintains dignity while exceeding demands. Turning the other cheek forces someone to hit you as an equal rather than backhand you as inferior. Going two miles with a Roman soldier put them in violation of their own rules. These are strategies that subvert oppression, not enable it. The goal is transformation, not self-destruction. Sometimes protecting yourself or others is the loving response.

"How do we know when generosity enables bad behavior versus transforms it?"

This requires wisdom and discernment. Jesus' examples all maintain the responder's dignity and agency while creating unexpected situations that reveal character and create possibilities. Enabling typically removes consequences and reduces agency. Transformative response creates new possibilities while maintaining boundaries. Consider: Does your response increase or decrease the other person's capacity for growth? Does it protect or endanger vulnerable people? The goal is always redemption and justice, not personal martyrdom.

"Isn't this teaching unrealistic in the face of real evil and violence?"

Jesus lived this teaching in the face of ultimate evil, crucifixion by an oppressive empire. His response transformed the meaning of the cross from a symbol of defeat into a symbol of victory over death and evil. This doesn't mean every situation calls for the same response, but it does mean that creative, generous responses have power that violence and retaliation lack. Sometimes the most realistic response to evil is the one that breaks the cycle and creates new possibilities. History shows us examples of this power in movements led by people like Gandhi, King, and others who followed Jesus' pattern.

The One Thing to Remember

Jesus calls us beyond fairness to generosity that has the power to transform conflicts by breaking cycles of retaliation, but this requires wisdom to distinguish between enabling harm and creating transformation.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between preventing injustice and breaking cycles through disproportionate grace. Help them discover how Jesus' radical teaching offers a third way beyond retaliation or passive acceptance.

The Tension to Frame

Does responding with generosity to wrongdoing enable evil, or does it have the power to transform it? How do we discern the difference?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their instincts for justice and fairness, these are good instincts that Jesus builds upon rather than dismisses
 - Honor the complexity of real-world situations where power dynamics, safety, and justice concerns make simple applications difficult
 - Let students wrestle with scenarios rather than providing quick answers, the tension itself is part of the learning
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you're walking through the hallway and someone deliberately bumps into you hard enough that you drop your books. Everyone around sees it happen. It's clearly intentional, clearly disrespectful. Your immediate instinct is probably to bump them back, maybe harder, or at least say something cutting to put them in their place. That feels like justice, right? They dish it out, they should be able to take it.

Or maybe you're in a group project and one person has been coasting, letting everyone else do the work. The fair response seems obvious: let them fail, make sure they get the grade they deserve based on their effort. Why should you cover for their laziness? They made their choice; they should live with the consequences.

Today we're looking at someone who faced similar situations, public humiliation, legal exploitation, forced labor, except his response was so unexpected, so radical, that it still makes people uncomfortable 2,000 years later. Jesus didn't just reject revenge; he advocated for something that sounds almost crazy to our sense of fairness.

As we read, pay attention to the pattern in his examples. Notice what he's asking people to do instead of getting even, and ask yourself: Is this transformative wisdom or dangerous naivety? Can generosity really have more power than proportional response?

Turn to Matthew 5:38-42. Read silently first, and let the strangeness of these commands sink in.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Some students will finish quickly, that's fine, let them sit with the text. Watch for confused or skeptical expressions; these are good responses to lean into during discussion. The goal is to let the radical nature of these commands create productive discomfort.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific scenarios does Jesus address, and why might he have chosen these examples?
 - What motivates people to want proportional response ("eye for eye"), and is that motivation wrong?
 - What's surprising or difficult about each of Jesus' alternative responses?
 - How would you feel if someone responded to your wrongdoing the way Jesus describes?
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Matthew 5:38-48 (NIV)

38 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' 39 But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also. 40 And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well. 41 If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. 42 Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you.

43 "You have heard that it was said, 'Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.' 44 But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, 45 that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? 47 And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? 48 Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect."

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. These verses benefit from being heard aloud because the contrast between conventional wisdom and Jesus' teaching is more striking when voiced.

Reader 1: Verses 38-40 (the slapping and lawsuit examples) **Reader 2:** Verses 41-42 (the forced labor and requests examples) **Reader 3:** Verses 43-48 (the enemy love and perfection teaching)

Listen for the shock value in these commands. This isn't gentle advice; it's radical reframing of how conflict works.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for them to develop 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen for emerging themes. Help stuck groups by asking, "What bothers you most about these commands?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read. Not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about or struggling with. Maybe something bothers you about Jesus' teaching, or maybe you're wondering how it would actually work in specific situations. Good questions often start with "But what if..." or "How do you..." You have three minutes. Go.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive the discussion with THEIR questions. Your job is to facilitate discovery and probe deeper, not to lecture. Guide them toward insights rather than providing answers.

Collecting Questions: Write their questions on the board. Look for themes around justice, practicality, safety, and transformation. Start with questions that most students will connect with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that Jesus understands the appeal of 'eye for eye' justice?"
 - "Why might Jesus have chosen these specific examples, slapping, lawsuits, forced labor?"
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- "What's the difference between 'do not resist an evil person' and 'let evil people walk all over you'?"
- "How might turning the other cheek or going the second mile actually maintain dignity rather than lose it?"
- "When might proportional response be more loving than disproportionate generosity?"
- "What modern situations parallel the ones Jesus describes?"
- "What would happen if everyone in a conflict chose retaliation? What about if everyone chose Jesus' approach?"
- "How do we tell the difference between wisdom that seems foolish and actual foolishness?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening in each example? Jesus isn't just saying "be passive" or "let people hurt you." He's saying "exceed what they demand in ways they don't expect." Turning the other cheek, giving your coat too, walking the extra mile, these responses all maintain your dignity while disrupting the power dynamic. The person hurting you suddenly doesn't know what to do with your unexpected generosity. That confusion creates space for something new to happen.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. You face situations every week where someone treats you unfairly, disrespectfully, or demands something from you. Your instinct is usually either to hit back proportionally or to just take it. Jesus is suggesting a third option that sounds risky but might actually be more powerful.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When someone spreads rumors about you, the proportional response is spreading rumors back, but what would "exceeding" look like?
 - When parents or teachers make unreasonable demands, the options seem to be compliance or resistance, but what's the "second mile" response?
 - When friends take advantage of your generosity without reciprocating, fairness says establish boundaries, but when might exceeding those boundaries transform the relationship?
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- When someone posts something hurtful about you online, the tempting response is to fire back, but what would generous response look like?
- When you witness bullying or injustice, standing up seems right, but how might Jesus' approach work in situations of systemic oppression?
- When family conflicts escalate through tit-for-tat responses, how might someone break the cycle through unexpected generosity?

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations are complex and may require different responses. Help them think through the discernment process rather than providing universal answers.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone break a negative cycle by responding with unexpected kindness or generosity?"
- "What would help you discern when Jesus' approach would be transformative versus when it might enable harm?"
- "How do you tell the difference between wisdom that looks foolish and actual foolishness?"
- "What's the difference between the justice you want when someone wrongs you and the mercy you hope for when you wrong someone?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus isn't asking you to be a doormat or to enable injustice. He's showing you a third way, a response that maintains your dignity while having the power to transform conflicts through unexpected generosity. This isn't easy, and it requires wisdom to know when and how to apply it. But when it works, it can break cycles that retaliation can't touch.

This week, pay attention to your instincts when someone treats you unfairly. Notice the pull toward proportional response, it's natural and often justified. But also watch for opportunities to experiment with exceeding expectations in ways that might surprise both of you. Not every situation calls for this approach, but some situations might be transformed by it.

The questions you wrestled with today are worth continuing to wrestle with. Learning to discern when generosity transforms and when it enables is part of growing in wisdom. Keep thinking, keep questioning, and keep looking for ways to break cycles rather than perpetuate them.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that responding with more kindness than expected can change difficult situations and break patterns of meanness or conflict.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps being mean even after I'm extra nice?"

Say: "Jesus' way doesn't always work right away, and sometimes we need help from adults to stay safe. But it's still worth trying because it often surprises people and can change their hearts."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where someone was mean to you and you wanted to be mean right back. Keep them up, I want to see. Good, because that's a completely normal feeling. When someone pushes us, our first instinct is to push back. When someone says something hurtful, we want to say something hurtful back.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever been in a fight or argument where both people kept getting meaner and meaner until someone got in real trouble or someone got really hurt. Maybe it was with a sibling, or at school, or you watched it happen between other people. Those situations feel terrible, don't they?

Here's the thing: when someone is mean to us, part of us thinks "They deserve to get it back!" And you know what? That feeling makes sense. It seems fair. But another part of us knows that being mean back usually just makes everything worse. Have you ever noticed that? The fight gets bigger, people get angrier, and nobody feels good at the end.

This reminds me of the movie Frozen, where Anna and Elsa keep hurting each other more and more until everything is frozen and broken. Or in any movie where the characters get into a cycle where they keep trying to get revenge on each other until everything explodes. The pattern always makes things worse, not better.

The tricky part is figuring out how to break that pattern. How do you stop the cycle of meanness without just letting people walk all over you? Is there another option besides being mean back or doing nothing?

Today we're going to hear about the most surprising advice Jesus ever gave. He was talking to people who were facing bullies, unfair laws, and people who were mean to them. And his advice was so unusual, so unexpected, that it still surprises people today. Let's find out what he said.

What to Expect: Kids will likely share examples of escalating conflicts. Acknowledge these briefly, "Yes, that sounds frustrating" or "I can see why you felt angry", then keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Jesus was sitting on a hillside with a huge crowd of people gathered around him. These weren't wealthy, powerful people, they were ordinary folks who dealt with bullies, unfair treatment, and people who took advantage of them every single day.

Many of them lived under Roman rule, which meant soldiers could boss them around whenever they wanted. If a Roman soldier told you to carry his heavy pack for a mile, you had to do it, no choice. People also had to deal with others who sued them unfairly, trying to take their possessions through the courts. And of course, just like today, there were people who would insult them, embarrass them in front of others, or treat them with disrespect.

These people knew the old rule: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth." That meant if someone hurt you, you could hurt them back, but only as much as they hurt you. No more, no less. It was actually a pretty good rule because it kept people from going too far with revenge.

Imagine sitting in that crowd, thinking about all the people who had been mean to you, all the times you'd been treated unfairly. You're probably nodding along, thinking, "Yeah, eye for eye sounds right. Fair is fair."

And then Jesus said something that made everyone's jaw drop.

Jesus looked out at the crowd and said, "You've heard 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth,' but I'm telling you something completely different."

Everyone leaned in. What could be different about fairness? What could be better than getting even?

Then Jesus said, "Do not resist an evil person..."

Wait, what? Don't resist evil people? That didn't make any sense! Isn't that exactly what you should do, resist evil?

But Jesus wasn't finished. He was about to give them examples that were even more shocking.

Matthew 5:39 (NIV)

39 "If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

The people in the crowd looked at each other with wide eyes. If someone slaps your right cheek, that means they hit you as an insult, like they think you're beneath them. And Jesus said to offer them your other cheek too? That sounded crazy!

But Jesus wasn't done with his surprising examples. He kept going.

Matthew 5:40 (NIV)

40 "And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well."

Now people were really confused. If someone is already trying to take your shirt through an unfair lawsuit, Jesus said to give them your coat too? That would leave you with almost no clothes! That seemed like letting bullies win!

But there was more coming. Jesus had one more example that really blew their minds.

Matthew 5:41 (NIV)

41 "If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles."

This one hit close to home for many people in the crowd. Roman soldiers could force you to carry their gear for one mile, it was the law. You had to do it, even if you had your own work to do. And Jesus said if that happens, carry it for two miles? Voluntarily?

By now, people in the crowd were probably thinking, "Jesus, this sounds like a recipe for getting walked all over! How is this better than eye for eye?"

But here's what Jesus understood that was so brilliant: When someone is mean to you and you do exactly what they demand, plus extra, it completely confuses them. They don't know what to do with kindness when they expected anger.

Think about it: If someone slaps you expecting you to hit back, and instead you offer the other cheek, they suddenly don't know what to do. If someone forces you to help them for one mile and you cheerfully say, "I'll do two," they start to wonder what kind of person you are.

Jesus was teaching them, and us, that there's a third option when people are mean to us. Not being mean back, and not just taking it, but surprising them with extra kindness. And you know what's amazing? Extra kindness has a kind of superpower that meanness doesn't have.

When you respond to meanness with unexpected kindness, it can actually change the mean person's heart. It makes them stop and think. It breaks the pattern that makes everything worse.

Sometimes in our lives, we get stuck in patterns where someone is mean, we're mean back, they're meaner, we're meaner, and everything explodes. Jesus is showing us how to break that pattern by doing more good than anyone expects.

What we learn from this teaching is that kindness, especially unexpected kindness, is more powerful than revenge. When we choose to be extra kind instead of getting even, we're acting like God, who is kind to everyone, even people who don't deserve it.

This doesn't mean we let people hurt us or never ask for help when someone is being truly mean. But it does mean that our first choice should be surprising people with kindness instead of surprising them with meanness.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Let's talk about how the people in the crowd might have felt when Jesus told them to turn the other cheek and go the extra mile. Imagine you're sitting there, and Jesus just told you that when someone slaps you, you should offer them your other cheek too. What would be going through your mind? What feelings would you have?

Listen For: "That's not fair," "I'd be confused," "That sounds scary", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Jesus was asking them to do something that felt risky and strange."

Question 2: The Surprise

Now imagine you're someone who just slapped another person, expecting them to hit you back or at least get angry. But instead, they calmly turn their other cheek and say, "Here, you can hit this side too." How do you think that would make the mean person feel? What would they be thinking?

If They Say: "They'd think the person was weak", respond "Maybe at first, but what happens when someone's kindness is so unexpected that it makes you stop and wonder what kind of person they are?"

Question 3: The Power

Jesus believed that unexpected kindness has a special power that fighting back doesn't have. It can actually change people's hearts and break bad patterns. When have you seen kindness surprise someone and maybe change how they were acting? Maybe at school, with siblings, or between friends?

Connect: "This is exactly what Jesus knew, that kindness can be more powerful than fighting when it comes to changing hearts and stopping bad patterns."

Question 4: The Choice

So when someone is mean to us, Jesus is giving us three choices: be mean back, do nothing, or surprise them with extra kindness. Which choice sounds hardest? Which sounds most likely to actually change the situation? Why do you think Jesus recommends the hardest option?

If They Say: "Being extra kind is hardest but it might work better", affirm "You're getting it. Jesus often asks us to do the harder thing because it's the thing that actually has the power to make situations better."

I love how you're thinking about this. Jesus wasn't asking people to be pushovers or to let bullies walk all over them. He was showing them a secret weapon: kindness that's so unexpected it stops people in their tracks and makes them think about what kind of person they want to be.

4. Activity: The Kindness Breakthrough (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces Jesus' teaching by having kids physically experience how "exceeding expectations" can break negative patterns and create breakthroughs. Success looks like kids discovering that going beyond what's asked can transform difficult situations and change how people feel.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do The Kindness Breakthrough. I'm going to divide you into pairs. One person will be the "Demander" and one will be the "Responder." Demanders, you're going to make reasonable requests like "Please hop on one foot three times" or "Please walk to that wall and back." Responders, here's your job: do exactly what they ask, but then do something extra kind that they didn't ask for.

Here's the twist that makes this like Jesus' teaching: Demanders, you start by making your requests in a somewhat grumpy or demanding voice, like you're annoyed. But Responders, even though they sound grumpy, you respond with a cheerful attitude and do extra. Demanders, pay attention to how the extra kindness makes you feel, and you might find your grumpiness starting to change.

This is exactly like what Jesus taught about going the extra mile and giving your coat too. When someone demands something and you cheerfully do more than they asked, it can change the whole feeling of the situation. You have two minutes to try this, then we'll switch roles.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First round starts now! Demanders, make your requests with a grumpy voice. Responders, do what they ask plus something extra, with a cheerful attitude. Remember, this isn't about being fake, it's about choosing kindness even when someone doesn't seem to deserve it.

I'm watching how this changes the feeling between partners. Demanders, notice how it feels when someone responds to your grumpy request with cheerful helpfulness plus extra kindness. Does it make you want to keep being grumpy? Responders, notice how your extra kindness affects the other person's attitude.

Great! I can see some breakthroughs happening. Some of your "demanders" are starting to smile even though they started grumpy. That's the power Jesus was talking about. Switch roles now, Responders become Demanders, and Demanders become Responders. Same rules: make requests with a grumpy voice, respond with cheerful extra kindness.

Perfect! Now I'm seeing even more smiles and laughter. When someone responds to demands with unexpected generosity and kindness, it becomes really hard to stay grumpy or mean. The extra kindness breaks through the negative pattern.

Excellent job! Come back to your spots. I noticed that even when you started with grumpy voices, the extra kindness kept breaking through and changing the mood between you. That's exactly what Jesus knew would happen!

Watch For: The moment when the "grumpy" demanders start smiling or laughing in response to cheerful extra kindness. This is the physical representation of how Jesus' approach can transform conflict through unexpected generosity.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when someone responded to your grumpy demands with cheerful extra kindness? Most of you started smiling or laughing even though you were trying to be grumpy! That's because kindness, especially unexpected extra kindness, has power to change the feeling of a situation. You just experienced what Jesus was teaching: when we exceed what people demand with cheerful generosity, it can break through negative patterns and transform relationships.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Jesus teaches us that when people are mean or demanding, we have a choice that's more powerful than being mean back. We can surprise them with extra kindness. This doesn't mean letting bullies hurt us or never asking adults for help when we need it. But it does mean that our first choice should be kindness that goes beyond what anyone expects.

This doesn't mean it will always work perfectly or that mean people will instantly become nice. Sometimes people need time to change, and sometimes we need help from adults to stay safe. But it's still worth trying because kindness has a special power to break bad patterns and change hearts in ways that meanness never can.

The amazing result is that when we choose extra kindness instead of getting even, we become more like God, who is kind to everyone. And we discover that kindness is actually a superpower that can change situations that seemed hopeless.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is less than kind to you, try the "extra kindness" response. Instead of being mean back or just taking it, do something surprisingly kind. Maybe help someone who was rude to you, or say something nice about someone who said something not-nice about you. See if extra kindness really does have the power to change situations.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for Jesus' amazing teaching about kindness being more powerful than meanness. Help us to be brave enough to try extra kindness when people aren't kind to us. Give us wisdom to know when to ask for help from adults, and help us remember that kindness can change hearts in ways that fighting back can't. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids learn that God wants us to be extra kind, even when people aren't kind to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare Jesus' teaching to sharing your favorite toy with someone who was mean to you, 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 kindness or loving others. Suggestions: "If You're Happy and You Know It" (with kind actions), "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "Love One Another." Use movements: open arms wide during "love" lyrics, point to others during "neighbor" lyrics, and big smiles throughout.

Great singing, everyone! I love seeing those happy faces and kind gestures. Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story about Jesus and kindness that's going to 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 people don't understand Jesus' teaching, sound warm and encouraging when explaining God's love.

Today we're going to meet Jesus when he taught people something very surprising about kindness!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Jesus was sitting on a big hill with lots and lots of people around him. They all wanted to hear what Jesus had to say!

[Use a wondering voice]

Now, some of these people had been hurt by others. Some had been teased or been mean to. They wanted to know: "Jesus, what should we do when people are mean to us?"

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak like you're thinking hard]

Most people would say, "If someone is mean to you, be mean back! That's fair!" But Jesus had a very different idea.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Jesus said something that made everyone's eyes get really wide. He said, "When someone is mean to you, don't be mean back. Instead, be extra kind to them!"

[Move to side, sound confused like the people in the crowd]

The people looked at each other and said, "Extra kind? To people who are mean to us? That sounds backwards, Jesus!"

Matthew 5:39 (NIV)

39 *"If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."*

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think the people were confused? Yes! Jesus was telling them to be kind even when someone hit them! That seemed very strange!

[Move to center, speak with warmth and excitement]

But Jesus knew something special. He knew that kindness has a superpower that meanness doesn't have!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

When someone expects you to be mean back but you're kind instead, it surprises them so much that it can change their heart! It's like magic, but it's God's love working!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Jesus told them, "Be extra kind. If someone asks you to help for a little bit, help them for a long time. If someone takes something from you, give them something else too!"

[Speak with excitement]

The people realized that Jesus was teaching them God's way of breaking the pattern when people are mean to each other!

[Pause dramatically]

God can help us choose kindness even when our feelings want to be mean back! And that kindness can change everything!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school, someone might say something mean to you. Sometimes a brother or sister might not share with you. Sometimes on the playground, someone might not include you in their game.

[Move closer to the children]

When that happens, you can ask God to help you be extra kind instead of being mean back. You can share with someone who didn't share with you. You can say something nice about someone who said something not-nice about you!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we choose kindness, and He gives us the power to be kind even when it's hard. That's how we show everyone that we belong to God!

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 partner! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, and you'll have about one minute to share your thoughts with each other.

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 be extra kind to mean people?
2. When has someone been extra kind to you when you weren't being very kind?
3. How would you feel if someone was extra kind to you after you were mean to them?
4. What would you do if someone took your favorite toy?
5. What changed when Jesus taught about being extra kind?
6. How does God help us choose kindness when it's hard?
7. What happens when we're mean back to someone who was mean first?
8. What's something extra kind you could do at school?
9. What's something extra kind you could do at home with your family?
10. Who do you know that shows extra kindness like Jesus taught?
11. Why do you think Jesus wanted people to be extra kind instead of mean?
12. How can kindness change someone's heart?
13. What does it mean that kindness has superpower that meanness doesn't have?
14. When is it hard to choose kindness?
15. How can you be brave enough to choose kindness?

16. What did you learn about God's love from this story?

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

18. How can we pray for help to be kind like Jesus?

19. What would happen if everyone chose extra kindness?

20. How can we be like Jesus in how we treat people?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about love and kindness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "I've Got the Joy Joy Joy Joy," or "Love Is Something If You Give It Away." Use movements: hug yourself during "love" words, point up to God during "Jesus" words, and spread arms wide during "give" or "share" words.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down in our rows for prayer time. Let's fold our hands and bow our heads to 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 Jesus teaching us about being extra kind...

[Pause]

Help us to choose kindness even when people are not kind to us. Give us brave hearts to be extra kind like Jesus taught us to be.

[Pause]

Help us remember that kindness has special power to change hearts and make bad situations better. Thank you for helping us love others the way you love us.

[Pause]

Thank you that your love helps us be kind even when it's hard. We want to show everyone that we belong to you by how kind we 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 kindness. Examples: "Help me be kind to my sister" or "Thank you that kindness can change hearts."

Remember, God wants us to be extra kind, even when people aren't kind to us! Have a wonderful week, and look for ways to surprise people with kindness!

Burning Coals

Transformative Kindness, When genuine kindness has ulterior motives, is it still genuine?

Proverbs 25:16-28

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

Proverbs 25:16-28 (NIV)

16 If you find honey, eat just enough, too much of it, and you will vomit. 17 Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, too much of you, and they will hate you. 18 Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor. 19 Like a broken tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble. 20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. 22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

23 Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain is a sly tongue, which provokes a horrified look. 24 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife. 25 Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land. 26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted well are the righteous who give way to the wicked. 27 It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to search out matters that are too deep. 28 Like a city whose walls are broken through is one who lacks self-control.

Context

These proverbs come from King Solomon's collection, specifically a section compiled by King Hezekiah's men centuries later. The wisdom literature tradition uses vivid metaphors and practical observations to teach about human relationships, character, and wise living. This particular section focuses on interpersonal dynamics, how we treat neighbors, enemies, and even difficult family members.

Verses 21-22 appear in the middle of this collection as a striking contrast to the surrounding warnings about broken relationships and harmful behavior. While other proverbs describe the damage caused by false testimony, unfaithfulness, and quarrelsome attitudes, these verses prescribe radical kindness toward those who have positioned themselves as enemies.

The Big Idea

Practical provision for enemies' physical needs is both a divine command and a transformative strategy that accomplishes what retaliation cannot.

This isn't merely about being nice to difficult people. The wisdom here recognizes that meeting enemies' concrete needs, food when hungry, water when thirsty, creates a kind of moral disruption in their hearts that violence or revenge could never achieve. The "burning coals" suggest transformative discomfort, a divine work that our kindness initiates but cannot control.

Theological Core

- **Practical provision over sentiment.** The command is specific, food for hunger, water for thirst, grounding enemy-love in observable need rather than warm feelings.
 - **Transformative power of kindness.** This approach produces effects in enemies' hearts that retaliation cannot accomplish, creating conviction rather than mere compliance.
 - **Divine involvement in human relationships.** The Lord rewards this behavior, indicating that enemy-kindness aligns with God's character and purposes.
 - **Strategic wisdom beyond sentiment.** This is not naive niceness but shrewd understanding of how moral influence actually works in human hearts.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Meeting enemies' practical needs is both commanded duty and transformative strategy, these motivations can coexist
 - The "burning coals" metaphor suggests divine work initiated by but beyond our control
 - Genuine kindness with transformative intent remains authentic when grounded in obedience and care
 - Discerning when and how to apply this wisdom requires understanding the difference between enabling and transforming
-

Grades 4, 6

- When enemies have real needs, the right response is practical help regardless of how they've treated us
 - Kindness to enemies often changes their hearts in ways that fighting back cannot
 - Helping an enemy might make us feel uncomfortable, but God rewards this choice
 - We can do the right thing even when our feelings are hurt or we don't want to
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind to people who are mean to us
 - God sees when we're kind to enemies and is happy about it
 - Sometimes being kind can help mean people become nice
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Manipulative kindness.** Don't present this as a technique for getting people to like us. The transformation is God's work; our job is obedience and genuine care for human need.
 - **Enabling harmful behavior.** Meeting practical needs doesn't mean accepting abuse. This wisdom applies when enemies experience legitimate need, not when they demand accommodation for destructive patterns.
 - **Oversimplifying the "burning coals."** Various interpretations exist (shame, conviction, Egyptian repentance ritual). Focus on the clear command rather than definitively explaining the metaphor's exact meaning.
 - **Demanding emotional transformation.** This passage commands practical provision, not warm feelings. Students shouldn't feel guilty for not enjoying enemy-kindness while still choosing to practice it.
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Handling Hard Questions

"If we're being kind to enemies just to change them, isn't that fake?"

This assumes pure motives are the only authentic ones, but human motivation is complex. We can genuinely care about someone's hunger while also hoping our kindness might soften their heart. The key is grounding our response in obedience to God and real concern for human need, not just personal benefit. Even strategic kindness becomes authentic when it flows from genuine care.

"What if being kind to an enemy just makes them treat me worse?"

The passage promises God's reward, not the enemy's immediate transformation. Some people do respond to kindness with increased hostility, at least initially. This wisdom teaches long-term thinking about moral influence versus short-term emotional payoff. The "burning coals" suggest internal work happening even when external behavior doesn't immediately change.

"Does this mean I have to stay in relationships with people who hurt me?"

Meeting someone's practical needs when you encounter them doesn't require maintaining close relationship or accepting ongoing harm. You can give a hungry enemy food without making them your friend. This wisdom applies to specific moments of observable need, not to comprehensive life engagement with destructive people.

The One Thing to Remember

Practical kindness to enemies creates the kind of heart-change that retaliation never can, accomplishing God's transformative work through our simple obedience.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to explore the tension between genuine kindness and strategic transformation. Help them discover that complex motivations don't invalidate authentic care when grounded in obedience and real concern for human need.

The Tension to Frame

When kindness has transformative intent, is it still genuine kindness? Can we authentically care for someone while also hoping to influence them?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with fake or manipulative kindness, acknowledge why they're suspicious of mixed motives
 - Honor the complexity of human motivation rather than demanding pure intentions
 - Let students wrestle with real scenarios rather than providing quick answers about when this applies
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You're scrolling through social media and see that someone who's been pretty cruel to you just posted about their family losing their home to a fire. They need clothes, food, basic supplies. Part of you feels bad for them, no one deserves that kind of loss. But part of you also thinks, "Maybe now they'll understand what it feels like to need help."

You have the ability to help. You could organize something, donate, share their post. It would genuinely help their family. But you also can't help wondering if experiencing your kindness after their cruelty might make them rethink how they've treated you. Is that thought wrong? Does having that hope make your kindness fake?

Today we're looking at ancient wisdom that actually commands this kind of practical help for enemies, and suggests it might accomplish something that fighting back never could. But it raises the question: when kindness has strategic purpose, what makes it authentic versus manipulative?

As we read, notice the specific nature of the help commanded and the mysterious promise about what this kindness accomplishes. Pay attention to whether the wisdom seems concerned about the helper's motivations or just about the enemy's needs.

Open your Bibles to Proverbs 25 and find verses 21 and 22. We'll start by reading silently to get the basic instruction, then explore what it means and whether it's realistic.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help students find the passage if needed. Watch for those who finish early and encourage them to read the surrounding verses for context. Let the weight of the counterintuitive command settle in.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions does the wisdom command, and what needs do they address?
 - Why might someone resist this instruction, and what fears would be reasonable?
 - What does the "burning coals" metaphor suggest about what happens in enemies' hearts?
 - How does this approach differ from typical responses to enemies?
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Proverbs 25:16-28 (NIV)

16 If you find honey, eat just enough, too much of it, and you will vomit. 17 Seldom set foot in your neighbor's house, too much of you, and they will hate you. 18 Like a club or a sword or a sharp arrow is one who gives false testimony against a neighbor. 19 Like a broken tooth or a lame foot is reliance on the unfaithful in a time of trouble. 20 Like one who takes away a garment on a cold day, or like vinegar poured on a wound, is one who sings songs to a heavy heart.

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. 22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

23 Like a north wind that brings unexpected rain is a sly tongue, which provokes a horrified look. 24 Better to live on a corner of the roof than share a house with a quarrelsome wife. 25 Like cold water to a weary soul is good news from a distant land. 26 Like a muddied spring or a polluted well are the righteous who give way to the wicked. 27 It is not good to eat too much honey, nor is it honorable to search out matters that are too deep. 28 Like a city whose walls are broken through is one who lacks self-control.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read sections. Allow students to pass if they're uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the metaphor-heavy sections.

Reader 1: Verses 16-20 (Context about broken relationships) **Reader 2:** Verses 21-22 (The enemy-kindness command) **Reader 3:** Verses 23-28 (More relationship wisdom)

Listen for the contrast between broken relationships described around our passage and the radical response commanded in verses 21-22. This isn't just advice, it's wisdom literature using vivid images.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate questions. Move between groups to listen and assist stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you?" or "What seems hardest about this?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what we just read, things you're actually curious or confused about. Don't ask questions you think you should ask; ask questions you actually want answered. Examples might be "Why would I want to put burning coals on someone's head?" or "What if helping them just makes them meaner?" You have exactly three minutes. Go.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Probe deeper into their thinking rather than providing quick answers.

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

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between giving food to someone hungry versus giving them whatever they want?"
- "The passage specifies food for hunger and water for thirst. What does that suggest about when this applies?"
- "If the goal is transformation, does that make the kindness manipulative or strategic?"
- "What might 'burning coals on the head' accomplish that revenge or fighting back couldn't?"
- "How can we tell the difference between genuine care with hopeful intent versus manipulation disguised as kindness?"
- "What's an example of this working in real life, where practical kindness to an enemy actually changed something?"
- "If someone responded to your kindness with increased hostility, how would that affect your willingness to try this again?"
- "Why do you think God rewards this behavior? What does that suggest about divine priorities?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? This wisdom says there are two results: something happens in the enemy's heart (burning coals) and something happens with God (divine reward). Your kindness initiates internal work in the enemy that revenge could never accomplish, while simultaneously aligning you with God's character. The transformation isn't fake because your motivation is complex, it's strategic because it works through moral influence rather than force.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you encounter people who've positioned themselves as enemies, who have real, observable needs? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, community conflicts, even broader social issues where you witness opponents struggling with genuine hardship.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Classmates who've bullied or excluded you but are now facing family crisis or academic struggles
 - Family members who've been cruel but are dealing with health issues, job loss, or relationship problems
 - Former friends who betrayed you but are now isolated or struggling with mental health
 - People whose politics you oppose but who are experiencing natural disasters or personal tragedy
 - Social media conflicts where someone who attacked you later posts about genuine need or hardship
 - Community members who've opposed your views but face practical challenges you have skills to address
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to prescriptive answers. Some situations require boundaries or safety considerations. Help them think through discernment rather than providing universal rules.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen practical kindness actually soften someone who was previously hostile?"
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- "What would help you distinguish between wisdom and naivety when applying this principle?"
- "How do you decide between protecting yourself and risking kindness to someone who's hurt you?"
- "What's the difference between transformative kindness and enabling destructive behavior?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: practical kindness to enemies isn't fake just because you hope it might change something. When you meet someone's real need, food for hunger, help with genuine crisis, you're aligning with God's character while creating opportunities for moral transformation that revenge could never accomplish. Your complex motivations don't invalidate authentic care.

This week, pay attention to moments when you encounter enemies experiencing real need. You don't have to act on every opportunity, but notice them. Ask yourself: is this a situation where practical help could plant seeds of transformation? What would wisdom look like here?

I'm proud of how thoughtfully you wrestled with these tensions today. Keep asking hard questions about motivation and authenticity, that kind of thinking will serve you well as you learn to navigate relationships with both wisdom and genuine care.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that practical kindness to enemies can change hearts in ways that fighting back cannot. Focus on concrete acts of care rather than feelings, and on God's pleasure rather than guaranteed results.

If Kids Ask "What if being nice just makes them meaner?"

Say: "Sometimes that happens at first. But God sees your kindness and is proud of you, even when people don't change right away. Kindness plants seeds that take time to grow."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school be really mean to you. Maybe they called you names, excluded you from games, or said hurtful things about you. Keep your hands up if that person ever needed help with something, maybe they forgot their lunch money, or their pencil broke, or they got hurt on the playground.

Now here's a harder question: when that mean person needed help, part of you probably wanted to help because it's the right thing to do, but another part of you probably thought, "Why should I help someone who's been mean to me?" You might have felt torn between wanting to do the right thing and feeling like they didn't deserve your help.

Those feelings make complete sense. It's genuinely confusing when someone who's hurt you needs help. Your heart wants to be kind, but it also remembers being hurt. Both feelings are normal and okay, you're not bad for feeling hesitant about helping someone who's been mean to you.

This reminds me of movies like "Zootopia," where Judy has to help Nick even after he tricks her, or in "Moana" when she helps Te Kā even though the lava monster has been destroying everything. The characters have to choose between getting revenge and showing unexpected kindness.

The tricky part is figuring out what actually changes people's hearts. Does fighting back make mean people nicer? Or does something else work better? What really helps bullies become friends?

Today we're going to learn about some ancient wisdom that gives a surprising answer to this question. A very wise king discovered something amazing about how to deal with enemies, and what he learned might change how you think about responding to mean people. Let's find out what he discovered.

What to Expect: Kids will share examples of enemies needing help. Acknowledge them briefly with phrases like "That must have felt confusing" or "That's a hard choice," then keep moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there lived a king named Solomon who was famous for being the wisest person who ever lived. God had given him special wisdom to understand how people's hearts worked and how relationships could be healed.

One day, King Solomon was thinking about a big problem that everyone faces: what do you do when someone becomes your enemy? What do you do when someone hurts you, is mean to you, or tries to make your life difficult?

The king knew that most people's first instinct is to fight back. When someone is mean to you, you want to be mean back. When someone hurts you, you want to hurt them. When someone excludes you, you want to exclude them. This feels fair and natural, it's how our hearts want to respond.

Imagine how you'd feel if someone at school spread lies about you, and then everyone started believing those lies. Your stomach would feel sick, your heart would pound with anger, and you'd probably want to find a way to get them back. That reaction makes sense, you've been hurt and it's not fair.

But King Solomon noticed something interesting: fighting back doesn't actually change people's hearts. When you're mean to someone who was mean to you, they don't usually think, "Oh, I was wrong to be mean." Instead, they think, "See? I was right to be mean to them because look how mean they are!"

So fighting back often just makes enemies stay enemies. It makes the meanness grow bigger instead of smaller. It's like throwing gasoline on a fire, it makes the problem worse, not better.

Then Solomon had an idea. What if there was a completely different way to respond to enemies? What if, instead of fighting back, you did something that would truly change their hearts? What if you could turn an enemy into a friend?

Solomon thought about this for a long time. He watched people and studied how hearts really change. And then God gave him a piece of wisdom that seemed completely backwards but was actually brilliant.

Help them feel what it would be like to discover something that could actually change an enemy's heart. Think about how amazing that would be, to have the power to turn someone who hates you into someone who respects and maybe even likes you.

One day, Solomon was walking through his kingdom when he saw something that gave him an idea. He saw a person who had been cruel and unkind to others, but that person was now hungry and thirsty. They needed food and water, but everyone was avoiding them because of how mean they'd been.

Instead of thinking, "They deserve to be hungry after how they treated people," Solomon thought, "What if someone gave them food and water right now? What would happen in their heart?" And that's when God gave him the incredible wisdom we're learning about today.

Solomon realized that when you help someone who has been your enemy, when you give them exactly what they need even though they've been mean to you, something amazing happens inside their heart that fighting back could never accomplish.

This is what the wise king learned, and God told him to write it down so we could learn it too. "If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink."

Proverbs 25:21-22 (NIV)

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink. 22 In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head, and the Lord will reward you.

Now, the "burning coals" part sounds scary, but it's not about hurting people. In Solomon's time, burning coals were a symbol of something that burns away badness and creates change. When you're kind to your enemy in their time of need, it creates a burning feeling in their heart, not pain, but the uncomfortable feeling of realizing they've been wrong.

Think about how you'd feel if someone you'd been really mean to brought you lunch when you were hungry or helped you when you were hurt. You'd probably feel embarrassed and ashamed of how you'd acted. That uncomfortable feeling is the "burning coals", it's your conscience waking up.

Here's what's amazing: this works! When you're kind to someone who's been mean to you, especially when they really need help, something changes inside them. They start to think, "Wow, I was wrong about this person. They're actually kind. Maybe I should treat them differently."

Solomon discovered that kindness is more powerful than revenge. Fighting back keeps people as enemies, but practical kindness, giving food when they're hungry, helping when they're in trouble, can actually turn enemies into friends.

And here's the best part: God loves it when we do this! The verse says "the Lord will reward you." God is so happy when we choose kindness over revenge that He promises to reward us for it. Even if our enemy doesn't change right away, God sees our choice and is proud of us.

This happened over and over throughout history. People who chose to help their enemies instead of fighting them often found that their enemies became their friends. Sometimes it took time, but the kindness planted seeds that eventually grew into friendship.

Sometimes you might be scared to help your enemy because you think they'll just be meaner. But remember: you're not doing it just to change them, you're doing it because God asks you to, and because God promises to reward your kindness. The change in their heart is God's job; your job is just to be kind when they need help.

Sometimes in our lives, we have the chance to choose between getting revenge and showing kindness. We can choose to fight back when someone is mean, or we can look for opportunities to help them when they need it. Solomon's wisdom tells us that kindness is the more powerful choice.

What we learn from King Solomon is this: when someone who's been mean to you needs help, that's your chance to change everything. Instead of thinking "They don't deserve help," think "This is my opportunity to plant seeds of friendship." Give them what they actually need, help with homework, lunch money, comfort when they're sad.

The core truth that Solomon discovered is that God has given us a superpower: the power to change hearts through unexpected kindness. Fighting back keeps enemies as enemies, but practical kindness can turn enemies into friends while making God happy with our choice.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Surprise

Imagine you're at lunch and you forgot your lunch money, and you're really hungry. The only person near you who could help is someone who you've been mean to all semester. They have extra money and could easily help you, but you've called them names and excluded them from games. How do you think you'd feel if they came over and said, "Here, take my lunch money. I know you're hungry"?

Listen For: "Surprised," "Ashamed," "Confused", affirm: "Yes! That uncomfortable feeling of realizing you've been wrong, that's exactly what changes hearts."

Question 2: The Choice

Think about a time when someone was mean to you and later needed help. Maybe they forgot their homework or got hurt or felt sad about something. In that moment, you have two choices: you can think "They deserve it" or you can think "This is my chance to plant kindness seeds." Which choice do you think takes more courage, and why?

If They Say: "It's scary to be nice", respond: "You're absolutely right. It takes courage to be kind to someone who's hurt you. That's why God promises to reward it."

Question 3: The Change

Solomon learned that fighting back keeps people as enemies, but kindness can turn enemies into friends. Think about someone you know who used to be mean but became nice. What do you think made the difference? Was it someone fighting back with them, or was it someone showing them unexpected kindness?

Connect: "That's exactly what Solomon discovered, kindness changes hearts in ways that fighting never can."

Question 4: The Ripple Effect

If everyone at school chose to help their enemies instead of fighting back, how do you think that would change the feeling of your classroom or playground? What if every time someone needed help, people helped them even if they'd been mean? What would school feel like then?

If They Say: "Everyone would be nicer", affirm: "Yes! Kindness spreads just like meanness spreads, but it creates friendship instead of more fighting."

You've discovered something that took King Solomon years to figure out: practical kindness has the power to change hearts, change relationships, and even change whole communities. Fighting back might feel good for a moment, but kindness creates lasting change that makes God happy. Now let's experience this truth with our bodies.

4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity physically demonstrates how practical kindness creates connection while fighting back creates separation. Success looks like kids experiencing that helping others, even when it feels risky, literally brings people together while competitive responses keep them apart.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Bridge Builders." Everyone find a partner and stand on opposite sides of the room facing each other. Imagine there's a deep canyon between you and your partner, and your goal is to build a bridge to reach each other.

Here's how it works: you can only move closer to your partner by doing something helpful for someone else in the room. Every time you help someone, pick up something they dropped, give them a compliment, help them with something, you get to take one step toward your partner.

But here's the twist: if you try to compete with others or say something unkind, you have to take a step backwards. We're doing this because it's exactly like what Solomon discovered, kindness builds bridges between people while fighting pushes people apart.

Your challenge is to see if you can reach your partner by building a bridge of kindness. Ready?

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Watch as kids start looking for ways to help each other. Some will immediately start complimenting or helping, while others might hesitate or try to compete for the "best" help. Let this play out for about a minute before offering guidance.

Notice the hesitation some of you feel about helping. It's risky to be kind first, isn't it? You don't know if others will appreciate it or if they'll think you're weird. But watch what happens when someone takes the risk, see how it makes others want to be kind too?

I'm watching kindness spread around the room. When one person helps, it makes others want to help too. And look, you're all getting closer to your partners! This is exactly what Solomon discovered: kindness builds bridges while fighting tears them down.

Some of you just experienced something powerful: you helped someone even though you weren't sure how they'd react, and it brought you closer to your goal. That feeling, the slight risk followed by connection, that's what happens when we're kind to enemies.

Look around the room now. Everyone is closer together than when we started, and the whole room feels different because it's been filled with helpfulness instead of competition. This is the power of choosing kindness over fighting.

Watch For: The moment when kids realize that helping others actually helps them reach their own goals, this is the physical representation of how kindness creates unexpected benefits.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you helped someone versus when you focused on competing? Did helping others bring you closer to your partner or farther away? You just experienced Solomon's wisdom with your bodies: kindness builds bridges between people while fighting tears them down. Even when helping feels risky, it creates connection in ways that competition never can.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when someone who's been mean to you needs help, that's your opportunity to plant seeds of friendship. Giving them what they actually need, food when hungry, help when struggling, comfort when sad, can change their heart in ways that fighting back never could. This doesn't mean you'll always feel like helping enemies, but you can choose to do it anyway.

This doesn't mean letting people be mean to you or pretending that hurtful behavior is okay. It means that when you see real need, someone hungry, hurt, or struggling, you can choose to help even if they've been unkind to you. Sometimes this kindness plants seeds that grow into friendship over time.

The amazing result is that you become someone who has the power to change hearts and build bridges instead of walls. You become someone who makes God happy by choosing His way of responding to difficult people.

This Week's Challenge

Look for one opportunity to help someone who hasn't been kind to you. It could be as simple as sharing supplies, offering a compliment, or helping with something they're struggling with. Pay attention to how it feels to choose kindness over getting back at them.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, help us remember that kindness is more powerful than fighting back. When someone is mean to us and then needs help, give us courage to choose kindness instead of revenge. Help us plant seeds of friendship instead of growing bigger walls. Thank You for promising to reward our kind choices. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids learn that God wants us to be kind to people who are mean to us, and that kindness can change hearts.

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 being kind to mean people to planting flower seeds in rocky ground, it takes time to grow, but God helps the flowers bloom.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness and God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "This Little Light of Mine," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: spread arms wide during "love" lyrics, point to yourself during "me" lyrics, and make gentle hand motions during kindness words.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down to hear an amazing story about kindness. Make a horseshoe shape on the floor and face me. Today we're going to learn about the most powerful thing in the whole world!

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 wise and strong when you're King Solomon, sound sad when talking about mean people, sound excited when talking about kindness.

Today we're going to meet a very special king named Solomon who discovered something amazing about kindness!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

King Solomon was the wisest person who ever lived. God gave him a super-smart brain to figure out how to solve big problems. One day, he was thinking about a problem that happens to everyone.

[Make a sad face and speak with concern]

The problem was this: sometimes people are mean to us. They might say unkind words, not share their toys, or not let us play with them. When this happens, our hearts feel hurt and angry.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak firmly]

Most people thought the answer was to be mean back. If someone is mean to you, be mean to them! If someone won't share, then you don't share with them! That seems fair, right?

[Move to center, speak with wisdom and authority]

But wise King Solomon noticed something important: being mean back to mean people just makes MORE meanness! It's like adding more mud to a mud puddle, it just makes the mess bigger!

[Move to side, speak with excitement like you discovered something amazing]

So Solomon prayed to God and asked, "God, is there a better way to deal with mean people?" And God gave him an incredible idea that seemed backwards but was actually brilliant!

Proverbs 25:21 (NIV)

21 If your enemy is hungry, give him food to eat; if he is thirsty, give him water to drink.

[Pause and look around at each child with amazement]

Can you believe it? God said when someone is mean to you, and then they need help, you should help them! If they're hungry, give them food! If they need something, help them get it!

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Now, this might sound scary or silly. You might think, "Why should I help someone who was mean to me?" But God knows something special about how hearts work that we're still learning.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe with wonder in your voice]

When you're kind to someone who was mean to you, something magical happens inside their heart. They start to feel bad about being mean. They think, "Wow, this person is really nice. Maybe I shouldn't have been mean to them."

[Stop walking and face the children directly with excitement]

Kindness is like a superpower! It can change mean hearts into kind hearts! Fighting back just makes people meaner, but kindness makes them want to be nicer!

[Speak with joy and celebration]

And here's the best part: God loves it when we choose to be kind instead of mean! God sees every time you help someone who was unkind to you, and it makes Him so happy that He gives you special rewards!

[Pause dramatically]

King Solomon learned that God has given us the power to change hearts with kindness. Instead of making enemies stay enemies, we can turn enemies into friends by helping them when they need it!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school, someone might be mean to you and then later need help. Maybe they forgot their lunch, or they're sad, or they can't find something. That's your chance to use your kindness superpower!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone who was mean to you needs help, you can choose to help them anyway. You can share your snack, help them find their toy, or comfort them when they're sad. This plants kindness seeds in their heart!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God is always with you to help you be kind, even when it feels hard. Remember: kindness is stronger than meanness, and God loves it when you choose to be kind to everyone!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think someone feels when you help them after they were mean to you?

2. What's something kind you could do for someone who wasn't nice to you?

3. Why do you think God wants us to be kind to mean people?

4. What would you do if someone who pushed you later needed help with something?

5. How do you think kindness changes people's hearts?

6. What makes you feel happy when someone is kind to you?

7. How do you think God feels when we choose kindness instead of being mean back?

8. What's harder: being mean back or being kind to someone who was mean?

9. Have you ever seen someone become nicer because someone was kind to them?

10. What would happen if everyone at school chose to help instead of fight?

11. Why is kindness like a superpower?

12. What would you want someone to do if you were mean and then needed help?

13. How can God help us be kind when it feels hard?

14. What's the difference between fighting back and being kind?

15. How do you think King Solomon figured out that kindness works better?

16. What kind of help might someone need at school?

17. How does it feel when someone is unexpectedly kind to you?

18. What would you pray for if someone was being mean to you?

19. What would happen if mean people never experienced kindness?

20. How can we remember to choose kindness when we feel angry?

Great discussions! Come back together in straight lines for our song. Who wants to share one thing they talked about?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about kindness or helping others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "I've Got the Joy," or "If You're Happy and You Know It" (adapted with kind actions). Include movements: reaching out to others during "love" lyrics, gentle helping motions during kindness words, and big smiles during joy songs.

Beautiful singing about kindness! Now let's sit criss-cross on the floor for prayer time. Fold your hands and bow your heads, we're going to thank God for teaching us about kindness.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank You for teaching us that kindness is stronger than meanness...

[Pause]

Help us remember to be kind to people who are mean to us, even when it feels hard. Give us brave hearts to help others when they need it...

[Pause]

Thank You for loving us and helping us choose kindness. Help us use our kindness superpower to change hearts at school and home...

[Pause]

Thank You for always being kind to us and for helping us be kind to others. Help us remember that kindness makes You happy. 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 Tommy" or "Thank you for kindness, God."

Remember: you have kindness superpowers! This week, look for chances to help someone who hasn't been kind to you. God will help you be brave and kind. Have a wonderful week!

When Friendship Turns to Betrayal

Responding as People of Prayer, How do we hold prayer and anger together?

Psalm 109:1-31

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Psalm 109:1-31 (NIV)

1 My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, 2 for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. 3 With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. 4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. 5 They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.

6 Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand. 7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him. 8 May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. 9 May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. 10 May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes. 11 May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. 12 May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. 13 May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation.

14 May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. 15 May their sins always remain before the Lord, that he may blot out their

name from the earth.

16 For he never thought of doing kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted. 17 He loved to pronounce a curse, may it come back on him. He found no pleasure in blessing, may it be far from him. 18 He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into his body like water, into his bones like oil. 19 May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him. 20 May this be the Lord's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.

21 But you, Sovereign Lord, help me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me. 22 For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. 23 I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. 24 My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt. 25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they shake their heads.

26 Help me, Lord my God; save me according to your unfailing love. 27 Let them know that it is your hand, that you, Lord, have done it. 28 While they curse, may you bless; may those who attack me be put to shame, but may your servant rejoice. 29 May my accusers be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.

30 With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng I will praise him. 31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy to save their life from those who would condemn them.

Context

Psalm 109 is one of the most intense imprecatory (cursing) psalms in the Psalter, attributed to David during a time of deep betrayal. The psalmist faces false accusations from those who were once friends, experiencing the devastating pain of friendship turned to enmity. The situation involves systematic character assassination, legal accusations, and coordinated attacks on his reputation and livelihood.

The immediate context reveals someone caught between maintaining his identity as a person of prayer while processing genuine rage and hurt over betrayal. The psalm moves from describing the attacks (verses 1-5) through an extended section of imprecatory prayer (verses 6-20) to a return to plea for God's intervention and eventual praise (verses 21-31). This emotional journey from betrayal through anger to trust reflects authentic spiritual struggle.

The Big Idea

When friendship turns to betrayal and good is repaid with evil, our response as people of prayer transforms both our pain and our identity, even when that prayer includes raw honesty about our anger.

This psalm reveals the complexity of processing betrayal through prayer rather than retaliation. The "man of prayer" identity doesn't eliminate intense emotions or the desire for justice, but it channels them through relationship with God rather than through personal vengeance. Prayer becomes both the method of processing pain and the declaration of fundamental identity.

Theological Core

- **Prayer as Identity.** Being a "man/woman of prayer" defines who we are at our core, shaping our response even in betrayal. This identity precedes and determines our reaction to enmity.
 - **Asymmetrical Response.** Our response need not match the treatment we receive. Friendship can be maintained internally even when met with accusation, and prayer can be chosen even when faced with hatred.
 - **Honest Prayer.** Authentic prayer includes the full range of human emotion, including anger, desire for justice, and calls for God's intervention. Prayer transforms rather than suppresses difficult feelings.
 - **Justice Through God.** The move from personal retaliation to divine justice preserves both the legitimacy of seeking justice and the protection of our own souls from becoming consumed by revenge.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Being a person of prayer doesn't mean suppressing anger or pretending betrayal doesn't hurt, it means processing those feelings through relationship with God
 - Prayer can include honest expressions of desire for justice and protection, even when those prayers feel intense or uncomfortable
 - Our identity as people of prayer shapes our response to betrayal, choosing God's justice over personal revenge
 - Learning to distinguish between seeking justice through God and pursuing personal vengeance requires wisdom and spiritual maturity
-

Grades 4, 6

- When friends betray us or hurt us deeply, we can choose prayer over revenge, even when we feel really angry
 - It's okay to feel mad when people are mean to us, but we can tell God about those feelings instead of hurting them back
 - Good people sometimes face accusations and mean treatment, but choosing the right response protects our hearts
 - Our feelings are valid and God cares about them, but we don't have to let those feelings control our actions
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Grades 1, 3

- When someone is mean to us, we can talk to God about how we feel instead of being mean back to them
 - God listens when we tell Him about people who hurt us, and He cares about our feelings
 - We can choose to do the right thing even when others do wrong things to us
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Spiritualizing Away Anger.** Don't suggest that being a person of prayer means never feeling angry or that intense emotions are unspiritual. The psalm validates the full emotional impact of betrayal while channeling response through prayer.
 - **Avoiding the Imprecatory Content.** The harsh language in verses 6-20 is part of Scripture and represents authentic human emotion in prayer. Acknowledge this complexity rather than skipping over it or explaining it away.
 - **Simple Formulas for Complex Pain.** Betrayal by friends creates deep wounds that don't heal quickly. Avoid offering easy answers or suggesting that prayer makes the pain disappear immediately.
 - **Passive Response to Injustice.** Being a person of prayer doesn't mean being passive about injustice or never seeking appropriate help or intervention. Prayer enhances rather than replaces wise action.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Why does the psalm ask God to punish the enemy's family and children? That seems unfair."

This reflects the ancient understanding of corporate identity and consequences, where families and communities shared in both blessings and judgments. The psalmist is expressing raw emotion in prayer rather than prescribing action. What matters for us is that he's bringing his desire for justice to God rather than taking revenge himself. These prayers give us permission to be honest about our anger while trusting God to sort out what justice actually looks like.

"How can David call himself 'a man of prayer' and then say such harsh things about his enemies?"

This is exactly what authentic prayer looks like, bringing our real feelings, including anger and desire for justice, into relationship with God. Being a person of prayer doesn't mean having perfect emotions; it means processing our emotions through conversation with God rather than through retaliation. The psalm shows us that God can handle our anger and that prayer transforms both our pain and our

response.

"If we're supposed to love our enemies, how do we understand this psalm?"

This psalm represents one stage in the journey of processing betrayal and injustice. It shows the movement from personal revenge toward divine justice, which is progress toward love. Sometimes we need to work through anger honestly before we can move toward forgiveness. The psalm gives us language for that process while ultimately pointing us toward trusting God for both justice and mercy.

The One Thing to Remember

Being people of prayer means bringing our whole selves, including our anger and pain, into relationship with God, letting our identity as people who pray shape our response to betrayal rather than letting betrayal reshape our identity.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between being people of prayer and experiencing genuine anger when betrayed. Help them discover that prayer doesn't eliminate difficult emotions but transforms how we process and respond to them.

The Tension to Frame

How do we hold together being "people of prayer" with the intense anger and desire for justice we feel when friends betray us? What does authentic prayer look like when we're deeply hurt?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of friendship betrayal, don't rush to "spiritual" answers before acknowledging the real pain
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- Honor the complexity of the psalm's harsh language rather than explaining it away, this opens space for honest conversation
- Let them wrestle with the tension rather than resolving it too quickly, the struggle itself is part of spiritual maturity

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about someone you trusted completely, maybe your best friend, someone in your family, or someone you looked up to. Now imagine discovering that they've been talking about you behind your back, spreading lies, trying to turn other people against you. Not just disagreeing with you, but actively working to damage your reputation and relationships.

Your first instinct might be to fight back, to defend yourself, to tell everyone what they're really like, maybe even to hurt them the way they hurt you. That makes complete sense. When someone betrays our trust and attacks our character, every part of us wants to respond with equal force.

But what if you'd built your whole identity around being someone who talks to God about everything, someone whose first response to any crisis is prayer? What happens when prayer feels too weak for the intensity of betrayal you're experiencing? What if your anger feels too big and too raw for spiritual responses?

Today we're looking at someone who faced exactly this situation. David is being systematically attacked by people who were once his friends, and he has to figure out how to process that betrayal without losing either his integrity or his identity as a person of prayer. What he discovers might surprise you.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 109. As we read, pay attention to the emotional journey and notice how David's identity as "a man of prayer" both complicates and clarifies his response to betrayal.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: This is an emotionally intense psalm. Walk quietly among students, watch for strong reactions to the harsh language in verses 6-20, and be prepared to process those reactions during discussion. Some may find the cursing prayers disturbing or confusing.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific accusations and attacks is David facing? Who is doing this to him?
- Why does David call himself "a man of prayer" in verse 4, and how does that identity play out through the rest of the psalm?
- What surprises or disturbs you about the prayers in verses 6-20? How do you make sense of that language?
- How does David's emotional state change from the beginning to the end of the psalm?

Psalm 109:1-31 (NIV)

1 My God, whom I praise, do not remain silent, 2 for people who are wicked and deceitful have opened their mouths against me; they have spoken against me with lying tongues. 3 With words of hatred they surround me; they attack me without cause. 4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. 5 They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.

6 Appoint someone evil to oppose my enemy; let an accuser stand at his right hand. 7 When he is tried, let him be found guilty, and may his prayers condemn him. 8 May his days be few; may another take his place of leadership. 9 May his children be fatherless and his wife a widow. 10 May his children be wandering beggars; may they be driven from their ruined homes. 11 May a creditor seize all he has; may strangers plunder the fruits of his labor. 12 May no one extend kindness to him or take pity on his fatherless children. 13 May his descendants be cut off, their names blotted out from the next generation.

14 May the iniquity of his fathers be remembered before the Lord; may the sin of his mother never be blotted out. 15 May their sins always remain before the Lord, that he may blot out their name from the earth.

16 For he never thought of doing kindness, but hounded to death the poor and the needy and the brokenhearted. 17 He loved to pronounce a curse, may it come back on him. He found no pleasure in blessing, may it be far from him. 18 He wore cursing as his garment; it entered into

his body like water, into his bones like oil. 19 May it be like a cloak wrapped about him, like a belt tied forever around him. 20 May this be the Lord's payment to my accusers, to those who speak evil of me.

21 But you, Sovereign Lord, help me for your name's sake; out of the goodness of your love, deliver me. 22 For I am poor and needy, and my heart is wounded within me. 23 I fade away like an evening shadow; I am shaken off like a locust. 24 My knees give way from fasting; my body is thin and gaunt. 25 I am an object of scorn to my accusers; when they see me, they shake their heads.

26 Help me, Lord my God; save me according to your unfailing love. 27 Let them know that it is your hand, that you, Lord, have done it. 28 While they curse, may you bless; may those who attack me be put to shame, but may your servant rejoice. 29 May my accusers be clothed with disgrace and wrapped in shame as in a cloak.

30 With my mouth I will greatly extol the Lord; in the great throng I will praise him. 31 For he stands at the right hand of the needy to save their life from those who would condemn them.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Choose confident readers who can handle intense emotional content. This psalm requires dramatic reading to capture the emotional journey from betrayal through anger to trust.

Reader 1: Verses 1-5 (The accusation and betrayal) **Reader 2:** Verses 6-20 (The imprecatory prayers)

Reader 3: Verses 21-31 (The turn to trust and praise)

Listen for the emotional intensity in each section, this isn't just information, it's the raw expression of someone processing deep betrayal through prayer.

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 what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about David's prayers?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people and spend the next three minutes coming up with 1-2 questions you're genuinely curious about from this psalm. Don't worry about having the "right" questions, ask about what actually strikes you or confuses you. For example, you might wonder about the harsh language, or why David responds the way he does, or how this fits with other things you know about prayer. Focus on what you're really wondering about, and we'll use your questions to drive our discussion.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive the discussion with their questions. Your role is to facilitate and probe deeper rather than lecture. Help them discover insights through guided exploration.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board and look for themes. Start with questions that will help most students connect with the passage's emotional reality.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What specific evidence do you see in verses 1-5 that these were people David once trusted? How does that change the impact of their accusations?"
 - "In verse 4, David calls himself 'a man of prayer' right after describing their accusations. Why do you think he emphasizes that identity in this moment?"
 - "How do you understand the harsh prayers in verses 6-20? What's David trying to accomplish by praying these things rather than acting on them?"
 - "What changes between verses 1-20 and verses 21-31? What causes David's shift from cursing his enemies to trusting God's justice?"
 - "David chooses prayer over retaliation, but his prayers aren't exactly 'nice.' How do you make sense of that tension?"
 - "Where do you see this same pattern in your own life, wanting to respond to betrayal but wrestling with what kind of response fits your identity?"
-

- "What would be different if David had chosen personal revenge instead of bringing his anger to God in prayer?"
- "Why does it matter that David maintains his identity as 'a man of prayer' even when that prayer includes harsh requests for justice?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? David doesn't suppress his anger or pretend the betrayal doesn't hurt. Instead, he processes all of that intensity through his relationship with God. Being "a man of prayer" doesn't make him less angry, it changes how he handles that anger. Prayer becomes both the method and the identity that shapes his response to injustice.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. You've all experienced betrayal, maybe not as dramatic as David's, but you know what it feels like when friends turn on you, when people spread rumors, when trust gets broken. Where do you see this same tension playing out between wanting justice and choosing how to respond?

Real Issues This Connects To

- When your best friend starts hanging out with people who talk trash about you and doesn't defend you
 - When someone you trusted shares personal information about you to hurt your reputation
 - When family members side against you in conflicts or consistently misrepresent your motives
 - When former friends use social media to exclude you or make you look bad publicly
 - When you witness systemic injustice and feel angry about the gap between how things are and how they should be
 - When you're falsely accused of something and the people who know better stay silent
-

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone handle betrayal in a way that protected their own character even while seeking justice?"
 - "What would help you process intense anger or hurt through prayer rather than through retaliation or withdrawal?"
 - "How do you discern the difference between seeking justice through appropriate channels and pursuing personal revenge?"
 - "What's the difference between authentic prayer that includes difficult emotions and spiritual bypassing that pretends everything's fine?"
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5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Being a person of prayer doesn't mean having perfect emotions or never feeling angry when betrayed. It means letting your identity as someone who talks to God shape how you process and respond to injustice. Prayer becomes the container that can hold your anger, your desire for justice, and your trust in God's character all at the same time.

This week, pay attention to moments when you feel the urge to retaliate or defend yourself. Notice what happens when you bring those feelings into conversation with God first, not to make them disappear, but to let your identity as a person of prayer shape what you do next. Sometimes that might still include seeking justice or addressing wrongs, but it changes the spirit and method of your response.

I'm impressed by the thoughtful questions you asked today and your willingness to wrestle with complex emotions and difficult passages. Keep bringing your real feelings into your relationship with God, that's exactly what authentic prayer looks like, and it's how you'll discover who you're becoming as people of prayer.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that when friends hurt us deeply, we can choose to pray about our feelings instead of trying to hurt them back, even when we feel really angry.

If Kids Ask "Why does David ask God to hurt his enemy's family?"

Say: "David was really angry and hurt, so he told God exactly how he felt. Sometimes when we're really upset, we think of things that aren't very nice. The important thing is that David talked to God about his feelings instead of trying to hurt people himself."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had a really good friend who suddenly started being mean to you or talking about you behind your back. Keep your hand up if that made you feel angry or confused or like you wanted to get them back somehow.

Now here's a harder question: Imagine your best friend starts telling everyone at school that you cheated on a test, even though you didn't. They tell everyone you're a liar and that nobody should trust you. Other kids start avoiding you because of what your friend said. Part of you thinks, "I need to defend myself and tell everyone what my friend is really like." But another part thinks, "If I say mean things back, I'll be just as bad as they are."

Those feelings make total sense. When someone we trust hurts us, especially when they lie about us, it feels unfair and confusing. Our brains want to protect us by fighting back or by making sure everyone knows we're not the bad guy. And sometimes we do need to tell the truth about what's happening.

This reminds me of movies like "Frozen" when Anna discovers that Hans was only pretending to love her so he could take over the kingdom. Or in "Toy Story" when Woody thinks Buzz is trying to replace him. The characters have to figure out what to do when trust gets broken and when people aren't who they seemed to be.

The tricky part is figuring out how to protect ourselves and seek the truth without letting anger turn us into someone we don't want to be. How do we respond to betrayal in a way that keeps our hearts from getting hard or mean?

Today we're going to hear about a time when King David faced exactly this situation. People who used to be his friends were lying about him and trying to destroy his life. Let's find out what he decided to do and what we can learn from his choice.

What to Expect: Kids will readily share experiences of friendship betrayal. Acknowledge them briefly with "That must have felt terrible" or "I can see why that would hurt," then keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

King David was in serious trouble. People who used to be his friends had turned against him. Instead of supporting him, they were now his enemies, spreading lies and trying to destroy his reputation.

David had been kind to these people. He had helped them when they needed it. He had been loyal and trustworthy. But now they were repaying his friendship with hatred and his kindness with cruelty.

Imagine how that felt. Think about your closest friends suddenly deciding to team up against you. They start telling lies about you to everyone they meet. They make up stories about bad things you supposedly did. They work together to turn other people against you.

David's heart was breaking. These weren't strangers or enemies attacking him, these were people he had trusted, people he had cared about, people he had helped. The betrayal cut deep because it came from people he loved.

David could have fought back. He was the king, he had power and influence. He could have used his position to destroy these people who were trying to destroy him. He could have started a campaign to ruin their reputations the way they were ruining his.

But David made a different choice. In the middle of describing how much these people had hurt him, David said something that revealed who he really was deep down.

David could have said, "I am a man of war," or "I am a man of revenge," or "I am a man who fights back." But listen to what he actually said about himself.

Psalm 109:4-5 (NIV)

4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer. 5 They repay me evil for good, and hatred for my friendship.

"I am a man of prayer." That's how David saw himself. Not as someone who gets revenge, but as someone who talks to God about everything that happens in his life, especially the hard things.

But here's what's really interesting: David's prayer wasn't just "Help me be nice to these people." David was honest with God about how angry he felt. He told God exactly what these people had done and how much it hurt.

David prayed some prayers that sound really harsh. He asked God to stop these people from hurting him and others. He asked God to make sure they faced consequences for the lies they were telling and the damage they were causing.

Some of David's prayers might sound scary to us because he was so angry. But here's the important thing: David was bringing his anger to God instead of acting on it himself. He was letting God handle the justice instead of trying to get revenge on his own.

David was choosing to be someone who prays about problems instead of someone who tries to solve problems by hurting other people. Even when he felt really angry and really hurt, he remembered who he was: a man of prayer.

As David poured out his heart to God, telling God about his anger, his hurt, his desire for justice, something began to change. David started remembering that God cares about people who are being treated unfairly.

David realized that God was on his side, not because David was perfect, but because God loves justice and truth. God doesn't like it when people lie about others or when bullies hurt innocent people.

By the end of his prayer, David wasn't focused on his enemies anymore. He was focused on praising God and trusting God to make things right. David chose to let God be the judge instead of trying to be the judge himself.

And you know what? That choice protected David's heart. Instead of becoming bitter and mean like his enemies, David stayed the kind of person God could use. Instead of letting betrayal change who he was, David let his identity as a person of prayer change how he responded to betrayal.

Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice David faced. When friends hurt us or when people are unfair to us, we can choose revenge or we can choose prayer. We can try to hurt them back, or we can talk to God about how we feel and ask Him to help us respond the right way.

What we learn from David is that being a person of prayer doesn't mean we don't feel angry when people hurt us. It means we take those feelings to God first before we decide what to do. Prayer helps us stay the kind of people God can use, even when other people choose to be unkind.

The amazing thing about choosing prayer over revenge is that it protects our hearts from becoming hard and mean. When we let God handle the justice, we can focus on becoming the people God wants us to be.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hurt Feelings

Imagine you found out that your best friend was telling everyone in your class that you steal things from their backpacks, even though you've never stolen anything. Other kids start watching you suspiciously and hiding their stuff when you're around. How do you think you would feel, and what would your first instinct be?

Listen For: "Mad," "Want to tell everyone the truth about my friend," "Hurt", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. Your heart is trying to protect you from being hurt more."

Question 2: The Choice

David could have used his power as king to get revenge on the people who were lying about him. He could have made their lives really difficult. Why do you think he chose to pray about it instead of fighting back right away?

If They Say: "Because revenge is bad", respond: "What do you think prayer does that revenge doesn't do? How does talking to God first help us?"

Question 3: The Identity

David called himself "a man of prayer" right when people were being meanest to him. What do you think it means to be "a person of prayer," and how do you think that identity helped David make good choices even when he felt really angry?

Connect: "This is exactly what made David's choice so powerful, he remembered who he was and let that shape what he did."

Question 4: The Protection

David's choice to pray instead of seeking revenge protected his heart from becoming bitter and mean. What do you think would have happened to David's character if he had chosen to hurt his enemies instead of talking to God about them?

If They Say: "He would have become just like them", respond: "Exactly! How does prayer help us stay the kind of people God can use?"

You've all understood something really important: when we choose prayer over revenge, we're not just protecting other people from our anger, we're protecting our own hearts from becoming hard and mean. That's wisdom beyond your years, and it's exactly what David discovered.

4. Activity: Prayer or Payback (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the choice between prayer and revenge by having kids physically experience the difference between responses that build up versus responses that tear down. Success looks like kids discovering that choosing prayer protects both themselves and others from escalating conflict.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Prayer or Payback." I'm going to divide you into two groups, Group A will be "Prayer People" and Group B will be "Payback People." Each group will start on opposite sides of the room, and I'll give you scenarios where someone treats you badly.

Here's the challenge: Prayer People, when someone is mean to you, your job is to take one step back, fold your hands like you're praying, and say "God, help me respond the right way." Payback People, when someone is mean to you, your job is to take two steps toward them and say something mean back.

The goal is to see what happens to the distance between the groups and the feelings in the room based on which response you choose. We're doing this because it's exactly like what David faced, he had to choose between moving toward conflict or stepping back to pray.

Ready? Here's the first scenario: Group B, someone from Group A accidentally bumped into your desk and knocked over your water bottle.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Watch what happens to the space between groups as Payback People step forward and Prayer People step back. Notice how it feels in the room when one group chooses aggressive responses while the other chooses prayer responses.

Now let's try another scenario: Group A, someone from Group B said your project was stupid in front of everyone. Let's see how each group responds. Pay attention to what's happening to the atmosphere in the room and the distance between groups.

I notice that the Prayer People keep creating space while the Payback People keep closing in for conflict. What if we try something: Prayer People, when you pray, send a blessing toward the other group. Payback People, keep doing what you're doing. Let's see what happens.

Now something amazing is happening, the Prayer People are changing the energy in the room. Even when the Payback People try to escalate, the prayer response is creating a different atmosphere. This is exactly what David experienced.

Let's switch roles for the last scenario so everyone can feel the difference. Previous Prayer People become Payback People, and previous Payback People become Prayer People. Notice how different it feels to respond with prayer versus responding with payback.

Watch For: The moment when kids realize that prayer responses create space for de-escalation while payback responses escalate conflict. This is the physical representation of how our choices shape both the conflict and our own character.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you chose prayer versus when you chose payback? Did you see how prayer responses created space and calm while payback responses made everything more

intense and aggressive? That's exactly what David figured out, choosing prayer doesn't just protect other people from our anger, it protects our own hearts and actually changes the whole situation.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: When friends hurt us or people treat us unfairly, we can choose to be people of prayer instead of people of payback. Being a person of prayer means we take our angry feelings to God first before we decide what to do about the person who hurt us.

This doesn't mean we never tell the truth about what happened or that we just let people be mean to us. It means we talk to God about our feelings first, and then we ask Him to help us respond in a way that protects our hearts and maybe even helps the situation get better.

The amazing result is that when we choose prayer over revenge, we stay the kind of people God can use. Our hearts don't get hard and mean, even when other people's hearts do. We become stronger, not weaker, because we're working with God instead of trying to handle everything on our own.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is mean to you or treats you unfairly, try David's response. Before you say or do anything else, take a step back (like in our game) and pray: "God, this really hurt. Help me respond the right way." Then see what God brings to your mind about how to handle the situation.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us through David that we can bring our hurt feelings and angry thoughts to You. Help us remember to pray first when people are mean to us. Help our hearts stay kind even when others choose to be unkind. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help children learn that when someone is mean to us, we can talk to God about our feelings instead of being mean back to 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 David's choice to choosing whether to hit back when someone pushes you or telling a grown-up instead. Then ask: "Which choice helps your heart stay happy?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about prayer or God's help. Suggestions: "I Can Talk to God," "God is So Good," or "Jesus Loves Me." Use movements: fold hands during prayer words, point up during God words, hug yourselves during love words.

Wow, you sound amazing! Now let's sit in our special horseshoe shape because I have an important story to tell you about a king who had to make a really big choice. Come sit down and get ready to listen!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound sad when talking about betrayal, sound strong when David prays, sound happy when talking about God's help.

Today we're going to meet King David. David was a good king who loved God very much.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

But David had a big problem. Some people who used to be his friends were now being very mean to him. They were telling lies about him and trying to get him in trouble.

[Use sad voice and facial expression]

This made David feel very sad and very hurt. Imagine if your best friend started telling everyone that you did bad things when you didn't. That's how David felt.

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

David had to make a choice. He could be mean back to these people, or he could do something different. What do you think David should do?

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

David made a very special choice. Instead of being mean back, David decided to talk to God about how he felt. Listen to what David said about himself.

[Fold hands like praying]

David said, "I am a man of prayer." That means David's job was to talk to God about everything, especially when he felt sad or angry.

Psalm 109:4 (NIV)

4 In return for my friendship they accuse me, but I am a man of prayer.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think David felt angry? Yes! Do you think David felt sad? Yes! But David knew something important. He knew that talking to God about his feelings was better than being mean to other people.

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

So David prayed to God. He told God exactly how he felt. He said, "God, these people are being mean to me and it hurts my heart. Please help me!"

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

When David talked to God about his feelings, something wonderful happened. David started to feel better. He remembered that God loves him and that God would take care of him.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

David chose to be a person who prays instead of a person who is mean back. And you know what? This choice made David's heart stay happy and kind.

[Speak with excitement]

Because David talked to God instead of being mean, God was able to help David. David's heart stayed good, and he stayed the kind of person God could use.

[Pause dramatically]

God can help us make the same good choice David made. When someone is mean to us, we can talk to God about how we feel instead of being mean back.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, people might be unkind to us. They might say mean words or do mean things. When that happens, we can remember David and choose to pray instead of being mean back.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can say, "God, this made me sad. Please help me know what to do." God always listens when we pray, and He helps our hearts stay kind and good.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

Just like David, we can be people of prayer. That means when we feel upset, we talk to God first. God loves us and wants to help us make good choices with our feelings.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think David felt when his friends were mean to him?
 2. What do you do when someone is mean to you?
 3. Why do you think David called himself "a man of prayer"?
 4. What would you want to tell God if someone hurt your feelings?
 5. How do you think David felt after he prayed to God?
 6. Why is talking to God better than being mean back?
 7. What happened to David's heart when he chose to pray?
 8. When has someone been mean to you at school?
 9. When has someone been mean to you at home?
 10. Who helps you when you feel sad or angry?
 11. Why do you think God wants us to pray about our feelings?
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12. How can you be a person of prayer like David?

13. What does God do when we pray to Him?

14. How does praying help us feel better?

15. What would you say if you wanted to be kind instead of mean?

16. How can prayer help us when we feel angry?

17. What should we remember about God when people are mean?

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

19. What would happen if everyone chose prayer instead of being mean?

20. How can we help our hearts stay happy and kind?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select songs that reinforce prayer and God's help. Suggestions: "When I Pray," "God Hears Me When I Pray," or "I Can Talk to Jesus." Include movements: fold hands for prayer words, point to ears for listening words, point up for God words.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Sit cross-legged in your rows, and let's bow our heads and fold our hands like David did when he prayed.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for King David who showed us how to pray when people are mean to us.

[Pause]

Please help us remember to talk to You when our feelings get hurt. Help us choose to pray instead of being mean back to people who hurt us.

[Pause]

Help our hearts stay kind and happy like David's heart. Thank You for loving us and listening when we pray.

[Pause]

Thank You that You always hear us and help us make good choices. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about talking to God when they're sad or hurt. Examples: "God, help me pray when I'm sad" or "Thank you for listening to me."

Remember, just like David, you can be people of prayer. When someone is mean to you, talk to God about it first. He loves you and will help you know what to do! Have a wonderful week!

Overcoming Evil

Good Defeats Evil, When Will God's Justice Come?

Romans 12:9-21

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Romans 12:9-21 (NIV)

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

Context

Paul's letter to the Romans moves from deep theology to practical Christian living. After eleven chapters explaining justification by faith and God's sovereignty, Paul turns to "how then shall we live?" This passage comes as part of his instructions for Christian community and response to opposition. Paul is writing to Roman Christians who face increasing tension from both Jewish communities and Roman authorities.

These verses conclude a section on love in action. Paul has just discussed spiritual gifts, humility, and genuine love within the community. Now he addresses how Christians should respond to enemies and evil treatment. This isn't abstract theology, it's urgent practical guidance for believers facing real persecution and social hostility in the capital of the empire.

The Big Idea

Revenge belongs to God alone, while humans are called to actively care for enemies and overcome evil through good rather than evil means.

This creates a profound tension: we naturally want justice for wrongs done to us, but God asks us to trust divine timing while actively blessing those who harm us. The "burning coals" imagery suggests our kindness may transform enemies, but the primary goal is our own faithfulness to God's way, not manipulating outcomes.

Theological Core

- **Divine Justice vs. Human Revenge.** God's justice is perfect and comprehensive; human revenge is flawed and partial. We release the right to payback because God's judgment is more trustworthy than our own.
 - **Active Enemy Care.** Loving enemies isn't passive non-resistance; it's active blessing through meeting practical needs. This subverts the natural order and witnesses to God's character.
 - **Good Overcomes Evil.** Evil is not defeated by equal and opposite evil, but by good that is qualitatively different. This principle operates both in individual relationships and cosmic spiritual warfare.
 - **Trust in Divine Timing.** "Leaving room for God's wrath" requires faith that justice will come, even when we cannot see how or when. This is ultimately about trusting God's sovereignty over
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outcomes.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Divine vengeance operates on different principles than human revenge, it's about restoration of cosmic order, not personal satisfaction
 - The complexity of trusting God's justice when it may not look like what we expect or happen in our preferred timeline
 - Kindness to enemies transforms both parties, but we must examine our motivations to ensure we're not manipulating for personal gain
 - Developing discernment about when to trust divine timing versus when to pursue human justice systems
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Grades 4, 6

- When someone hurts us, our job is to choose good actions instead of getting them back
 - Being kind to mean people doesn't mean being unsafe, it means looking for ways to help rather than harm
 - God sees everything that happens and will make sure justice comes, even when adults can't fix it right away
 - Sometimes we feel angry and that's okay, but we can choose to act with love even when we don't feel like it
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Grades 1, 3

- When someone is mean to us, God wants us to be kind to them instead of being mean back
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- God sees everything and takes care of problems when grown-ups can't
 - We can help people who are mean to us by sharing or being nice
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying "burning coals."** This Old Testament image doesn't primarily mean making enemies feel guilty, it suggests transformation through unexpected kindness. Avoid teaching manipulation disguised as love.
 - **Ignoring the justice question.** Students will wrestle with whether trusting God means justice will actually come. Don't promise specific outcomes, but affirm God's ultimate justice and the value of trust even in uncertainty.
 - **Conflating enemy care with enabling abuse.** Loving enemies doesn't mean accepting harmful treatment or failing to protect others. Emphasize wisdom in how love is expressed practically.
 - **Spiritualizing away real emotions.** Anger at injustice is often appropriate and godly. The issue isn't feeling anger but choosing how to channel it, toward good rather than revenge.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if God never punishes the person who hurt me? What if they get away with it?"

This is the heart of faith, trusting that God's justice operates beyond what we can see or understand. Point out that "getting away with it" assumes we can see the full picture of someone's life and consequences. God's justice may look different from human justice, and it operates in eternal timeframes. Our call is to trust and live faithfully, not to manage outcomes.

"Doesn't being kind to enemies just encourage them to keep being mean?"

Sometimes kindness does transform enemies, as the "burning coals" suggests, but that's not guaranteed or the primary purpose. We show kindness because it reflects God's character and maintains our own spiritual integrity. Wise kindness also includes appropriate boundaries, we can care for someone's needs without enabling harmful behavior or compromising safety.

"How is this different from just being a doormat? When do you stand up for yourself?"

Enemy love is not passivity. Paul assumes Christians will face persecution and opposition, not that they'll avoid all conflict. Standing up for yourself can still operate within this framework, you can advocate for truth, protect others, and pursue justice through appropriate channels while refusing personal revenge and maintaining love for opponents. The question becomes not whether to respond, but how.

The One Thing to Remember

When we trust God with justice, we're freed to respond to enemies with good rather than evil, knowing that transformation happens through love, not revenge.

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 their natural desire for justice and God's call to trust divine vengeance while actively caring for enemies. Help them discover that this isn't about being weak, but about trusting a different kind of power.

The Tension to Frame

Does trusting divine vengeance mean justice will actually come in ways we recognize, or is the point learning to release our need for visible justice altogether?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their frustration with injustice, anger at wrongdoing often reflects God's own heart
 - Honor the complexity of situations where kindness to enemies feels impossible or unsafe
 - Let students question whether God's justice will really come rather than rushing to easy assurances
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You're at school and someone has been spreading lies about you for weeks. They've turned some of your friends against you, made you feel stupid in class, and yesterday they publicly embarrassed you in the hallway. You're furious. You've got dirt on this person, you know exactly how to destroy their reputation and make them feel the way they've made you feel.

Part of you knows that getting revenge will probably make things worse and won't actually solve anything. But another part of you is screaming that they deserve it, that someone needs to teach them a lesson, that if you don't stand up for yourself nobody else will. The urge for payback feels almost impossible to ignore.

Here's what makes it even more complicated: adults keep telling you to "be the bigger person" or "just ignore them," but that feels like being told to let them win. You want justice. You want them to understand what they've done and face consequences. Is wanting justice wrong? Is there a difference between justice and revenge?

Today we're looking at Paul's letter to Christians who were facing real persecution and opposition in Rome. Some of them were probably asking the same question you might ask: "If I don't fight back, who will? How do I trust God to handle this when I can't see God doing anything?"

As we read this, I want you to notice two things: what Paul says about who handles justice, and what he suggests we do instead of getting even. Open your Bibles to Romans 12, starting at verse 9.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage contains some challenging concepts, so check in with students who seem confused. Watch for early finishers and direct them to the reflection questions. Let the weight of "love your enemies" and "heap burning coals" create some tension.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions does Paul tell Christians to take when people treat them badly?
 - Why might Paul quote the Old Testament about God's vengeance, what's his point?
 - What do you think "heap burning coals on his head" means? Is it about guilt, transformation, or something else?
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- How would you feel if someone asked you to follow these instructions about your worst enemy?
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Romans 12:9-21 (NIV)

9 Love must be sincere. Hate what is evil; cling to what is good. 10 Be devoted to one another in love. Honor one another above yourselves. 11 Never be lacking in zeal, but keep your spiritual fervor, serving the Lord. 12 Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer. 13 Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality.

14 Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse. 15 Rejoice with those who rejoice; mourn with those who mourn. 16 Live in harmony with one another. Do not be proud, but be willing to associate with people of low position. Do not be conceited.

17 Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. 18 If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. 19 Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: "It is mine to avenge; I will repay," says the Lord. 20 On the contrary: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head." 21 Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who feel confident reading aloud. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose dramatic readers for the quotes from Deuteronomy and Proverbs in verses 19-20.

Reader 1: Verses 9, 13 (Christian community standards) **Reader 2:** Verses 14, 18 (Living at peace with others) **Reader 3:** Verses 19, 21 (God's vengeance and enemy care)

As you listen this time, pay attention to the emotional intensity of what Paul is asking. This isn't casual advice, it's radical re-orientation of how we respond to evil.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to generate real questions about this passage. Walk between groups to listen for emerging themes. If a group is stuck, suggest they start with "What surprised you most?" or "What feels hardest about this?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious or confused about, not questions you already know the answer to. Good questions might start with "Why does Paul..." or "What would happen if..." or "How can we..." You've got 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive the discussion with their questions. Your role is to facilitate deeper thinking and guide discovery rather than lecture. Help them wrestle with the tensions rather than resolving them too quickly.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes like justice, practicality, motivation, and outcomes. Start with questions most students can relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between what Paul says in verse 17 ('do not repay evil for evil') and what he says in verse 19 ('leave room for God's wrath')?"
 - "Paul quotes Deuteronomy: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay.' What do you think divine vengeance looks like compared to human revenge?"
 - "Is feeding your hungry enemy a way to manipulate them into feeling guilty, or is Paul after something different?"
 - "The 'burning coals' image comes from Proverbs. What do you think it suggests about the effect of kindness on enemies?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between trusting God's justice and just being a doormat?"
 - "What would it look like to 'overcome evil with good' in conflicts you actually face, school, social media, family?"
-

- "If someone followed Paul's advice perfectly but their enemy never changed and never faced consequences, would that be success or failure?"
- "Why might Paul connect enemy love with trusting divine justice, what does one have to do with the other?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what Paul is doing here? He's not just telling people to be nice. He's offering a completely different way to think about power and change. Instead of fighting evil with equal and opposite evil, he suggests that good is actually stronger than evil, that kindness can accomplish what revenge can't. But it requires trusting that God's justice operates on a different timeline and in ways we might not recognize.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out, that struggle between wanting justice and trying to trust God with it? Think about school drama, family conflicts, social media trolls, even bigger issues like injustice you see in the world.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Someone spreads rumors about you or betrays your trust
 - A teacher or coach treats you unfairly and you have evidence to get them in trouble
 - Online harassment or cyberbullying where you could easily retaliate
 - Family members who consistently hurt or disappoint you
 - Systemic injustice where traditional authority figures seem unwilling to address real problems
 - Friend groups where someone is consistently mean or exclusionary
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations require different responses, help them think through discernment. Validate their anger while exploring the difference between righteous anger and personal revenge.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen kindness actually change someone's behavior toward you or others?"
 - "What would help you trust God's justice when you can't see any evidence that consequences are coming?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between godly anger at injustice and personal desire for revenge?"
 - "What's the difference between enemy love and enabling someone to keep hurting people?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Paul isn't asking you to pretend that injustice doesn't hurt or that you shouldn't care about fairness. He's asking you to trust that God's justice is bigger and better than anything you could arrange, and that this trust frees you to respond with good instead of evil. This takes incredible strength, not weakness.

This week, pay attention to moments when you feel that urge for payback or revenge. Notice it without judging it. Then ask: "What would it look like to respond with good here? What would it mean to trust God's justice in this situation?" You don't have to be perfect at this, just notice and experiment.

You asked really good questions today and wrestled with things that even adults struggle with. Keep asking hard questions about faith and justice. The tension you feel about these passages often means you're taking them seriously, which is exactly what Paul would want.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that choosing good responses instead of getting even is possible because God sees everything and will make things right.

If Kids Ask "What if the mean person never gets in trouble?"

Say: "God sees everything that happens, even when grown-ups miss it. God's way of making things right might look different from our way, but we can trust that God cares about fairness even more than we do."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone be mean to you on purpose, maybe they said something hurtful, broke something of yours, or left you out on purpose. Keep your hand up if you wanted to get them back somehow, to make them feel as bad as they made you feel.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where you knew the right thing to do was probably to be kind or forgive someone, but part of you really wanted them to get in trouble first. Maybe you wanted them to say sorry, or for a teacher to see what they did, or for other people to know how mean they were being.

Those feelings make total sense! When someone hurts us, our brain wants to protect us and make sure they can't hurt us again. Part of protecting ourselves is making sure they understand that what they did was wrong. But here's the tricky part: sometimes the person who hurt us never seems to get in trouble, and sometimes we can't make them understand what they did.

It's like in movies when the bully picks on the main character and nobody sees it, or when the mean girl is super nice to adults but cruel to other kids when adults aren't watching. You want to shout "Why doesn't anyone see what's really happening?"

The tricky part is figuring out what to do when you can't get back at someone and you're not sure anyone in charge will make things fair. Do you have to just let them keep being mean? Do you become mean too? Is there another choice?

Today we're going to hear about some Christians who lived in Rome, the most powerful city in the world, and they were having this exact problem. People were being mean to them, sometimes dangerous, and the government wasn't helping. Let's find out what the apostle Paul told them to do.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to unfairness. Some may share specific examples, acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really frustrating" and keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Imagine living in the biggest, most powerful city in the world. Rome was like New York City, Washington DC, and Hollywood all rolled into one. Everyone who was anyone wanted to live there.

But if you were a Christian in Rome, life was getting harder and harder. Some of your Jewish neighbors were angry because you believed Jesus was the Messiah. Some of your Roman neighbors thought Christians were weird and dangerous.

People would say mean things about Christians in the marketplace. Sometimes they'd refuse to do business with you. Some Christians lost their jobs. Others had their property damaged. And when Christians went to the authorities for help, often the authorities didn't care, or worse, they sided with the people causing trouble.

Imagine how frustrating that would be! You're trying to follow Jesus and love people, and they're treating you badly for it. You want someone in charge to step in and make it stop, but nobody seems to care about fairness.

So the apostle Paul wrote a letter to these Roman Christians. Paul understood exactly what they were going through because it had happened to him too, people had been mean to him, lied about him, even beaten him up for talking about Jesus.

But Paul had learned something important about how to respond when people are cruel and nobody in charge seems to care. He didn't tell them to just let people walk all over them, and he didn't tell them to get revenge.

Instead, Paul reminded them about something amazing: God sees everything. Even when parents don't see it, even when teachers miss it, even when police don't care, God sees everything that happens. And God cares about fairness even more than we do.

Paul told them, "Don't take revenge. Don't try to get people back for hurting you."

Now some of the Christians probably thought, "But Paul, if we don't stand up for ourselves, who will? How will they learn that what they're doing is wrong?"

And Paul said something that probably surprised them. He said, "Let God handle that part."

Romans 12:19 (NIV)

"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."

In other words, "God says, 'Making people face consequences for their wrong choices, that's my job, not yours.'" Paul was reminding them that God is the ultimate authority, higher than any emperor or governor or parent.

But then Paul said something even more surprising. He didn't just tell them what not to do, don't get revenge. He told them what TO do instead.

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he's thirsty, give him something to drink."

Wait, what? Be NICE to the people who are being mean to you? That seems backwards!

Romans 12:20 (NIV)

"If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head."

Now, "burning coals" sounds scary, but Paul was quoting an old saying that meant something like "your kindness will make them feel ashamed of how they've treated you." Sometimes when you're really kind to someone who's been mean to you, it helps them realize how wrong they've been.

But here's the most important thing Paul said: "Don't let evil win over you. Instead, let good win over evil."

Paul was teaching them something amazing: evil is actually weaker than good. When someone is mean to you and you're mean back, the meanness grows bigger and stronger. But when someone is mean to you and you respond with good, the good is more powerful.

It's like fighting darkness with light instead of fighting darkness with more darkness. Light always wins.

The Christians who heard this letter had to make a choice. They could try to get back at their enemies, or they could trust that God sees everything and would handle the justice part while they focused on the goodness part.

Many of them chose to trust God. And you know what happened? Sometimes their kindness really did change people's hearts. Sometimes their enemies became friends. And even when that didn't happen, the Christians stayed true to who God wanted them to be.

They discovered that when you trust God to handle fairness, you're free to focus on goodness. And good really is stronger than evil.

Sometimes in our lives, people are mean to us and it doesn't seem like anyone notices or cares. But God always notices. God always cares. And God can handle making things right so that we can focus on doing what's good and kind and right.

When we choose to respond with good instead of getting even, we're showing that we trust God to take care of the justice part. And that's exactly what God wants us to do.

We learn that God's way is always to overcome evil with good, not to overcome evil with more evil. And God's way always works, even when it takes longer than we wish it would.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine your worst enemy at school, someone who's been really mean to you, comes to lunch one day and realizes they forgot their lunch money and have no food. You have extra snacks in your backpack that you could share. How do you think you would feel in that moment? What thoughts would go through your head?

Listen For: "I wouldn't want to help them," "They deserve it," "I'd feel bad for them but also kind of happy",
affirm: "Those are honest feelings! It's really hard to want to help someone who's hurt you."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Let's say you decided to share your snacks with that enemy. What do you think might happen? What would be the best thing that could happen? What would be the worst thing? Would it be worth the risk?

If They Say: "They'd just be mean to me again", respond: "That might happen. What do you think Paul would say about that? Why might it still be the right choice?"

Question 3: God's Job vs. Your Job

Paul said making people face consequences is God's job, not ours. But being kind to enemies is our job. Why do you think God divided it up that way? What's good about letting God handle the justice part while we handle the kindness part?

Connect: "This is exactly why the Christians in Rome found it so freeing, they didn't have to figure out how to make things fair AND be good people at the same time."

Question 4: Light vs. Darkness

If being mean back to someone who's mean to you makes the meanness grow bigger, and being kind to them helps goodness win, what would happen in our school if everyone started choosing good responses instead of getting even? How might things change?

If They Say: "Everyone would have to do it or it wouldn't work", affirm: "That's a good point. But Paul says even one person choosing good can overcome evil. What do you think makes good so powerful?"

You guys understand something really important: it's hard to be kind to people who are mean to you, but when you do it, you're choosing God's way instead of the world's way. And God's way is always stronger, even when it doesn't feel like it at first.

4. Activity: Light vs. Darkness Challenge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that good overcomes evil through cooperation and kindness rather than fighting evil with more evil. Success looks like kids discovering that helping each other is more powerful than competing against each other, even when it's hard.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Light vs. Darkness Challenge. Half of you are the Darkness Team, your job is to make it hard for people to find their way across the room. The other half is the Light Team, your job is to help people get safely from one side to the other.

Here's the challenge: Darkness Team, you'll create "obstacles" by standing in the middle and gently tagging people trying to cross, which means they have to start over. Light Team, you'll be guides who can hold hands with people and help them navigate around the obstacles safely.

Here's the twist: every minute, I'll add more obstacles, making it harder and harder. But Light Team, you have a special power, if two light guides work together to help someone across, that person becomes a light guide too.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul taught, when darkness tries to stop good things, light doesn't fight darkness directly. Light just keeps shining and helping, and eventually light becomes stronger than darkness.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start the first round with equal teams. Watch as kids struggle with obstacles and begin to realize that light guides working alone can't help everyone get across safely when darkness keeps growing.

After about a minute, add more obstacles. Notice when kids start to get frustrated or feel like the light team can't win. This represents the feeling of being overwhelmed by meanness or evil.

Coach with phrases like: "Light team, what happens when you work together? I wonder if there's more power when light guides help each other help others..." Guide them toward cooperation without giving away the answer.

Celebrate the moment when light guides start working together and new people become light guides too. This is the breakthrough moment: cooperation creates more goodness rather than just fighting badness.

Once they've succeeded, have them notice how many light guides there are compared to when they started. The room should now be mostly filled with light guides who can help anyone get across safely.

Watch For: The moment when light guides realize they're stronger working together than fighting obstacles individually, this is the physical representation of good overcoming evil through cooperation rather than opposition.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when light guides tried to fight obstacles directly versus when they worked together to help people? At the end, what was stronger, the obstacles or the light? This is exactly what Paul meant when he said good overcomes evil. Good doesn't fight evil by being evil back, good grows stronger by creating more goodness.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when someone is mean to us, God wants us to choose good responses instead of getting them back. God sees everything that happens and will make sure justice comes, so we can focus on being kind and good even to people who hurt us.

This doesn't mean letting people walk all over you or pretending it doesn't hurt when someone is cruel. It means trusting that God is big enough to handle the making-things-fair part while you handle the being-good part.

The amazing result is that good really is stronger than evil. When we choose kindness instead of revenge, we're choosing God's way, and God's way always wins in the end.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is mean to you or treats you unfairly, try this: First, tell God about how it made you feel and ask God to handle the justice part. Then ask, "What would a good response look like?" Try one act of kindness toward someone who's been unkind to you.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for seeing everything that happens to us, even when other people don't notice. Help us trust you to make things fair so we can focus on being kind, even to people who are mean to us. Help us remember that your way, choosing good instead of getting even, is always stronger. 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 mean people instead of being mean back, and that God sees everything and takes care of problems.

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 being kind to mean people to turning on a light when a room is dark, the light always wins over darkness.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness or God's love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "The Fruit of the Spirit," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: point to others during verses about loving others, make a big heart with arms during choruses, clap hands during upbeat sections.

Great singing! Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape for story time. We're going to hear about a time when people were being mean to Christians, and what God told them to do about it.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound sad when talking about people being mean, sound strong and confident when talking about God and Paul's advice.

Today we're going to meet some Christians who lived far away in a big city called Rome.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

These Christians loved Jesus very much. They tried to be kind and good. But some people in their city were being mean to them!

[Make a sad face, speak with concern]

People would say mean things about the Christians. Sometimes they wouldn't be their friends anymore. Some Christians felt very sad and confused.

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

The Christians wondered, "What should we do? Should we be mean back to them? Should we say mean things too?"

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

So God's helper Paul wrote them a letter. Paul said, "Don't be mean to people who are mean to you. Don't try to get them back."

[Move to side, sound like a confused Christian]

Some Christians said, "But Paul, what if they keep being mean? Who will stop them?"

Romans 12:19 (NIV)

"Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Paul told them, "God sees everything! God will take care of making things right. That's God's job, not yours!"

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

But then Paul said something that surprised everyone. He said, "If someone who's mean to you is hungry, give them food! If they're thirsty, give them water!"

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Be NICE to the people who are mean to you? That sounds backwards! But Paul explained that being kind to mean people sometimes helps them realize they've been wrong.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Then Paul told them the most important thing: "Don't let mean things make you mean. Instead, let good things beat the mean things!"

[Speak with excitement]

Paul taught them that being good is stronger than being mean! It's like turning on a light when it's dark, the light always wins!

[Pause dramatically]

The Christians learned that God sees everything that happens to them. Even when grown-ups don't see it, God sees it!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, kids are mean to us at school or siblings are mean to us at home. We want to be mean back to them!

[Move closer to the children]

But God says, "Instead of being mean back, try being kind. Let me handle making things fair. You handle being good!"

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

When we're kind to mean people, we're choosing God's way. And God's way always wins!

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 a question to talk about. You'll have about one minute to share your ideas. 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 Christians felt when people were mean to them?
 2. Have you ever wanted to be mean to someone who was mean to you?
 3. Why do you think Paul told them not to be mean back?
 4. What would you do if someone took your toy and wouldn't give it back?
 5. How does it feel when someone is kind to you after you've been grumpy?
 6. Why does God see everything even when grown-ups don't?
 7. What changed when the Christians chose to be kind instead of mean?
 8. When is it hard to be kind at school?
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9. When is it hard to be kind at home with your family?

10. Can you think of someone who needs kindness?

11. Why is being good stronger than being mean?

12. How can you be kind to someone who's been unkind to you?

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

14. How does it feel to trust God with problems?

15. When have you seen kindness change someone's heart?

16. What do you want to remember from today's story?

17. How can we help others choose kindness?

18. What would you tell God about mean people?

19. What would happen if everyone chose kindness?

20. How can we be like the good Christians in the story?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines for our closing 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 choosing good. Suggestions: "Love, Love, Love," "I Will Choose Jesus," or "God Is So Good." Include movements like hugging motions for love songs, pointing up for God songs, or marching in place for strong choruses.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit cross-legged in rows for our prayer time. We're going to talk to God about being kind to people who are mean to us.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for seeing everything that happens to us...

[Pause]

Help us remember to be kind to people who are mean to us. Help us trust you to take care of making things right...

[Pause]

When we feel like being mean back, help us choose your way instead. Help us remember that being good is stronger than being mean...

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and taking care of us even when we can't see how. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind to mean people. Examples: "God, help me be nice to kids who aren't nice to me" or "Thank you for seeing when people are mean to me."

Remember, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose to be kind back because God sees everything and will take care of you. Have a wonderful week!

Generosity's Protection

Light Versus Darkness, Does generosity really guarantee protection?

Tobit 14:1-15

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

Tobit 14:1-15 (NIV)

1 So Tobit ended his words of praise. 2 He was fifty-eight years old when he lost his eyesight, and after eight years he regained it. He gave alms, and he continued to fear the Lord God and to praise him. 3 When he had grown very old he called his son and the six sons of his son and said to them: "My children, take my words to heart; listen to what I say to you. 4 Serve God faithfully and do what is pleasing in his sight. Your children should also be commanded to do what is right and to give alms, and to be mindful of God and to bless his name at all times with sincerity and with all their strength.

5 So now, my son, leave Nineveh; do not remain here. 6 On whatever day you bury your mother beside me, do not stay overnight within the confines of the city. For I see that there is much wickedness within it, and that much deceit is practiced within it, while the people are without shame. See, my son, what Nadab did to Ahikar who had reared him. 7 Was he not, while still alive, brought down into the earth? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar.

8 See what Nadab did to Ahikar who had reared him. Was he not, while still alive, brought down into the earth? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar. 9 Because he gave alms, Ahikar escaped the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him, but Nadab fell into it himself, and was destroyed.

10 So now, my children, see what almsgiving accomplishes, and what righteousness delivers! It is better to die than to live unrighteously; it is better to give alms than to lay up gold. 11 For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, 12 but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies.

13 "I will now tell you the whole truth, my son. When I was an infant, the tribe of my ancestor Naphtali deserted from the house of David and from Jerusalem, which had been chosen from among all the tribes of Israel, where all the tribes of Israel should offer sacrifice and where the temple, the dwelling of God, had been consecrated and established for all generations forever. 14 All my ancestors and the whole house of my ancestor Naphtali sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected in Dan; this was also done by all the tribes. 15 But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the festivals, as it is prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree."

Context

Tobit is speaking from his deathbed to his son Tobias and grandsons. As an elderly man who has experienced decades of faithfulness, suffering, divine intervention, and restoration, Tobit shares his final wisdom about righteousness and generosity. This is his parting testimony about what truly matters in life, drawn from hard-earned experience.

The immediate context is Tobit's instruction to leave Nineveh because of its wickedness. He uses the story of Ahikar and Nadab, likely a well-known tale, to illustrate his central point about the protective power of almsgiving and the self-destructive nature of wickedness. This isn't theoretical teaching but practical wisdom from a man who has lived it.

The Big Idea

Generosity creates divine protection that preserves life; wickedness creates traps that destroy those who practice it.

This isn't a mechanical guarantee but a spiritual pattern Tobit has observed throughout his life. The contrast between light and darkness shows that moral choices have cosmic consequences, though the timing and specific outcomes remain in God's hands rather than human calculation.

Theological Core

- **Almsgiving provides divine protection.** Generosity creates a spiritual hedge around the giver that can deflect enemies' schemes and preserve life in dangerous circumstances.
 - **Wickedness rebounds on the wicked.** Evil actions create consequences that often circle back to destroy those who practice them, demonstrating divine justice even when human courts fail.
 - **Light versus darkness reveals moral outcomes.** The contrast between Ahikar's emergence into light and Nadab's descent into darkness shows that moral choices determine spiritual destinies.
 - **Divine preservation operates through righteousness.** God's protection isn't arbitrary but connected to faithful living, particularly care for the poor and vulnerable through almsgiving.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Tobit's deathbed wisdom represents a spiritual pattern observed over a lifetime rather than a mathematical formula
 - The tension between divine protection and suffering requires discernment about when to expect miraculous intervention versus faithful endurance
 - Practical application involves trusting God through generous living while accepting that protection may come in unexpected forms
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- Wisdom literature teaches principles that are generally true but must be applied with nuance to specific situations
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Grades 4, 6

- Generous people often find help when they need it because generosity creates friendships and divine favor
 - Mean actions tend to create problems that circle back to hurt the person who was mean
 - God notices and cares about how we treat other people, especially those who need help
 - Sometimes doing the right thing feels scary, but God provides protection and help to those who choose generosity
-

Grades 1, 3

- Being generous and sharing helps keep us safe and happy
 - God likes it when we are kind to other people
 - Being mean to people creates problems for ourselves
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Prosperity Gospel Misinterpretation.** Don't present this as "give money and God will protect you from all harm." Tobit himself experienced blindness, exile, and suffering despite his faithfulness. The protection is real but mysterious, not mechanical.
 - **Ignoring the Wisdom Literature Genre.** This is deathbed wisdom, not prophetic prediction. Tobit shares patterns he's observed over a lifetime, not promises about specific outcomes in every situation.
 - **Oversimplifying Divine Justice.** Avoid suggesting that all suffering results from wickedness or that all prosperity results from righteousness. Job and other biblical examples complicate this pattern.
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- **Missing the Relational Dimension.** The protection isn't just supernatural but practical, generous people build networks of relationships that often provide help in times of need, while selfish people isolate themselves.
-

Handling Hard Questions

"What about generous people who still get hurt or killed?"

Tobit himself was generous but still went blind and experienced years of suffering. The protection isn't a force field against all harm but a spiritual principle that operates in mysterious ways. Sometimes protection means physical safety, sometimes it means spiritual preservation through trials, and sometimes it means eternal safety even when earthly life ends. Tobit's wisdom comes from observing patterns over a lifetime, not making guarantees about every individual case.

"Does this mean poor people aren't generous enough?"

Absolutely not. Generosity isn't about the amount given but the heart behind the giving. Jesus praised the widow who gave two small coins more than rich people who gave larger amounts. Generosity means sharing what you have, whether that's money, time, food, or kindness. Many poor people are incredibly generous with what little they have, while some wealthy people hoard their resources.

"How do we know if someone's suffering is because of wickedness or just bad luck?"

We don't, and we shouldn't judge. This passage focuses on Tobit encouraging generous living based on his experience, not on evaluating other people's circumstances. When we see suffering, our job is to respond with compassion and help, not to determine whether the person "deserves" it. The pattern Tobit describes is about choosing our own actions, not judging others.

The One Thing to Remember

Generosity creates divine protection and builds relationships that preserve life, while wickedness creates traps that destroy those who practice it, though God's timing and methods remain mysterious.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between trusting God's protection through generous living and accepting that divine protection doesn't always prevent suffering. Help them understand wisdom literature as spiritual patterns rather than mathematical guarantees.

The Tension to Frame

If generosity really provides divine protection, why do generous people sometimes suffer while selfish people sometimes prosper? How do we live generously when protection isn't guaranteed?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of seeing good people suffer and bad people succeed
 - Honor the complexity by distinguishing between wisdom principles and prophetic promises
 - Let them wrestle with the mystery rather than providing neat theological answers
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you're scrolling through social media and see two stories. First story: A family loses their home to a fire, and within 24 hours, their community raises \$50,000 to help them rebuild. The comments are full of people saying "They deserve this help, they've always been there for everyone else." Second story: A wealthy businessman gets caught in a massive fraud scheme and loses everything, including his family, because of his own greed and lies.

Your first instinct might be to think, "See? Good people get rewarded and bad people get punished." That feels right, doesn't it? When generous people find help and selfish people create their own problems, it seems like the universe is working the way it should.

But then you remember other stories. The teacher who spends her own money on supplies for students but can barely pay her rent. The nurse who works extra shifts to help patients but gets COVID and dies. The activist fighting for justice who gets imprisoned. Suddenly the pattern doesn't seem so clear.

Today we're looking at an old man named Tobit giving deathbed advice to his family. He tells them a story about two men, one generous, one wicked, and claims that generosity provides divine protection while wickedness destroys itself. He's not theorizing; he's sharing what he's learned from a lifetime of experience.

As we read, pay attention to whether Tobit is making promises about what will always happen or describing patterns he's observed. There's a difference, and it matters for how we apply this to our own lives.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "almsgiving" or "righteousness." Let students feel the weight of deathbed wisdom, this isn't casual advice but final words from someone who has lived through decades of experience.

As You Read, Think About:

- What happened to Ahikar and Nadab, and why does Tobit think it happened?
 - What does Tobit mean by "light" and "eternal darkness"?
 - How does Tobit connect almsgiving to protection and survival?
 - What would you think if your grandfather gave you this advice on his deathbed?
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Tobit 14:1-15 (NIV)

1 So Tobit ended his words of praise. 2 He was fifty-eight years old when he lost his eyesight, and after eight years he regained it. He gave alms, and he continued to fear the Lord God and to praise him. 3 When he had grown very old he called his son and the six sons of his son and said to them: "My children, take my words to heart; listen to what I say to you. 4 Serve God faithfully and do what is pleasing in his sight. Your children should also be commanded to do what is right

and to give alms, and to be mindful of God and to bless his name at all times with sincerity and with all their strength.

5 So now, my son, leave Nineveh; do not remain here. 6 On whatever day you bury your mother beside me, do not stay overnight within the confines of the city. For I see that there is much wickedness within it, and that much deceit is practiced within it, while the people are without shame. See, my son, what Nadab did to Ahikar who had reared him. 7 Was he not, while still alive, brought down into the earth? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar.

8 See what Nadab did to Ahikar who had reared him. Was he not, while still alive, brought down into the earth? For God repaid him to his face for this shameful treatment. Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar. 9 Because he gave alms, Ahikar escaped the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him, but Nadab fell into it himself, and was destroyed.

10 So now, my children, see what almsgiving accomplishes, and what righteousness delivers! It is better to die than to live unrighteously; it is better to give alms than to lay up gold. 11 For almsgiving saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life, 12 but those who commit sin and do wrong are their own worst enemies.

13 "I will now tell you the whole truth, my son. When I was an infant, the tribe of my ancestor Naphtali deserted from the house of David and from Jerusalem, which had been chosen from among all the tribes of Israel, where all the tribes of Israel should offer sacrifice and where the temple, the dwelling of God, had been consecrated and established for all generations forever. 14 All my ancestors and the whole house of my ancestor Naphtali sacrificed to the calf that King Jeroboam of Israel had erected in Dan; this was also done by all the tribes. 15 But I alone went often to Jerusalem for the festivals, as it is prescribed for all Israel by an everlasting decree."

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic contrast between Ahikar and Nadab.

Reader 1: Verses 1-6 (Tobit's introduction and call to leave Nineveh) **Reader 2:** Verses 7-9 (The story of Ahikar and Nadab) **Reader 3:** Verses 10-15 (Tobit's conclusions about almsgiving and righteousness)

Listen for the contrast between what happened to these two men. This isn't just a story, it's an old man's final wisdom about how the world works.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What doesn't make sense?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why did..." or "What if..." or "How can..." Don't worry about having the "right" questions; ask what you're actually wondering about. You have three minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive the discussion with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Honor their real experiences and doubts.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around justice, protection, suffering, and the connection between actions and consequences.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence does Tobit give for his claim that almsgiving provides protection?"
-

- "Why does Tobit emphasize that Ahikar 'came out into the light' while Nadab went into 'eternal darkness'?"

- "Is Tobit promising that generous people will never suffer, or is he describing a general pattern with exceptions?"

- "How do you reconcile this teaching with examples of generous people who suffer or selfish people who prosper?"

- "What's the difference between divine protection and guarantee of an easy life?"

- "When have you seen generosity create protection or wickedness create self-destruction in real life?"

- "What would change about Tobit's advice if Ahikar had died in the trap despite his generosity?"

- "Why does Tobit think this pattern matters enough to share as his final words to his family?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening in Tobit's worldview? He's not saying "be generous and nothing bad will ever happen to you", remember, he himself went blind for eight years despite his faithfulness. Instead, he's saying that over a lifetime of observation, he's seen that generosity creates divine protection and builds relationships that preserve life, while wickedness tends to create traps that destroy those who practice it. It's wisdom about spiritual patterns, not a mathematical formula.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. You're old enough to see this pattern playing out around you, and you're also old enough to see the exceptions that complicate it. Where do you see examples of generosity creating protection or selfishness creating problems in school, families, social media, or current events?

Real Issues This Connects To

- The student who always helps others with homework and finds study groups eager to help them when they're struggling

- Family dynamics where generous relatives have strong support networks while selfish ones end up isolated

- Friendship circles where the person who's always available for others receives loyalty, while those who only take eventually get cut off
- Online behavior where consistently kind people build positive communities while trolls create toxic environments that eventually consume them
- Social justice movements where those fighting for others gain broad support while oppressors create resistance that undermines their power
- Personal decision-making about whether to prioritize helping others or protecting your own interests

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to neat conclusions. Some situations are complex and require different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about when to expect protection.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen generous people receive help when they needed it most?"
- "What would help you choose generosity even when protection isn't guaranteed?"
- "How do you discern when to expect divine intervention versus when to endure faithfully through suffering?"
- "What's the difference between wise generosity and naive generosity that enables harmful behavior?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Tobit's deathbed wisdom isn't a promise that generous people never suffer, but an observation that generosity creates divine protection and builds relationships that tend to preserve life over time. It's a spiritual pattern worth trusting even when we can't predict exactly how it will work in specific situations.

This week, pay attention to how generosity and selfishness play out around you. Notice when helping others creates help in return, and when selfish behavior creates problems for the selfish person. Look for the pattern without expecting it to be simple or automatic.

I'm proud of how you wrestled with hard questions today. Keep asking them. Faith that can't handle honest questions isn't worth much, and God is big enough for your doubts and observations about how the world actually works.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that generosity creates protection and friendship while meanness creates problems that hurt the mean person. Focus on concrete examples they can relate to.

If Kids Ask "What if generous people still get hurt?"

Say: "Sometimes bad things still happen to good people, but generous people usually have friends to help them through hard times, while mean people often face problems alone."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever helped someone carry their books when they dropped them, or shared your lunch with someone who forgot theirs, or included someone who was sitting alone. Keep your hands up! Now, raise your hand if you've ever needed help and someone came to rescue you, maybe when you were lost, or hurt, or having a really bad day.

Here's a trickier question. Have you ever seen someone who was really mean to other people end up having problems because of their meanness? Like the class bully who ends up with no friends? Or someone who cheats and gets caught? Or someone who lies and then gets in trouble when people stop trusting them?

It's interesting how that works, isn't it? When you're kind and helpful to others, people want to be kind and helpful back to you. But when someone is mean or selfish, it often comes back to hurt them. Part of you probably thinks that's fair, but another part of you might wonder if it always works that way.

This pattern reminds me of stories like "The Lion and the Mouse" where the mouse's kindness to the lion saves the mouse's life later. Or like in "Frozen" where Anna's willingness to sacrifice herself for Elsa breaks the curse and saves them both. Kindness creates protection; selfishness creates problems.

The tricky part is figuring out whether we should be kind because it protects us, or just because it's the right thing to do even when it doesn't seem to help us immediately.

Today we're going to hear about an old, wise man named Tobit who told his family a story about two men, one who was generous and one who was wicked. Tobit believed that the generous man's kindness saved his life while the wicked man's meanness destroyed him. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will have lots of examples of both kind people being helped and mean people facing consequences. Acknowledge these briefly but keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Tobit was a very old man lying on his deathbed, surrounded by his son and grandsons. His hair was white, his hands were wrinkled, but his eyes were bright and clear. He had lived for many, many years and had learned important things about how life works.

Tobit had been through a lot. He had been blind for eight long years, and his family had been very poor. But he had always, always been generous to people who needed help. Even when he didn't have much, he shared what he had with hungry people and poor people.

Now, as he was about to die, he wanted to tell his family the most important things he had learned. He called them close and said, "Listen carefully to what I'm about to tell you, because this is really, really important."

Imagine being one of those grandchildren, sitting quietly by your grandfather's bed, knowing these might be his last words. You would pay attention to every single thing he said, wouldn't you?

Tobit began to tell them a story about two men. The first man was named Ahikar. Ahikar was generous and kind. He helped people who needed help. He gave money to poor people. He took care of people who were hungry or didn't have homes.

The second man was named Nadab. Now here's the interesting part: Ahikar had actually raised Nadab like his own son. Ahikar had been like a father to Nadab, teaching him, feeding him, taking care of him.

But Nadab grew up to be greedy and mean.

Nadab looked at Ahikar and thought, "I want what he has. I want his money and his house and his position." So Nadab came up with an evil plan. He decided to set a trap to kill Ahikar so he could take everything for himself.

Can you imagine? The man who had raised him like a son was planning to murder him! Nadab dug a deep pit and covered it with branches and leaves, just like in cartoons where someone falls through what looks like solid ground.

But then something amazing happened. Ahikar discovered the trap before he fell into it! How did he escape? Tobit explained: "Because Ahikar had been generous his whole life, God protected him."

Tobit 14:9 (NIV)

"Because he gave alms, Ahikar escaped the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him, but Nadab fell into it himself, and was destroyed."

Did you catch what happened? Nadab, the one who dug the trap, fell into his own trap! The pit he had made to hurt someone else ended up destroying him instead. It's like in cartoons when the villain's plan backfires and they get caught in their own scheme.

Tobit told his family, "Ahikar came out into the light", meaning he was safe and free and alive. "But Nadab went into eternal darkness", meaning his wickedness destroyed him completely.

Tobit 14:8 (NIV)

"Ahikar came out into the light, but Nadab went into the eternal darkness, because he tried to kill Ahikar."

Then Tobit looked at his family with serious, loving eyes and said something really important. He said, "Do you see what this means? When you give to people who need help, when you're generous, God saves you from danger. When you're righteous and good, God delivers you from trouble."

Tobit had seen this pattern his whole life. Kind, generous people seemed to find help when they needed it. Mean, selfish people seemed to create problems that came back to hurt them.

He told his family, "It's better to give your money away to help people than to store it up for yourself. It's better to be generous than to be rich but selfish."

And then Tobit said something that must have made his grandsons' eyes grow wide: "Almsgiving", that means giving to poor people, "saves from death and purges away every sin. Those who give alms will enjoy a full life."

Sometimes in our lives, we see this same pattern. The kid who always shares their snacks finds that other kids share with them when they forget their lunch. The student who helps others with homework finds study partners when they're struggling. The family that helps their neighbors finds neighbors rushing to help them during emergencies.

What we learn from Tobit's story is that God notices when we're generous and kind to other people, especially people who really need help. Our generosity creates a kind of protection around us, not like a magic force field, but like a network of love and friendship and God's care.

The amazing thing is that meanness often creates the opposite. Mean people often end up lonely and in trouble, like Nadab falling into his own trap.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Think about Ahikar finding out that Nadab, the young man he had raised like his own son, was trying to kill him. How do you think that felt? Have you ever been really hurt by someone you had been kind to? Maybe someone you helped who then said mean things about you, or someone you trusted who then broke that trust?

Listen For: "Sad," "angry," "confused", affirm: "Yeah, that would be heartbreaking. When someone we've been good to hurts us, it makes us question whether kindness is worth it."

Question 2: The Rescue

Tobit says Ahikar escaped the trap "because he gave alms", because he was generous to poor people. What do you think that connection is? Why would being generous to some people protect you from a totally different person's trap?

If They Say: "God was watching" or "Good people have more friends", respond "Both of those could be true. How might God use friends to provide protection?"

Question 3: The Pattern

Nadab's plan was to hurt Ahikar, but instead, Nadab got hurt by his own plan. Have you ever seen something like this happen? When someone's meanness or selfishness came back to hurt them instead of the person they were trying to hurt?

Connect: "This is exactly what Tobit noticed over his long life, wickedness often destroys the wicked person."

Question 4: The Choice

If you knew for sure that being generous would protect you and being selfish would hurt you, would that change how you act? Or should we be generous just because it's right, even if it doesn't always protect us?

If They Say: Both motives are okay, respond "You're right. Sometimes we start being kind because it helps us, and then we learn to be kind just because we love people."

You're all thinking really good thoughts about this. What I hear you discovering is that generosity and kindness often do create protection and friendship, but the best reason to be generous is because it's the right thing to do and because God loves it when we care for each other.

4. Activity: Protection Circle (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces how generosity creates mutual protection by having kids physically experience how helping others builds a network that protects everyone. Success looks like kids discovering that the people who help others receive help when they need it most.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Protection Circle." Everyone spread out around the room and stand alone. I'm going to call out different challenges that might happen to you, and you'll have to figure out how to handle them.

Here's the twist: some of you will be "Generous People" and some will be "Selfish People." Generous People must help anyone who asks for help. Selfish People can only worry about themselves. We'll see what happens when both groups face the same challenges.

I'll give you each a secret identity by tapping you on the shoulder. Don't tell anyone else whether you're generous or selfish, just act it out. When someone asks for help, Generous People say yes and Selfish People say no.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Ahikar and Nadab's situation, generosity creates protection while selfishness creates isolation.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Challenge 1: "Everyone with brown eyes, you're lost and need directions home!" Let them approach others and ask for help. Watch how Generous People start clustering together as they help each other.

Challenge 2: "Everyone wearing blue, you're carrying heavy books and your backpack broke!" See how Generous People immediately find multiple helpers while Selfish People struggle alone.

Challenge 3: "Everyone whose name starts with A through M, you're being chased by a bully and need people to stand with you!" Notice how Generous People have already built alliances and protection networks.

Call out: "Look around! Who has the most protection and help right now? What's the difference between how the two groups are doing?"

Challenge 4: "Now something bad happens to all the Selfish People at once, you all need help with the same big problem!" Watch them realize they have no network of people willing to help them.

Watch For: The moment when Generous People naturally form supportive clusters while Selfish People end up isolated, this is the physical representation of how generosity creates protection networks.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt to be generous versus selfish when problems came up? The Generous People built friendships and alliances that protected them when they faced challenges. The Selfish People ended up facing problems alone. This is exactly what Tobit observed about Ahikar and Nadab, generosity creates protection while selfishness creates isolation and vulnerability.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God loves it when we're generous and kind to people who need help, and our generosity often creates protection for us through friendships and God's care. Meanwhile, mean and selfish behavior tends to create problems that hurt the person being selfish.

This doesn't mean generous people never have problems or that every bad thing happens because someone was selfish. Sometimes bad things just happen. But over time, generous people usually have more friends to help them through hard times, while selfish people often face difficulties alone.

The amazing result is that when we choose generosity, we build a network of love and friendship that makes everyone safer and happier, including ourselves.

This Week's Challenge

Look for one opportunity each day to be generous, share something, help someone, include someone who's alone, or give something to someone who needs it. Notice how it feels and whether people respond differently to you when you're generous.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us through Tobit's story that generosity creates protection and friendship. Help us to be generous and kind like Ahikar, not selfish and mean like Nadab. When we're tempted to only think about ourselves, remind us that helping others helps everyone. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Teach kids that being generous and sharing keeps us safe while being mean creates problems for ourselves.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare generous Ahikar to a helpful friend at school, then ask "What happens when someone is always helpful versus always mean?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about sharing or kindness. Suggestions: "Share Your Toys," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: stretch arms wide during "share," point to friends during "kind," and make heart shapes with hands during "love."

Great singing! Now let's sit in our story circle because I have an amazing story about two men, one who was generous and one who was mean. Find your spots on the floor and get ready to hear what happened to them!

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 kind when you're Ahikar, sound sneaky and mean when you're Nadab.

Today we're going to meet a very old, very wise man named Tobit who had something important to tell his family.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Tobit was lying in his bed, and all his children and grandchildren gathered around him. He was about to tell them the most important story he could think of, a story about two men.

[Use a kind, warm voice]

The first man was named Ahikar. Ahikar was the most generous, kindest person you could ever meet! He shared his food with hungry people. He gave money to families who didn't have enough. He helped anyone who needed help.

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

The second man was named Nadab. Now, here's the sad part: Ahikar had taken care of Nadab when Nadab was little, like a daddy. But Nadab grew up to be greedy and mean.

[Move to center, look concerned]

One day, mean Nadab looked at good Ahikar and thought, "I want everything he has! I want his house and his money!" So Nadab came up with a terrible plan.

[Move to side, sound sneaky]

Nadab decided to dig a deep pit, a trap! He covered it with sticks and leaves so it looked like regular ground. He wanted Ahikar to fall in and get hurt so he could steal everything!

Tobit 14:9 (NIV)

"Because he gave alms, Ahikar escaped the fatal trap that Nadab had set for him, but Nadab fell into it himself, and was destroyed."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think Ahikar fell into the trap because he was generous to poor people? No! God protected him and helped him see the trap before he fell in!

[Move to center, speak with amazement]

But guess what happened to mean Nadab? He fell into his own trap! The pit he dug to hurt someone else ended up hurting him instead!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Old Tobit told his family, "Ahikar came out into the light", that means he was safe and happy and alive. "But Nadab went into darkness", that means his meanness destroyed him.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Then Tobit said something very important to his family: "When you share with people who need help, God keeps you safe. When you're good and kind, God protects you!"

[Speak with excitement]

Tobit had seen this his whole long life! Kind people found help when they needed it. Mean people created problems for themselves.

[Pause dramatically]

God loves it when we share our toys, our snacks, our kindness with other people. When we're generous like Ahikar, God takes care of us!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or home, we see this same thing. The kid who shares their crayons finds friends who share back. The kid who helps others gets help when they need it. But the kid who's mean often ends up playing alone.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone needs help or looks sad or hungry, you can choose to be like generous Ahikar and help them. God sees your kindness and keeps you safe!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves generous hearts! When we share and care for others, we're doing exactly what makes God happy, and God always takes care of children who have generous hearts.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner! I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. You'll have about one minute to share your ideas with each other. 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 Ahikar felt when he found out Nadab was trying to hurt him?
2. What would you do if someone you had been nice to was mean to you back?
3. Why do you think God protected Ahikar from the trap?
4. Have you ever seen someone be really generous and then get help when they needed it?
5. What changed between the beginning and end of this story?
6. How does God feel when we share with people who need help?
7. What happened to Nadab because he was mean?
8. Can you think of a time at school when sharing helped you make friends?

9. What happens at home when you share your toys versus when you don't?

10. Do you know someone who is always kind to others?

11. Why did Nadab's mean plan not work?

12. How can you be like generous Ahikar this week?

13. What does it mean that God protects generous people?

14. Would you rather have friends like Ahikar or Nadab? Why?

15. What would happen if everyone was generous like Ahikar?

16. How do you feel when someone shares with you?

17. What should we remember most about this story?

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

19. What would happen if Nadab had been kind instead of mean?

20. What's the best way to help someone who looks sad?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our story circle. 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 God's protection or caring for others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God Will Take Care of You," or "Love One Another." Include movements: hug yourself during "loves me," stretch arms protectively during "take care," and point to friends during "love one another."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for prayer. Find your prayer spot on the floor and fold your hands 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 the story of Ahikar and Nadab...

[Pause]

Help us to be generous and kind like Ahikar. When we see someone who needs help or looks sad, help us share what we have with them...

[Pause]

Help us remember that when we're generous, you keep us safe and give us good friends. Help us not be mean or selfish like Nadab...

[Pause]

Thank you that you love generous hearts and that you always take care of kids who are kind to others. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about sharing and kindness. Examples: "Help me share my snacks" or "Thank you that God protects kind people."

Remember to look for ways to be generous this week! God loves it when you share and help others, and he always takes care of kids with kind hearts. Have a wonderful week!
