

Loving Difficult People

Volume 8

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Loving Difficult People

Volume 8

Published by

1611 Press

www.1611press.com

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons: Loving Difficult People

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First Edition: 2026

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

Love Without Return

Generous Like God, When does generous giving become unwise?

Luke 6:27-42

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

Luke 6:27-42 (NIV)

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

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

37 Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven. 38 Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed

down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.

39 He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit? 40 The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher. 41 Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye? 42 How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."

Context

Jesus delivers this teaching during his Sermon on the Plain in Luke's Gospel, immediately after calling the twelve disciples and drawing massive crowds from throughout the region. This teaching comes after the Beatitudes and woes, addressing disciples who will face persecution and enemies. The historical context includes Roman occupation, social tensions between Jews and Gentiles, and economic disparities where lending and borrowing were everyday survival issues.

Jesus speaks directly to "you who are listening", those choosing to follow him despite the cost. He's preparing them for a kingdom ethic that defies conventional wisdom about reciprocity, self-protection, and resource management. The teaching culminates in a call to divine imitation: be merciful as your Father is merciful. This isn't merely moral instruction but identity formation for people learning to live as God's children in a hostile world.

The Big Idea

God's children practice enemy-love and no-return generosity because this is how God treats us, showing kindness to the ungrateful and wicked without expecting reciprocity.

Yet this radical generosity raises genuine questions about wisdom, enabling harmful behavior, and practical stewardship. The reward is "great" but undefined, and the motivation shifts from self-interest to divine resemblance. This teaching challenges us to examine whether our giving truly mirrors God's character or serves our own need for control and return.

Theological Core

- **Divine Imitation.** We are called to be "children of the Most High" by reflecting God's character in our relationships. Our identity as God's family shapes how we treat others, especially enemies.
 - **No-Return Generosity.** True generosity expects nothing back, mirroring how God gives to us. This challenges transactional thinking and reveals whether we're truly trusting God's provision.
 - **Enemy-Love as Identity Marker.** Loving those who love us requires no faith. Enemy-love demonstrates our transformation and dependence on God's power rather than human reciprocity.
 - **Mercy Modeling.** God's mercy to the ungrateful and wicked establishes the pattern for how we extend mercy. We give because we have received, not to earn or manipulate.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- True generosity without expectation of return reflects God's character and challenges our transactional mindset
 - Enemy-love isn't naive, it requires wrestling with practical wisdom while maintaining divine imitation as the goal
 - The tension between generous giving and enabling irresponsibility requires discernment, not avoidance of generosity
 - Our identity as "children of the Most High" shapes how we respond to those who can't or won't reciprocate
-

Grades 4, 6

- Helping people who can't help you back shows you're part of God's family
 - Sometimes the right choice is to be kind even when others aren't kind to you
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- God helps everyone, even people who don't say thank you or ask nicely
 - Your feelings might say "that's not fair," but you can choose to be generous anyway
-

Grades 1, 3

- God is kind to everyone, even people who aren't kind back
 - God loves us and helps us even when we forget to say thank you
 - We can be kind like God is kind
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Ignoring the wisdom question.** Students will rightly ask if this teaching enables harmful behavior or irresponsibility. Don't dismiss these concerns, acknowledge that divine imitation requires both generosity and discernment, not blind giving that harms others.
 - **Making it about earning rewards.** The "great reward" can easily become transactional motivation. Emphasize that the reward flows from identity as God's children, not from generous behavior designed to manipulate God's response.
 - **Spiritualizing away practical application.** This teaching addresses real lending, real enemies, and real resource decisions. Help students grapple with concrete scenarios rather than reducing it to general "be nice" principles.
 - **Assuming enemy-love means accepting abuse.** Enemy-love can include boundaries, consequences, and protection of others. The teaching challenges retaliation and hatred, not all forms of resistance to harmful behavior.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't lending without expecting return just enable people to be irresponsible?"

That's a wise concern that shows you're thinking about the real impact of your choices. Jesus isn't calling us to enable harmful patterns, but to examine our motives for giving. Sometimes the most loving thing is to say no or to give differently. The key is asking: Am I withholding help because I'm protecting myself, or because I genuinely believe this approach will help them more? God gives to the ungrateful, but God also allows consequences that teach us. The point is that our motivation shifts from "what's in it for me" to "how does this reflect God's character."

"What if someone keeps taking advantage of my generosity?"

Jesus calls us to love our enemies, but love doesn't mean accepting abuse or enabling destructive patterns. Sometimes love requires boundaries, honest conversations, or changing how we help. The goal is divine imitation, God is both generous and wise. Ask yourself: How can I continue to reflect God's character in this situation? That might mean generous forgiveness, wise boundaries, or finding different ways to help that don't reward harmful behavior. The challenge is maintaining a generous heart even when you need to be wise about method.

"How do I know when I'm being generous versus being a pushover?"

Great question. The difference often lies in motivation and wisdom. Generous giving flows from security in God's provision and desire to reflect his character. Being a pushover usually comes from fear, people-pleasing, or inability to set healthy boundaries. Ask: Am I giving because I want to be like God, or because I'm afraid of conflict? Am I considering what's truly helpful, or just what's easiest? God's generosity includes both abundance and wisdom, he gives good gifts, not whatever people demand. Sometimes the most generous thing is honest conversation or appropriate limits.

The One Thing to Remember

We give without expecting return not because it's easy or always safe, but because that's how God treats us, and learning to be generous like God is worth wrestling with the hard questions.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between radical generosity and practical wisdom, helping them discover how divine imitation reshapes our approach to giving, lending, and enemy-love. Your goal is not to resolve the tension but to help them engage it honestly.

The Tension to Frame

When does generous giving become unwise? How do we practice no-return generosity without enabling irresponsibility or ignoring practical stewardship?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their concerns about being taken advantage of, these are legitimate wisdom questions, not failures of faith
 - Honor the complexity by acknowledging that divine imitation requires both generosity and discernment
 - Let students wrestle with specific scenarios rather than settling for abstract principles
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: You've got a friend who's always asking to borrow money. Twenty dollars here, fifty there, always with promises to pay you back soon. But "soon" never comes. Your parents have warned you, your other friends think you're being naive, but every time they ask, you feel bad saying no. Part of you wants to keep helping because that feels like the right thing to do.

But another part of you is starting to wonder if you're actually helping or just making it easier for them to avoid responsibility. Maybe your generosity is becoming a problem instead of a solution. You want to be a generous person, but you're starting to feel like a ATM machine with legs. What's the difference between being generous and being a pushover?

Today we're looking at some of Jesus's most challenging words about generosity, enemy-love, and giving without expecting anything back. Except Jesus was talking to people who had even more at stake, facing real enemies, real persecution, and real economic pressure where a wrong decision about lending could mean the difference between survival and disaster.

As we read, pay attention to how Jesus connects our generosity to God's character, and notice what he says about the reward for this kind of giving. Also watch for how this teaching challenges normal assumptions about fairness, reciprocity, and protecting yourself from being taken advantage of.

Let's open our Bibles to Luke chapter 6, starting at verse 27. Read silently through verse 42, and think about what surprises you or makes you uncomfortable in this passage.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room, helping with difficult words if needed. Watch for early finishers and remind them to think about the reflection questions. Let them feel the weight and challenge of this teaching, don't rush them through it.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions does Jesus command, and which ones challenge you most?
- Why does Jesus compare his followers' behavior to how "sinners" act?
- What does he say about God's character that's supposed to motivate our behavior?
- How would you feel if someone took Jesus's words completely literally in every situation?

Luke 6:27-42 (NIV)

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

32 If you love those who love you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners love those who love them. 33 And if you do good to those who are good to you, what credit is that to you? Even sinners do that. 34 And if you lend to those from whom you expect repayment, what credit is that to you? Even sinners lend to sinners, expecting to be repaid in full. 35 But love your enemies, do

good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.
36 *Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.*

37 *Do not judge, and you will not be judged. Do not condemn, and you will not be condemned. Forgive, and you will be forgiven.* **38** *Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you.*

39 *He also told them this parable: "Can the blind lead the blind? Will they not both fall into a pit?"* **40** *The student is not above the teacher, but everyone who is fully trained will be like their teacher.* **41** *Why do you look at the speck of sawdust in your brother's eye and pay no attention to the plank in your own eye?"* **42** *How can you say to your brother, 'Brother, let me take the speck out of your eye,' when you yourself fail to see the plank in your own eye? You hypocrite, first take the plank out of your eye, and then you will see clearly to remove the speck from your brother's eye."*

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the more challenging commands and longer paragraphs.

Reader 1: Verses 27-31 (The radical commands) **Reader 2:** Verses 32-36 (The divine motivation)

Reader 3: Verses 37-42 (Reciprocity and judgment)

Listen for how Jesus escalates the challenge, notice the progression from normal behavior to extraordinary behavior, and pay attention to his reasoning for why this matters.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for each group to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What made you uncomfortable?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what we just read, not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about or struggling with. For example: "How do you know if you're being generous or just being stupid?" or "What does Jesus mean by 'great reward' and why doesn't he say what it is?" You've got three minutes. Ask about what you really want to understand.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive the discussion with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guiding discovery rather than lecturing. Let them wrestle with the tension.

Collecting Questions: Let me hear your questions and I'll write them on the board. We'll look for themes and start with the questions that resonate with most of you.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that Jesus is talking about specific, concrete actions rather than general attitudes?"
- "Why do you think Jesus compares his followers to 'sinners' three times in verses 32-34?"
- "What does it mean that God 'is kind to the ungrateful and wicked', is that fair?"
- "How do you handle the tension between 'give to everyone who asks' and practical wisdom about enabling bad behavior?"
- "What's the difference between being 'children of the Most High' and just being nice people?"
- "Where do you see this kind of no-return generosity playing out in real life today?"
- "What would change in your relationships if you truly expected nothing back from your kindness?"
- "Why might Jesus withhold specifics about what the 'great reward' actually is?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus isn't just giving random commands about being nice. He's saying our generosity should mirror God's character, and God gives to ungrateful, wicked people without expecting anything back. That's revolutionary because it means our motivation shifts from "what's in it for me" to "how do I reflect who God is." It challenges every assumption about fairness, reciprocity, and self-protection.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out, wanting to be generous but worrying about being taken advantage of? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, friendships, or even broader issues like poverty and social justice.

Real Issues This Connects To

- The friend who always wants to copy homework but never offers help when you need it
 - Family members who take your generosity for granted or expect constant help
 - People online asking for money or support for causes that may or may not be legitimate
 - Social media interactions where you're kind to people who consistently post negativity or attack others
 - Debates about welfare policies, immigration assistance, or foreign aid where people question whether help enables dependency
 - Situations where standing up for someone might cost you socially but staying silent feels cowardly
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Acknowledge that different situations may call for different responses, and help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone practice this kind of no-return generosity, and what was the result?"
-

- "What would help you distinguish between generous love and naive enabling in specific situations?"
- "How do you discern when to give freely and when to set boundaries or say no?"
- "What's the difference between wisdom that protects others and self-protection that uses wisdom as an excuse?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus isn't calling you to be naive or to enable harmful behavior, but he is calling you to examine your motives for giving and withholding. The goal is learning to be generous like God is generous, and God is both abundantly kind and infinitely wise. This isn't about following a simple rule; it's about growing into people who reflect God's character even when it's complicated.

This week, pay attention to moments when you have the opportunity to help someone who probably can't or won't reciprocate. Notice what you feel, what you're afraid of, and what motivates your decision to help or not help. Ask yourself: Am I reflecting God's character, or am I protecting my own interests? There's no shame in wrestling with these questions, this is hard stuff that requires both generous hearts and wise minds.

You did some excellent thinking today about genuinely difficult questions. Keep wrestling with them. The world needs people who can be generous without being naive, and learning that balance is worth the effort it takes. I'm confident you're up for this challenge.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that helping people who can't help you back is how God treats us, and it's one way we show we're part of God's family. Keep it concrete and encourage them to wrestle with their feelings about unfairness.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps taking my stuff?"

Say: "That doesn't feel fair, does it? Sometimes being generous doesn't mean giving whatever people want. It means finding wise ways to help. God wants us to be kind AND smart."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever helped someone who couldn't help you back. Maybe you helped a little kid who dropped their books, or you were kind to someone who was being picked on, or you gave something to someone who didn't have anything to give you in return. Keep your hands up for a minute.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever felt frustrated when you helped someone and they didn't even say thank you. Or when you were generous to someone and then they turned around and were mean to you later. How did that make you feel? Part of you probably thought, "Why did I even bother helping them?" But another part of you might have felt good about doing the right thing anyway.

Those feelings make complete sense. Your brain is designed to notice fairness, and when someone doesn't appreciate your kindness or doesn't return it, that feels wrong. Sometimes it makes you want to say, "Fine, I'll never help them again." And honestly, sometimes that might be the wise choice.

This reminds me of the movie "Coco," where Miguel keeps trying to help his family understand his music, even though they keep saying no and getting angry. Or think about Moana, who had to help Te Fiti even though Te Fiti had become a lava monster who was trying to destroy everything. The heroes kept choosing to help even when it didn't seem like it would work out for them.

The tricky part is figuring out when to keep being generous and when it's wise to try a different approach. How do you know if you're being kind like God wants, or if you're just letting people walk all over you? How do you stay generous when people don't appreciate it?

Today we're going to hear about some surprising things Jesus said about helping people who can't, or won't, help you back. He was talking to his followers who were facing real enemies, real persecution, and real situations where generosity could be dangerous. But Jesus told them something amazing about why this kind of giving matters and what it shows about who they really are. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids may share stories about unfairness or being taken advantage of. Acknowledge their feelings briefly, "That would be frustrating", then maintain momentum toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture Jesus sitting on a hillside with thousands of people gathered around him. These weren't just curious visitors, many of these people had real problems. Some were poor and desperately needed help. Others were sick and hoping for healing. Some were being treated badly by enemies who had more power than they did.

In the crowd were fishermen who could barely make ends meet, tax collectors that everyone hated, women who weren't allowed to speak in public, and people whose own neighbors looked down on them. Many of them knew what it felt like to ask for help and be turned away. They knew what it was like to be treated unfairly.

Jesus looked out at all these people who understood pain and injustice, and he said something that must have shocked them. He didn't say, "Make sure you get treated fairly first." He didn't say, "Only help people who deserve it." Instead, he said something much more challenging.

Imagine you're sitting on that hillside, maybe hungry, maybe worried about money, definitely worried about people who don't like you. How would you feel if someone told you to be extra nice to the very people who were making your life difficult?

But Jesus wasn't finished. He looked at them with love and said words that seemed impossible: "Love your enemies. Do good to people who hate you. Bless people who say mean things about you. Pray for people who hurt you." Can you imagine how that sounded to people who were actually being hurt by real enemies?

Then Jesus gave them examples that hit close to home. "If someone hits you on one side of your face, let them hit the other side too. If someone steals your coat, give them your shirt as well. Give to everyone who asks you for something. If someone takes what belongs to you, don't demand it back."

By now, the people in the crowd were probably looking at each other like, "Is he serious? This sounds like a recipe for getting walked all over by everyone!" Their brains were probably screaming, "But that's not fair!" Because it wasn't fair. Jesus was asking them to do things that felt completely backwards.

Then Jesus told them something that helped explain why this mattered so much. He said, "If you only love people who love you back, what's so special about that? Even people who don't follow God do that much. If you only do good things for people who do good things for you, so what? Everyone does that."

Jesus was helping them see that normal human kindness, the kind where you're nice to people who are nice to you, isn't actually that impressive. It's basic human behavior. It doesn't require any faith, any courage, or any trust in God. It's just trading niceness for niceness.

But then Jesus said something that must have made them sit up and pay attention:

Luke 6:35-36 (NIV)

35 But love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked. 36 Be merciful, just as your Father is merciful.

Wait. Did you catch that? Jesus said that when you help people without expecting anything back, it shows that you're "children of the Most High." That means you're part of God's family. You're acting like God acts.

And how does God act? Jesus said God "is kind to the ungrateful and wicked." Think about that. God helps people who never say thank you. God gives good things to people who ignore him, disobey him, and sometimes even hate him. God doesn't wait for people to earn his kindness or prove they deserve it.

That's revolutionary! Jesus was telling them, "When you love your enemies and help people who can't help you back, you're not being naive or stupid. You're being like God. You're showing that you really understand what God is like, and you're reflecting his character to the world."

But Jesus wasn't done. He told them that this kind of giving would bring them a "great reward." He didn't say what the reward would be, but he promised it would be worth it. Maybe the reward was becoming more like God. Maybe it was the joy of reflecting his character. Maybe it was freedom from always needing to get something back.

The people on that hillside had to make a choice. Would they trust that God's way of generosity was better than the world's way of keeping score? Would they believe that giving without getting back could actually be the path to blessing rather than the path to being taken advantage of?

Some of them probably went home that day and started trying it. Instead of only helping people who could return the favor, they began helping people who couldn't. Instead of only lending money to people who could pay them back, they started giving to people who might never be able to repay them.

And you know what? They discovered that Jesus was right. When they stopped keeping score and started giving like God gives, they found freedom they'd never experienced before. They stopped being controlled by whether people appreciated them or treated them fairly. They started experiencing the joy of reflecting God's character.

Sometimes people still took advantage of their generosity. Sometimes their kindness wasn't returned. But they learned that giving like God gives isn't about controlling other people's responses, it's about becoming the kind of people God created them to be.

This is like when you help someone even though they can't help you back, and you discover that it feels good to be generous just because generosity is beautiful. You're not doing it to get something in return, you're doing it because that's who you want to be.

What Jesus taught them, and us, is that helping people who can't help you back isn't naive or foolish. It's one of the most powerful ways to show that you understand what God is like. It's how you prove that you're really part of his family, because that's exactly how God treats all of us.

God loves us even when we forget to pray. He helps us even when we don't say thank you. He's kind to us even when we make mistakes or ignore him. And when we love others the same way, without keeping score, without demanding payback, we show the world what God's love looks like.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Unfair Feeling

Think about a time when you helped someone and they didn't even say thank you, or when you were kind to someone and they were mean to you later. Your first thought was probably, "That's not fair!" If Jesus were sitting next to you in that moment, what do you think he would say about those feelings? Are you wrong for feeling frustrated when people don't appreciate your kindness?

Listen For: "That's not fair," "I'd be mad", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. Your brain is designed to notice fairness, and Jesus isn't saying those feelings are wrong."

Question 2: The God Connection

Jesus said that when we help people who can't help us back, we're acting like God does. Can you think of ways that God helps you even though you can't really help God back? What are some things God gives you that you could never repay him for?

If They Say: If they mention specific gifts like family, food, or health, respond "Yes! And does God wait for you to earn those things or prove you deserve them?"

Question 3: The Smart Choice

Sometimes being generous and wise at the same time is tricky. If someone kept asking you for help but never said thank you and kept making the same bad choices, how would you balance Jesus's teaching with being smart about how you help? What's the difference between giving up on someone and finding a different way to help?

Connect: "This is exactly why Jesus's teaching is so challenging, it requires both generous hearts and wise minds. Sometimes love changes how we help, not whether we help."

Question 4: The Family Resemblance

Jesus said that helping people without expecting payback shows you're "children of the Most High", part of God's family. If someone watched how you treat people who can't do anything for you, what would they learn about what God is like? How does your generosity show your family resemblance to God?

If They Say: If they worry they're not good enough examples, respond "God's working on all of us. The point isn't being perfect; it's choosing to reflect his character more and more."

You've shared some really thoughtful insights about generosity, fairness, and wisdom. I can tell you understand that being like God means caring more about reflecting his character than keeping score with people. Now let's do an activity that helps us experience what this kind of giving feels like.

4. Activity: The Chain of Kindness (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces no-return generosity by having kids physically experience the difference between transactional helping (where you only help people who can help you back) and God-like helping (where you help whoever needs it). Success looks like kids discovering that generous chains create more connection and joy than transactional helping.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "The Chain of Kindness." First, I'm going to divide you into two groups: the "Green Group" and the "Blue Group." Green Group, stand on this side of the room. Blue Group, stand on that side. Each person needs to remember whether you're green or blue.

Here's how Round 1 works: When I say "go," your job is to find someone from your same color group and do a simple kind act, like giving them a high-five, telling them something nice, or pretending to share something with them. But here's the catch: you can only help someone if they can immediately help you back in the exact same way. If they can't return the favor right away, find someone else.

Round 2 will be different: you can help anyone in the room, regardless of their color, and you don't need them to help you back at all. Your only job is to be kind to whoever seems like they could use kindness, even if they can't return it.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus was teaching, the difference between only helping people who can help you back versus helping anyone who needs it, just like God helps everyone whether they can help him back or not.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round 1, Ready, go! Remember, same color only, and they have to be able to help you back immediately. You've got two minutes to create as many kindness exchanges as possible where everyone gets helped equally.

As they play, watch how they start limiting their kindness only to people who can immediately reciprocate. Notice if anyone gets left out because they can't return favors quickly enough. Some kids may start forming exclusive pairs rather than including everyone.

Time! Freeze where you are. Look around the room. Who got included in lots of kindness exchanges? Who got left out? How did it feel to only help people who could help you back immediately? Remember those feelings.

Now for Round 2, this time, help anyone who seems like they could use kindness, regardless of their color. Don't worry about whether they can help you back. Your only job is to spread kindness to whoever needs it. Ready, go!

Watch how the dynamic changes. Kids should start including everyone, creating longer chains of kindness, and focusing on actual need rather than ability to reciprocate. The room should feel more connected and joyful.

Watch For: The moment when someone helps a person who clearly can't help them back but does it joyfully anyway, this is the physical representation of God-like generosity that expects nothing in return.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you could only help people who could immediately help you back, versus when you could help anyone who needed it? In Round 1, you had to keep calculating whether each person could return the favor. In Round 2, you could just focus on being kind. That's the difference between keeping score and giving like God gives, it actually feels better to give without expecting anything back!

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: helping people who can't help you back isn't naive or foolish, it's how you show you're part of God's family. God helps everyone, even people who forget to say thank you or who don't appreciate his kindness. When you love like that, you're acting like God acts.

This doesn't mean you have to give people whatever they want whenever they want it. Sometimes being wise means finding different ways to help or setting appropriate boundaries. But it does mean that your heart stays generous even when people don't appreciate you or can't return your kindness.

The amazing result is that when you stop keeping score and start giving like God gives, you become free. Free from needing everyone to appreciate you. Free from controlling whether people return your kindness. Free to reflect God's character just because that's who he created you to be.

This Week's Challenge

This week, look for one opportunity to help someone who probably can't help you back, maybe a younger kid, someone new at school, or someone who seems lonely. Notice how it feels to be kind without expecting anything in return. Remember that when you do this, you're showing what God's love looks like.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for being kind to us even when we forget to say thank you. Help us to be generous like you are generous. When it's hard to help people who can't help us back, remind us that this is how we show we're part of your family. Help us have wise and generous hearts. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God is kind to everyone, even people who aren't kind back, and we can be kind like God is kind.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
-

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare God's kindness to how a good parent helps their child even when the child is cranky or forgetful, then ask "How can you be kind like God?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love and kindness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God is So Good," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: spread arms wide during "Jesus loves," point to heaven during "God," and hug yourself during "loves me."

What beautiful singing! I can tell God loves hearing your voices. Now let's sit in a horseshoe shape on the floor because I have an amazing story to tell you about how kind God is and how we can be kind too!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound gentle when talking about God's kindness, sound excited when talking about being God's children.

Today we're going to meet Jesus! Jesus was sitting on a hill talking to lots and lots of people.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Some of the people listening were sad. Some were worried. Some had people who were mean to them. They all came to hear what Jesus would say.

[Use gentle, caring voice]

Jesus looked at all these people with love. He wanted to teach them something very important about being kind. But what he said surprised everyone!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, sound excited]

Jesus said, "I want you to love your enemies! Be kind to people who are mean to you! Help people even if they can't help you back!"

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

The people probably thought, "What? That doesn't sound fair!" And you know what? It doesn't sound fair to us either sometimes.

[Move to side, sound like you're explaining something important]

But then Jesus told them WHY this was so important. He said something amazing!

Luke 6:35 (NIV)

35 Love your enemies, do good to them, and lend to them without expecting to get anything back. Then your reward will be great, and you will be children of the Most High, because he is kind to the ungrateful and wicked.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what Jesus was saying? He was saying that when you're kind to everyone, even people who aren't kind back, you show that you're God's child!

[Move to center, speak with authority and joy]

And do you know why? Because that's exactly how God treats us! God is kind to everyone, even people who forget to say thank you. Even people who don't listen to him. Even people who make bad choices!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Think about it, does God wait for you to be perfect before he loves you? No! Does God only help good people? No! God loves everyone and helps everyone because that's what love does.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So when you help someone who can't help you back, you're acting just like God! When you're kind to someone who's grumpy, you're showing God's love!

[Speak with excitement]

Jesus said this makes you "children of the Most High." That means you're part of God's family! You're acting like God acts!

[Pause dramatically]

God gives us sunshine and rain. God gives us food and families. God helps us even when we forget to pray or say thank you. That's just how kind God is!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, someone might be mean to you. Or someone might ask for help but never help you back. Your feelings might say, "That's not fair!"

[Move closer to the children]

When that happens, you can remember that God loves you even when you're grumpy. God helps you even when you forget to be thankful. And you can be kind like God is kind!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

Being kind like God doesn't always feel easy. But it shows everyone what God's love looks like. And God promises that when you love like he loves, good things happen!

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 of friends 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 the people felt when Jesus said to be kind to mean people?
2. What are some ways God is kind to you every day?
3. How do you feel when someone is mean to you but you choose to be kind anyway?
4. What would you do if someone never said thank you for your help?
5. What changed when Jesus explained why being kind matters?
6. How does God help you even when you forget to ask?
7. What happened to the people who listened to Jesus?
8. How can you be kind to someone at school who can't help you back?
9. What does it mean to be "God's child"?
10. Who do you know who is kind like God is kind?
11. Why do you think God helps everyone, even people who aren't thankful?
12. How can you remember to be kind when someone is grumpy?
13. What does God's kindness teach us about what God is like?
14. When is it hard to be kind without getting kindness back?
15. How can you be brave enough to help someone who might not help you?
16. What did you learn about God from this story?
17. What do you want to remember about being kind?

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

19. What would happen if everyone was kind like God is kind?

20. How does being kind show people what God's love is like?

Great discussions! Let's come back together. 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: "Love is Something if You Give it Away," "I've Got the Joy," or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: hands on heart during "love," giving motions during "give it away," and pointing to others during "you."

Beautiful singing about love and kindness! Now let's sit quietly for prayer time. Sit cross-legged in rows and fold your hands.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for being so kind to everyone, even us.

[Pause]

Please help us remember that when we're kind to people who can't help us back, we're showing everyone what you're like. Help us have kind hearts even when it's hard.

[Pause]

Help us remember that we're your children, and you want us to love like you love.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us even when we forget to say thank you. Thank you for helping us every day. 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 like God. Examples: "Help me be nice to my sister" or "Thank you for being kind to me."

Remember, you can be kind like God is kind! Have a wonderful week showing people what God's love looks like. I'm proud of how well you listened and shared today!

Turn the Other Cheek

Beyond Eye for Eye, When Does Non-Resistance Enable Evil?

Matthew 5:33-48

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 5:33-48 (NIV)

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' **34** But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; **35** or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. **36** And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. **37** All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

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, give them your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, carry their load 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

These teachings come from the famous Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus addresses a hillside crowd about the nature of God's kingdom. He's been systematically contrasting traditional Jewish interpretations of the law with his deeper spiritual vision, "You have heard it said...but I tell you." This is revolutionary teaching that challenges not just behavior, but the entire framework of justice and social order.

The immediate context involves Jesus addressing the lex talionis principle, "eye for eye, tooth for tooth", which wasn't about encouraging revenge but actually limiting it to proportional response. Jesus now pushes beyond even this restraint to something unprecedented: non-resistance to personal insult and injury. The crowd would have found this shocking, as honor and reputation were central to their social survival.

The Big Idea

Jesus replaces proportional retribution with dignified non-resistance, transcending even fair justice with radical love that mirrors God's character.

This teaching isn't naive pacifism but strategic non-retaliation that exposes evil while refusing to perpetuate cycles of harm. The specificity of the "right cheek" slap indicates Jesus is addressing honor challenges rather than life-threatening violence, requiring wisdom to discern when this principle applies versus when protection of the vulnerable demands different action.

Theological Core

- **Non-resistance transcends justice.** Jesus moves beyond "fair" responses to something that breaks cycles of retaliation entirely.
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- **Insult met with dignity.** The right cheek detail suggests responding to honor challenges with unexpected grace rather than defensive reaction.
- **Evil exposed through goodness.** Non-retaliation doesn't enable evil but reveals it while refusing to be corrupted by it.
- **God's character as model.** This radical love mirrors how God treats both righteous and unrighteous with the same care.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Non-resistance to personal insult can break cycles of retaliation while maintaining dignity
 - The principle requires wisdom to distinguish between honor challenges and situations requiring protection
 - This teaching applies differently in contexts of personal offense versus systemic oppression
 - Discernment involves understanding when turning the other cheek exposes evil versus when it enables it
-

Grades 4, 6

- When someone is mean to us, we can choose kindness instead of getting them back
 - Unexpected kindness often stops mean behavior better than fighting back does
 - Getting revenge usually makes problems bigger, not smaller
 - It's okay to feel hurt and still choose to do the right thing
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Grades 1, 3

- Jesus wants us to be kind even when others are mean to us
 - God loves everyone, even people who do wrong things
 - We can ask God to help us be kind when it's hard
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying to doormat behavior.** This passage addresses honor challenges in shame cultures, not all forms of conflict. Be careful not to teach children they must accept abuse or that standing up for others is wrong.
 - **Ignoring the cultural specificity.** The right cheek slap was a specific insult in ancient culture. Help students think about modern equivalents rather than literal physical applications only.
 - **Missing the strategic nature.** Non-resistance isn't passive weakness but active exposure of evil through unexpected grace. Emphasize the dignity and agency involved, not helplessness.
 - **Avoiding the complexity.** Students will naturally ask about situations where this seems to enable harm. Acknowledge these tensions rather than providing simplistic answers that don't match real-world complexity.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't this just let bullies get away with hurting people?"

Jesus is addressing personal insults and honor challenges, situations where retaliation escalates conflict without protecting anyone. When someone is being hurt or vulnerable people need protection, different principles apply. Sometimes the most loving thing is to intervene. The goal is always to stop cycles of harm, which might require protection in some situations and non-resistance in others.

"What if someone keeps hitting you? Are you supposed to just stand there?"

The "right cheek" detail suggests Jesus is talking about a backhanded slap, an insult, not an assault. There's a difference between someone trying to hurt your feelings and someone trying to cause real

harm. Safety comes first. This passage teaches us how to respond to disrespect and insults, not how to handle genuine danger.

"How do you know when turning the other cheek helps versus when it makes things worse?"

This requires wisdom and often community discernment. Ask: Is this about personal offense or protecting others? Will non-resistance break a cycle or enable ongoing harm? Am I responding from ego or from love? Sometimes the most Christ-like response is protective action; sometimes it's absorbing insult with grace. The goal is always to reflect God's character and stop cycles of harm.

The One Thing to Remember

Jesus calls us beyond "getting even" to breaking cycles of harm through unexpected grace, requiring wisdom to know when non-resistance heals and when protection serves love better.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between non-resistance and justice. Help them discover how Jesus's teaching transcends simple revenge while acknowledging the complexity of when this applies versus when protection of others demands different action.

The Tension to Frame

When does turning the other cheek break cycles of harm, and when does it enable evil to continue? How do we distinguish between personal offense and situations requiring protective intervention?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their instinct that "just taking it" feels wrong in many situations
 - Honor the complexity of abuse, bullying, and systemic injustice contexts
 - Let them work through the tensions rather than providing quick answers
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Someone posts something on social media that makes fun of you in front of your friends. It's not true, it's mean, and people you care about have seen it. Your first instinct is probably to fire back, post something equally embarrassing about them, or worse. And honestly, that makes sense. They hurt you publicly, so public payback feels fair.

But then you realize this could escalate. They'll probably respond to your response, and pretty soon you're in a full social media war where everyone's getting hurt. Part of you knows that fighting fire with fire usually just creates a bigger fire. But the other part of you thinks that if you don't hit back, they'll think they can walk all over you.

Today we're looking at Jesus addressing a similar dilemma, except instead of social media drama, he's talking about a culture where your honor and reputation could literally determine your survival. Someone has publicly insulted his listeners, and the question is: do you defend yourself and risk escalation, or do you respond in a way no one expects?

As we read, pay attention to how specific Jesus gets about the type of situation he's addressing, and notice what his alternative actually accomplishes. This isn't about being a doormat, there's strategy here, but it might not be what you expect.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 5:38 and start reading silently from verse 33 through verse 48. We'll focus on verses 38-39, but the context matters.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly and help with difficult vocabulary. Let early finishers sit with the weight of these radical commands. This passage should feel challenging and provocative.

As You Read, Think About:

- What was the old system Jesus is replacing? How did "eye for eye" actually work?
 - Why might a "right cheek" slap be different from other kinds of violence?
 - What do you think Jesus's goal is with these commands?
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- What situations in your life might this apply to? What situations might it not?
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Matthew 5:33-48 (NIV)

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but fulfill to the Lord the vows you have made.' **34** But I tell you, do not swear an oath at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; **35** or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. **36** And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. **37** All you need to say is simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything beyond this comes from the evil one.

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, give them your coat as well. **41** If anyone forces you to go one mile, carry their load 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: Choose confident readers for this challenging passage. Let them hear the rhythm and contrast of "You have heard...but I tell you."

Reader 1: Verses 33-37 (About oath-making) **Reader 2:** Verses 38-42 (The core teaching on non-resistance) **Reader 3:** Verses 43-48 (Love for enemies and God's perfection)

Listen for the contrast Jesus is making. This isn't just about behavior, he's challenging an entire system of thinking.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. If a group is stuck, ask "What surprised you most?" or "What felt hardest to understand?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. These could be practical questions like "How is this supposed to work?" or deeper questions like "Why would Jesus teach this?" Don't worry about having the right questions; just ask what you're really wondering about. You have exactly three minutes. Go.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students lead with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Honor their genuine concerns about this difficult passage.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around fairness, practicality, and when this applies. Start with questions that address their biggest concerns.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do you notice about the specific details Jesus uses, right cheek, shirt and coat, one mile versus two?"
 - "What was the 'eye for eye' system actually designed to do? Why might that have been an improvement over unlimited revenge?"
 - "What do you think happens when someone slaps you and you offer the other cheek? How might that change the dynamic?"
 - "When might this teaching help break cycles of conflict? When might it not apply?"
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- "How do you tell the difference between personal offense and situations where others need protection?"
- "What modern situations feel similar to a 'right cheek slap', public insult or honor challenge?"
- "What would happen if the person being insulted responded completely differently than expected?"
- "Why do you think Jesus connects this to God's character in verses 45-48?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what Jesus is doing here? He's not just saying "be nice." He's showing a third option between retaliation and passivity. When someone tries to shame you publicly, escalating maintains their game. But responding with unexpected dignity exposes what they're really doing while refusing to be corrupted by it. It's strategic non-retaliation that breaks cycles rather than perpetuating them.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension between justice and retaliation playing out? Think about school drama, social media conflicts, family arguments, friend betrayals, or even bigger social issues you care about.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Someone spreads rumors about you at school or posts something embarrassing online
- A family member constantly criticizes you in front of others
- Friends exclude you from something important and make sure you know about it
- Someone takes credit for your work or idea in front of people who matter to you
- Witnessing injustice or discrimination where calling it out might make things worse
- Dealing with authority figures who abuse their power or treat people unfairly

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to provide answers. Some situations call for protection; others for non-resistance. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket formulas.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone respond to insult with unexpected grace? What happened?"
 - "What would help you choose dignity over retaliation when someone hurts your reputation?"
 - "How do you tell whether a situation calls for Jesus's approach or for protective intervention?"
 - "What's the difference between wisdom and being a doormat?"
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5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you. Jesus isn't asking you to be passive or to enable abuse. He's showing you how to break cycles of harm through unexpected grace. Sometimes that means absorbing personal insult with dignity. Sometimes it means standing up for others who can't protect themselves. The goal is always to reflect God's character and stop cycles of retaliation.

This week, pay attention to moments when your first instinct is to get someone back. Before you respond, ask yourself: Will this break a cycle or perpetuate one? Is this about my ego or about love? Sometimes the most powerful response is the one no one expects.

You wrestled with really hard questions today, and that's exactly what Jesus wants. Keep thinking, keep asking, and don't be afraid of complexity. That's where wisdom grows.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that choosing unexpected kindness instead of getting even often stops mean behavior better than fighting back does.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps being mean no matter what?"

Say: "Sometimes we need to get help from adults when someone won't stop hurting people. Being kind doesn't mean letting people be unsafe. It means not making things worse with revenge."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone say something mean about you in front of other people. Yeah, most of us have. It feels terrible, doesn't it? Your face gets hot, your heart beats fast, and part of you wants to say something even meaner back to them.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever gotten someone back for being mean to you, but then they got you back even worse, and pretty soon you were in a big fight that was way bigger than how it started. This happens a lot, doesn't it? Someone is mean, so we're mean back, so they're meaner back, and suddenly everyone's really hurt.

It's totally normal to want to get someone back when they hurt your feelings. Your brain is trying to protect you and make them stop. But sometimes getting people back actually makes things worse instead of better, and then everyone ends up more hurt than when it started.

This reminds me of movies like Frozen when Anna and Elsa keep hurting each other's feelings, or in Encanto when Mirabel and Abuela's hurt feelings make the whole family fall apart. Sometimes the people fighting aren't even bad people, they're just stuck in a pattern where hurt feelings create more hurt feelings.

The tricky part is figuring out how to make it stop. How do you get someone to stop being mean without being mean back? How do you protect your feelings without making theirs worse?

Today we're going to hear about Jesus teaching people a completely different way to handle it when someone is mean to them. It's so surprising that it might sound crazy at first, but let's find out what happened when people actually tried it.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to the getting-even cycle. Acknowledge their experiences briefly but keep momentum moving toward the story. Some may share specific examples, affirm their feelings but transition to "Let's see what Jesus said about this."

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a huge crowd of people sitting on a hillside, listening to Jesus teach. These weren't just nice church people, these were real people with real problems, just like us.

Some of them had been treated really unfairly by powerful people. Some had been made fun of or excluded. Some had enemies who wanted to hurt them. They were tired of being pushed around.

For their whole lives, they'd been taught one simple rule: "Eye for eye, tooth for tooth." That meant if someone hurt you, you could hurt them back exactly the same amount, but no more.

Imagine if someone hit you, you could hit them back once, but only once. If someone said something mean about you, you could say something equally mean back, but not worse. It was actually supposed to keep fights from getting too big.

But even this "fair" way of handling things meant everyone was still hurting each other. Someone would be mean, someone else would be mean back, and the hurting would go on and on, even if it stayed "fair."

So Jesus looked out at all these hurting people, and he said something that probably made their mouths drop open.

He said, "You've been taught 'eye for eye, tooth for tooth,' but I'm going to tell you something completely different."

The crowd probably leaned in. What could be different than getting fair revenge? What else was there?

And then Jesus said something that must have sounded absolutely crazy.

Matthew 5:39 (NIV)

"Do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

Wait, what? If someone hits you, let them hit you again? The people must have looked at each other like, "Did he really just say that?"

But Jesus wasn't finished. He gave them more examples of this crazy new way.

Matthew 5:40-41 (NIV)

"If anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, give them your coat as well. If anyone forces you to go one mile, carry their load two miles."

Okay, so if someone tries to take your stuff, give them more stuff? If someone makes you do work for them, do extra work? This was the opposite of everything they'd been taught about standing up for yourself.

But here's what Jesus understood that maybe the crowd didn't understand yet: when someone is mean to you and you're unexpectedly kind back, it completely changes what's happening.

Think about it. If someone slaps you and you slap them back, you're both angry, you're both hurt, and you're both ready to keep fighting. But if someone slaps you and you respond with kindness, suddenly they have to think about what they just did.

It's like if someone pushes you on the playground, and instead of pushing back, you say, "Are you okay? You seem upset about something." Suddenly they can't keep being angry at you, because you're not fighting back.

Jesus wasn't teaching people to be doormats or to let bullies hurt them. He was teaching them a way to stop the fighting that actually worked. When you respond to meanness with unexpected kindness, it breaks the cycle.

Sometimes the person being mean realizes what they're doing and feels bad about it. Sometimes they're so surprised that they forget why they were angry. Sometimes other people watching realize that the mean person is the one with the problem, not you.

But here's the most important part: when you choose kindness instead of revenge, you don't become a mean person yourself. Your heart stays good. You don't have to carry around anger and hurt feelings. You're free.

Jesus taught this because he knew God's heart. God is kind to everyone, even people who don't deserve it. God doesn't get back at people for being bad to him. Instead, God keeps being loving and giving people chances to do better.

When we choose kindness over revenge, we're acting like God acts. We're breaking cycles of meanness instead of making them worse. And we're keeping our own hearts free from the poison of wanting to

hurt people back.

The people on the hillside had to decide: would they keep doing things the old way, fair revenge that kept everyone hurting each other? Or would they try Jesus's new way, unexpected kindness that could actually make things better?

It wasn't easy. It took courage. But the ones who tried it discovered something amazing: it really worked. Kindness turned out to be more powerful than revenge.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Surprise

Imagine you're sitting on that hillside listening to Jesus. You've always been taught that if someone hits you, you hit them back. But then Jesus says, "If someone slaps you, let them slap your other cheek too." What would your face have looked like when he said that? What would you have been thinking?

Listen For: "That's crazy," "I'd be confused," "I wouldn't want to do that", affirm: "That makes sense! This was completely different from everything they knew."

Question 2: The Pattern

Think about a time when you got in a fight with a sibling or friend where both of you kept saying meaner and meaner things until someone got really hurt. What do you think would have happened if, right in the middle, one of you had said something kind instead of something mean?

If They Say: "The fight would have stopped", respond "Exactly! It's hard for someone to keep being mad at you when you're being nice to them."

Question 3: The Hard Choice

Why do you think it's so hard to be kind to someone who just hurt your feelings? What makes our hearts want to get them back instead of being nice to them? Be honest, there's nothing wrong with those

feelings.

Connect: "This is exactly why Jesus's teaching was so hard and so brave. Our feelings make sense, but Jesus shows us a better way."

Question 4: The Result

Jesus taught this because God is kind to everyone, even people who don't deserve it. When we choose kindness over revenge, how do you think that changes us? How might it change the person who was mean to us?

If They Say: "It makes us more like God", celebrate that insight: "Yes! And it keeps our hearts from getting hard and mean."

You guys are getting something really important here. Jesus wasn't teaching people to let bullies hurt them. He was showing them how to stop the fight in a way that actually worked. Now let's try an activity that shows how this works.

4. Activity: The Kindness Knock-Down (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity physically demonstrates how unexpected kindness can defuse conflict better than fighting back. Success looks like kids discovering that when someone chooses kindness in response to aggression, it becomes much harder to maintain aggressive behavior, and the "fight" naturally dissolves.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play something called The Kindness Knock-Down. Everyone find a partner, someone about your size. One person will be the "Challenger" and one will be the "Responder." Challengers, stand with your hands on your hips looking tough. Responders, just stand normally.

Here's how it works: Challengers, your job is to try to start a pretend argument. Point at your partner and say something like "You did something wrong!" in a stern voice, not mean, just challenging. Responders, here's your choice: you can either challenge back by pointing and saying "No, YOU did something wrong!" or you can respond with unexpected kindness like "I'm sorry you're upset. Can I help?"

We'll try it both ways and see what happens. The twist is that it's really hard to keep arguing with someone who's being genuinely kind to you. Challengers, you'll probably find that when your partner is kind, you'll naturally want to stop challenging them.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus taught, unexpected kindness changes the whole dynamic and makes it hard for conflicts to keep growing.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First round: Responders, challenge back when your partner challenges you. Everyone start, Challengers, point and say "You did something wrong!" Responders, point back and say "No, YOU did something wrong!" Keep going back and forth for thirty seconds.

Stop! How did that feel? Did the arguing want to keep growing? Now let's try the Jesus way. Same setup, but this time, Responders, when your partner challenges you, respond with kindness. Maybe "I'm sorry you're upset" or "How can I help?"

Challengers, notice what happens to your energy when they respond with kindness. Can you stay angry at someone who's being genuinely nice? Responders, notice how it feels to choose kindness even when someone is challenging you.

Ready? Challengers, point and say "You did something wrong!" Responders, respond with kindness. Go!

Stop! What happened that time? Challengers, was it harder or easier to keep arguing? Responders, how did it feel to choose kindness?

Watch For: The moment when Challengers naturally soften or start smiling when met with kindness, this is the physical representation of how unexpected grace defuses aggression.

Debrief(1 minute)

Did you notice the difference? When both people were challenging, the energy kept building and the fight wanted to grow. But when one person chose kindness, it was like the air went out of the argument. It's really hard to stay mad at someone who's being genuinely kind to you. That's the power of what Jesus taught, unexpected kindness stops fights better than fighting back does.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: When someone is mean to us, we have a choice. We can be mean back, which usually makes the problem bigger, or we can surprise them with kindness, which often makes the problem smaller or even disappear completely.

This doesn't mean we let people be unsafe or that we never get help from adults when someone won't stop being mean. It means we don't make things worse by trying to get revenge.

The amazing result is that when we choose kindness over revenge, we stay free. Our hearts don't get hard and mean. We act like God acts, and we help make the world a little bit better instead of a little bit meaner.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is mean to you or hurts your feelings, try Jesus's way before you try getting them back. Take a deep breath and choose one kind response. It might be "Are you okay?" or "I'm sorry you're upset" or just walking away without being mean back. See what happens when you surprise someone with kindness instead of revenge.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us through Jesus that kindness is more powerful than revenge. When someone hurts our feelings this week, help us remember to choose kindness instead of getting them back. Help us be brave enough to break cycles of meanness and keep our hearts free. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Your Main Job Today

Help children understand that Jesus wants us to be kind even when others are mean to us, and that God loves everyone.

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 when someone is mean to giving a hug when someone is sad, then ask "How do you think that person feels when you're kind to them?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or being kind. Suggestions: "God's Love is So Wonderful," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Jesus Loves Me." Use movements: spread arms wide during "wonderful," point to others during "be kind," and hug yourself during "Jesus loves me."

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our story shape so we can hear about something amazing that Jesus taught people. Make a horseshoe on the floor facing me.

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 gentle when you're Jesus, sound confused when you're the people listening.

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

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Picture lots and lots of people sitting on a big hill, all listening to Jesus. Some of them looked sad. Some looked angry. Some had been hurt by other people.

[Make a sad face, then an angry face]

These people had a problem. When someone was mean to them, they would be mean right back. If someone hit them, they would hit back. If someone said something mean, they would say something mean back.

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

This made everyone sadder and angrier. No one felt better. The meanness just kept growing and growing!

[Move to center, speak with gentle, wise voice like Jesus]

So Jesus looked at all these hurting people and said, "I want to teach you a better way to live. A way that will make your hearts happy instead of sad."

[Move to side, look curious like the people listening]

The people leaned in close. "What better way?" they wondered. "How can we feel better when people are mean to us?"

Matthew 5:39 (NIV)

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

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

Wait, what? The people probably looked at each other with big surprised eyes, just like you're doing right now! Did Jesus really say to be KIND when someone is MEAN?

[Move to center, speak with Jesus's gentle wisdom]

Yes! Jesus knew something amazing. When someone is mean to you and you're kind back, something magical happens. The meanness stops growing!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, gesturing gently]

Think about it this way: if someone pushes you and you push back, now you're both angry and both pushing. But if someone pushes you and you say, "Are you okay? You seem upset," suddenly they don't want to push anymore.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Jesus wasn't telling people to let bullies hurt them. He was showing them how to make the hurting STOP by being unexpectedly kind.

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what? When people tried Jesus's way, it really worked! Being kind stopped fights better than being mean back.

[Pause dramatically]

Jesus taught this because God is like that. God is kind to everyone, even people who do wrong things. God doesn't get back at people for being bad. God keeps loving them and hoping they'll do better.

[Speak directly to the children warmly]

Sometimes at school or at home, people might say mean things to us or not share with us or leave us out. Jesus says when that happens, we can choose to be kind instead of mean back.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can say "I'm sorry you're sad" or "Can I help you feel better?" or just walk away without being mean back. This is God's way!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

And when we choose kindness, our hearts stay happy and free. We don't have to carry around angry feelings. We get to be like God, who is always kind and loving!

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, just share what you think. You'll have about one minute to talk together.

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the people felt when Jesus said to be kind to mean people?
 2. When has someone been kind to you when you were sad or upset?
 3. What do you think happens inside your heart when you choose to be kind?
 4. If someone took your toy, what would be a kind thing to say?
 5. How do you think it feels to choose kindness instead of being mean back?
 6. Why do you think God wants us to be kind to everyone?
 7. What changed when people started following Jesus's teaching?
 8. If someone said something mean at school, how could you be kind?
 9. When someone is mean at home, what kind thing could you do?
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10. Who do you know who is really good at being kind to everyone?

11. Why did Jesus teach people this new way?

12. How can we remember to be kind when someone is mean to us?

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

14. How does being kind help everyone feel better?

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

16. How can we ask God to help us be kind?

17. What makes it hard to be kind sometimes?

18. How can we help our friends remember to be kind too?

19. What would happen if we always choose Jesus's way?

20. How can we be like God by being kind to everyone?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our 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

Choose songs about kindness or God's love. Suggestions: "If You're Happy and You Know It" (clap for kindness), "This Little Light of Mine" (let your kindness shine), or "Love, Love, Love" with hand motions. Include movements: clap hands for "happy," hold up pretend light for "shine," and make heart shape with hands for "love."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly so we can pray together. Make rows on the floor and fold your hands.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for sending Jesus to teach us about kindness.

[Pause]

When someone is mean to us this week, help us remember to be kind instead of mean back. Help us choose your way, not the world's way.

[Pause]

Help us remember that you love everyone, even people who do wrong things. Help us have hearts like yours.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us so much and for always being kind to us. Help us share your kindness with everyone we meet. 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 that God is kind to me."

Remember, Jesus wants us to be kind even when others are mean. Have a wonderful week being kind like God is kind! I'm proud of how well you listened and shared today.

Love Your Enemies

Breaking the Automatic Pattern, How do we love those actively harming us?

Matthew 5:38-48

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 just and the unjust. **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 passage comes near the end of Jesus's Sermon on the Mount, in a series of "You have heard... but I tell you" statements that radically reframe Jewish law and ethics. Jesus is addressing a crowd living under Roman occupation, where enemies weren't theoretical, they were the soldiers who could force you to carry their pack, the tax collectors who took your money, and the officials who could slap your face with impunity.

The immediate context involves several examples of non-retaliation and generosity toward those with power over you. Jesus builds from specific scenarios to the broadest possible category: enemies and persecutors. This isn't philosophical speculation but urgent guidance for people whose "enemies" had names, faces, and the power to make their lives miserable.

The Big Idea

Jesus eliminates the enemy category from ethical consideration, replacing the automatic pattern of neighbor-love/enemy-hate with enemy-love and prayer for persecutors.

This isn't naive optimism or passive tolerance. Jesus doesn't deny that enemies exist or that persecution hurts. Instead, he fundamentally redefines how followers respond to those who actively harm them, making persecution a trigger for prayer rather than hatred.

Theological Core

- **Enemy Status Creates No Exception.** Having "enemy" status doesn't exempt anyone from receiving love and prayer, it creates additional responsibility for active engagement through prayer.
 - **Automatic Patterns Get Broken.** The natural, expected response of loving friends and hating enemies is replaced with a pattern that mirrors God's indiscriminate care for all people.
 - **Persecution Becomes Prayer Opportunity.** Those who actively oppose or harm us become specific subjects for ongoing prayer rather than objects of revenge or hatred.
 - **God's Character Defines Our Response.** We love enemies because God causes sun and rain to fall on both just and unjust, showing that divine love operates beyond human categories of deserving.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Enemy love doesn't mean enabling harm or removing protective boundaries
 - Prayer for persecutors is active engagement that changes both the pray-er and potentially the persecutor
 - God's indiscriminate love becomes the model for human response to opposition
 - Discernment is required to love enemies practically while protecting those we're responsible for
-

Grades 4, 6

- Mean people need prayer and kindness, not meanness back
 - We can be kind to bullies while still getting help from adults when needed
 - God loves everyone, even people who do wrong things
 - It's okay to feel angry when someone hurts us AND still choose to pray for them
-

Grades 1, 3

- Jesus says to be kind even to people who are mean to us
 - God loves everyone and wants us to love everyone too
 - We can pray for people who hurt our feelings
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Conflating Love with Enabling.** Enemy love doesn't mean allowing continued harm or removing consequences. Jesus calls for love and prayer, not passive acceptance of abuse or injustice.
-

- **Making It Purely Internal.** This isn't just about changing our feelings, it's about active prayer and practical love that may include boundaries, protection, and advocacy for justice.
- **Ignoring the Roman Context.** Jesus's audience lived under oppressive occupation. Their "enemies" were real people with power to harm them, making this command concrete rather than theoretical.
- **Demanding Immediate Emotional Change.** The command is to love and pray, not to feel warm feelings. Love here is action and commitment, not sentiment that can be manufactured on demand.

Handling Hard Questions

"Does this mean I have to let bullies keep hurting me?"

Love sometimes requires protecting yourself and others from harm. Jesus calls us to love our enemies, which means we want what's best for them, and allowing them to continue harmful behavior isn't good for anyone. You can pray for a bully, show kindness when possible, AND get help from adults to stop the bullying. Love is active and protective, not passive acceptance of abuse.

"What about Hitler or terrorists? Are we supposed to love them too?"

This is exactly why this teaching is so challenging and profound. It doesn't mean we don't stop evil or protect innocent people. Military action, police work, and justice systems can all be expressions of love for both victims and perpetrators when they prevent greater harm. We can pray for those who commit evil while still working to stop them, sometimes the most loving thing is to prevent someone from doing more harm.

"How is this realistic? Won't people just take advantage of you?"

Jesus isn't naive about human nature, he knows exactly what people are capable of. This command comes with the promise that we become "children of your Father in heaven," drawing on divine resources rather than just human willpower. It's realistic because it reflects the way God actually operates in the world, caring for just and unjust alike. Some people may take advantage, but that doesn't change our calling to reflect God's character.

The One Thing to Remember

Enemy love breaks the automatic pattern of hate, replacing persecution-triggers with prayer-opportunities while trusting God's character to guide practical wisdom.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Help students wrestle honestly with the tension between loving enemies and protecting themselves and others from harm. Guide them to discover that enemy love is active and practical, not passive or naive.

The Tension to Frame

How do we love those who are actively harming us without enabling more harm or failing to protect those we're responsible for?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their instinct to protect themselves, it's healthy and necessary
 - Honor the complexity of real-world conflicts rather than offering simple answers
 - Let them wrestle with specific scenarios rather than staying theoretical
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about someone who's made your life genuinely difficult, maybe a bully, a toxic family member, someone at school who seems to enjoy making you miserable. You know the feeling when you see them coming, when your stomach tightens and you mentally prepare for whatever they're going to do next. That automatic response makes total sense.

Now imagine someone telling you, "You need to love that person and pray for them every day." Your first thought is probably, "Are you insane?" Because that feels like letting them win, like being naive

about what they're actually like, like setting yourself up to get hurt even more.

Today we're looking at Jesus giving exactly that kind of impossible-sounding command to people living under Roman occupation, people whose "enemies" weren't just mean kids at school but soldiers who could force them to carry military equipment, officials who could slap them without consequences, tax collectors working for the occupying army.

Here's what I want you to notice: Jesus doesn't deny that enemies exist or that persecution hurts. He's not telling them to pretend everything's fine. Instead, he's doing something far more radical, he's completely redefining how his followers respond to people who have power over them and use it to harm.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 5:38-48. We're going to read silently first, and I want you to pay attention to your gut reactions, especially the moments where you think, "But what about...?"

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Let students feel the weight and difficulty of these commands. Some will finish early, let them sit with what they've read rather than rushing to discussion.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific scenarios does Jesus describe, and why those particular examples?
 - What would these commands have felt like to people under Roman occupation?
 - Where do you find yourself thinking "But what if..." or "That won't work because..."?
 - What does Jesus say about God's character, and how does that connect to the commands?
-

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 just and the unjust. 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 for each section. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the most challenging parts.

Reader 1: Verses 38-42 (The specific scenarios) **Reader 2:** Verses 43-45 (The enemy love command)

Reader 3: Verses 46-48 (The reasoning and conclusion)

Listen for the progression, Jesus starts with specific examples and builds to the most general command possible. This isn't abstract philosophy; it's practical guidance for real conflicts.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what we just read, things you're actually curious about or struggling with. Good questions might start with "How do you..." or "What about when..." or "Why does Jesus..." Don't worry about having answers; we're looking for the questions that matter most to you. You have three minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guiding discovery rather than lecturing. Let them wrestle.

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

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do you notice about the specific examples Jesus gives, getting slapped, sued, forced to carry equipment?"
 - "Why do you think Jesus contrasts loving neighbors with hating enemies? Where does that pattern come from?"
 - "What's the difference between loving someone and letting them harm you or others?"
 - "How does praying for persecutors change things, for you, for them, for the situation?"
 - "What does it mean that God sends sun and rain on both evil and good people?"
 - "Can you think of examples where someone loved their enemies without being passive or weak?"
 - "What would have to be different about you to actually do this with someone who hurt you?"
 - "Why does Jesus connect this to being 'children of your Father in heaven', what's that about?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus is taking the automatic pattern, love friends, hate enemies, and completely breaking it. Instead of enemy status creating permission to hate, it creates responsibility to love and pray. The question isn't whether enemies exist or whether persecution hurts, but how children of God respond when it happens. We're called to reflect God's character, not just react from human instinct.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same pattern playing out, the automatic response to love people who are good to you and hate people who hurt you? Think beyond just personal relationships to school dynamics, family conflicts, social media, political disagreements, even global conflicts.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Bullies at school who make your life miserable every day
 - Family members who are toxic, manipulative, or abusive
 - Friends who betray your trust or spread rumors about you
 - Online trolls or cyberbullies who target you personally
 - Political leaders or groups whose policies harm people you care about
 - People who hurt those you love and you want to protect
-

Facilitation: Let students share specific examples without rushing to simple answers. Acknowledge that different situations call for different responses. Help them think through practical wisdom.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone love an enemy in a way that was active and strong, not passive?"
 - "What would help you pray for someone who's actively harming you or people you care about?"
 - "How do you discern when to engage directly versus when to create boundaries for protection?"
 - "What's the difference between loving someone and trusting them or being naive about their behavior?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus isn't calling you to be naive or passive about people who harm you. He's calling you to break the automatic pattern of returning hate for hate, and instead respond from God's character rather than just human instinct. Enemy love is active, not passive, it includes prayer, practical care when possible, and sometimes protective boundaries.

This week, pay attention to your automatic responses when someone treats you badly. Notice the moment when you feel that familiar anger or desire for revenge. What would it look like to pause in that moment and pray for that person instead? I'm not saying it's easy, I'm saying it's possible when you're drawing on something bigger than your own willpower.

I'm genuinely impressed by the thoughtful way you wrestled with these hard questions today. Keep asking them. Keep wrestling. The world needs people who know how to love enemies without being weak and how to pursue justice without becoming hateful.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that mean people still need kindness and prayer, even when we need to protect ourselves and get help from adults.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is really dangerous?"

Say: "Being kind doesn't mean being unsafe. We can pray for dangerous people AND get help from adults to stay protected. Sometimes the kindest thing is to make sure they can't hurt anyone."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school who seemed to enjoy being mean to you, maybe they called you names, excluded you from games, or made fun of something you cared about. Keep your hands up if you've ever felt really angry at that person and wanted them to feel as bad as they made you feel.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever had a moment where you were mean back to someone who was mean to you first. Maybe you called them a name, spread a rumor, or did something to get revenge. Part of you probably felt like they deserved it, but another part of you maybe felt weird about it afterward.

That makes total sense, and those feelings are completely normal. When someone hurts us, our brain automatically wants to hurt them back. It feels fair, and sometimes it feels like the only way to make the hurt stop. Your anger makes sense, and wanting to protect yourself makes sense.

This reminds me of that moment in *Inside Out* when Riley's emotions are all fighting about how to handle the move to San Francisco. Anger keeps wanting to take control because it feels like the only way to deal with all the hurt and confusion. But then Joy and Sadness have to work together to find a different way.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do when someone keeps being mean to you. Is there a way to protect yourself without becoming mean yourself? Is there a way to respond that doesn't just make the whole cycle of meanness keep going?

Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus told people something that sounded completely impossible: love the people who are mean to you and pray for the people who hurt you. Let's find out what he meant by that and whether it actually makes any sense.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to the revenge feelings. Acknowledge these briefly, "That makes sense", before moving to the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a huge crowd of people sitting on a hillside, listening to Jesus teach. These weren't people living comfortable, easy lives, they were living under Roman rule, which meant soldiers could force them to do things, officials could take their money, and nobody really cared if they were treated fairly.

Many of these people had real enemies, not just people who were annoying, but people who had the power to make their lives miserable. Roman soldiers who could force them to carry heavy military packs for miles. Tax collectors who worked for the Romans and took their money. Officials who could slap them in the face and there was nothing they could do about it.

So when Jesus started talking about how to handle enemies, everyone leaned in to listen. This wasn't just interesting teaching, this was about their daily lives. What would Jesus tell them to do about the people who had power over them and used it to hurt them?

Imagine how surprised they were when Jesus said this: "You've heard people say, 'Love your neighbors and hate your enemies.' That's the way most people think it works, be nice to people who are nice to you, and be mean to people who are mean to you."

The crowd probably nodded. That made perfect sense. If someone hurts you, you hurt them back. If someone is your enemy, you treat them like an enemy. That's fair, right?

But then Jesus said something that probably made their jaws drop: "But I tell you something different. Love your enemies. Pray for the people who persecute you."

Matthew 5:43-45a (NIV)

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."

Can you imagine what the people were thinking? "Love our enemies? Pray for people who hurt us? Is Jesus serious?" It probably felt impossible, maybe even unfair. Why should they be kind to people who weren't kind to them?

But Jesus wasn't finished. He explained why this made sense, and it had to do with what God is like. Jesus said, "God causes his sun to rise on evil people and good people. He sends rain to help the crops of people who do right and people who do wrong."

Think about that for a minute. God doesn't look down and say, "Oh, that person was mean today, so I'm not going to let the sun shine on their garden." God doesn't say, "That person was kind today, so they get extra rain for their crops." God is good to everyone, even people who don't deserve it.

Matthew 5:45-46 (NIV)

45 "He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust. 46 If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that?"

Then Jesus asked them a question that probably made them think: "If you only love people who love you back, what's so special about that? Even tax collectors do that. Even people who don't care about

God are nice to their friends. What makes you different?"

Jesus was helping them see that anyone can be nice to nice people. That's easy! But God's people are called to do something harder and more amazing, to be kind even to people who aren't kind back.

Now, this doesn't mean Jesus wanted them to let people hurt them or never get help when they were in danger. Being loving doesn't mean being stupid or letting bad people do whatever they want. Sometimes the most loving thing is to stop someone from hurting others.

But it does mean that even when someone is your enemy, you don't have to become their enemy back. Even when someone hurts you, you don't have to carry hatred in your heart. You can choose to pray for them and look for ways to be kind, even while you protect yourself.

The people listening probably went home that day with a lot to think about. Some of them might have started praying for their enemies instead of just being angry at them. Some of them might have looked for small ways to be kind to people who hadn't been kind to them.

And maybe they discovered something amazing: when you pray for someone who hurt you, it changes your heart. When you choose kindness instead of revenge, you become more like God. When you break the cycle of meanness, you make the world a little bit better.

Sometimes in our lives, we have people who are mean to us, bullies at school, siblings who annoy us on purpose, neighbors who aren't friendly. Jesus says we can choose to respond like God responds: with kindness even when people don't deserve it.

What we learn is this: mean people need kindness just as much as nice people do, maybe even more. And when we choose to be kind instead of mean back, we're showing the world what God is like.

The core truth is that God loves everyone, even people who do wrong things, and he wants his children to love like that too.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine someone at school has been really mean to you all week, maybe they've been calling you names, pushing you around, or making fun of your clothes. Then your mom says, "You know what? You should pray for that person and try to be extra kind to them." How do you think you would feel about that advice? What would be going through your mind?

Listen For: "That's not fair," "I don't want to," "They don't deserve it", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. It's hard to be kind to people who hurt us."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Let's say there's a kid in your class who's always mean to everyone, they steal lunches, say cruel things, and seem to enjoy making other people sad. One day you see them sitting alone looking really upset. What's the difference between being kind to them and just ignoring them because "they deserve it"? What might kindness look like in that moment?

If They Say: "I'd want to ignore them", respond: "What if you found out their family was going through something really hard? Would that change how you felt?"

Question 3: The God Connection

Jesus said that God sends sun and rain to both good people and bad people. What do you think that teaches us about what God is like? Why do you think God doesn't just punish mean people by making bad weather follow them around?

Connect: "This is exactly what made Jesus's teaching so surprising, God's kindness works differently than human kindness."

Question 4: The Ripple Effect

Think about what happens when someone is mean to you and you're mean right back to them. Then think about what might happen if you were kind instead, even though they didn't deserve it. How might those two different choices change things, for you, for them, and for everyone watching?

If They Say: "Being nice won't work", respond: "What if it doesn't change them right away, but it changes you? What if other people notice how you handled it?"

You've all shared some really wise thoughts. The big idea Jesus wants us to understand is that we get to choose how we respond when people hurt us, and choosing kindness makes us more like God, even when it's really hard.

4. Activity: The Kindness Chain Reaction (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of choosing kindness over revenge by having kids physically experience how kindness creates positive chain reactions while meanness creates negative cycles. Success looks like kids discovering that one person choosing kindness can change the whole group's dynamic.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Kindness Chain Reaction." I need you to form a circle and stand about arm's length apart from each other. We're going to start with everyone having neutral expressions, not happy, not sad, just normal.

Here's how it works: I'm going to whisper to one person to act "mean", they'll cross their arms, frown, and turn their back to the person next to them. That person has a choice: they can be mean back (cross arms, frown, turn away), or they can choose kindness (smile, wave, or give a thumbs up). Whatever they choose affects the next person.

The twist is this: if someone chooses kindness instead of being mean back, it breaks the pattern and starts spreading kindness instead. But if everyone just responds with meanness, the whole circle becomes negative. Let's see what happens when one person decides to be kind instead of mean.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Jesus was teaching, one person choosing love instead of hate can change everything around them.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round one: Let the meanness travel around the circle as kids respond naturally. Most will probably be mean back, creating a circle of crossed arms and frowns. Let this go for about 30 seconds so they can see how meanness spreads.

After round one: "What did you notice? How did it feel when everyone was being mean?" Coach them to notice how the negative energy affected everyone, even people who weren't originally involved.

Round two: "Now let's try it again, but this time I want someone to break the pattern. When meanness comes to you, instead of being mean back, try being extra kind. Let's see what happens." Watch for the moment when someone chooses kindness, celebrate it immediately!

During round two: "I see Sarah chose to smile instead of frown! What's happening now? How is the kindness spreading?" Point out how one person's choice to be kind is changing the whole group's energy.

Completion: Once kindness has traveled around the circle, have them notice the difference in how the room feels compared to the first round. The physical change from crossed arms and frowns to smiles and open postures shows Jesus's teaching in action.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses kindness over meanness, this is the physical representation of enemy love breaking the automatic pattern of hate.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when everyone was being mean versus when kindness started spreading? You just experienced what Jesus was teaching, one person choosing love instead of hate can change everything. When you pray for your enemies and choose kindness, you're not being weak, you're being powerful enough to break the cycle of meanness.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Jesus wants us to love even people who are mean to us and pray for people who hurt us. This doesn't mean we let people hurt us or that we don't get help from adults when we need protection. It means we choose kindness instead of revenge.

This doesn't mean we have to trust mean people or pretend they're safe when they're not. We can be kind to bullies AND still tell adults when we need help. We can pray for people who hurt us AND still

protect ourselves and others.

The amazing result is that when we choose kindness instead of meanness, we become more like God, and we might even help mean people learn how to be kinder too. Plus, we don't have to carry around angry, hating feelings that make us feel bad inside.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is mean to you, try pausing before you respond. Ask yourself, "What would kindness look like right now?" It might be walking away, it might be saying something nice, or it might be praying for that person later. See what happens when you choose kindness instead of meanness back.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for loving everyone, even people who do wrong things. Help us remember that when someone is mean to us, we can choose to be kind instead of mean back. Give us courage to pray for people who hurt us and wisdom to know when to get help from adults. Help us be like you. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that Jesus wants us to be kind to people who are mean to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows
-

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare enemies to people who are mean to us at school or home, then ask "How does God want us to treat people who are mean to us?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or being kind. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God's Love is So Wonderful." Use movements: point to self on "me," point to others on "you," make heart with hands on "love," and stretch arms wide on "everyone."

Great singing! Now I want you to sit down in our story horseshoe so we can hear about something very special that Jesus taught people about being kind. Come sit on the floor where you can see me!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

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

Today we're going to meet some people who came to listen to Jesus teach!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Picture a big, big hill with lots and lots of people sitting on the grass. They all came to hear Jesus talk because Jesus always said amazing things that helped people know how to live.

[Look around at each child with excitement]

Some of these people had a big problem. There were some very mean people in their town, people who were bullies, people who took their money, people who were just plain mean for no good reason.

[Move to other side of horseshoe, make a sad face]

You know how it feels when someone is mean to you, right? Maybe they call you names or won't let you play with them. It makes you feel sad and angry inside.

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

So Jesus told them something very important. He said, "I know people have told you to love your friends and hate your enemies..."

[Move to side, look confused like the listening people]

The people probably thought, "Well, yes! That makes sense! Be nice to nice people and be mean to mean people!" But then Jesus said something that made them very surprised!

Matthew 5:44 (NIV)

"But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you."

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

Can you imagine how surprised they were? "Love our enemies? Be kind to people who are mean to us? Pray for people who hurt our feelings? Jesus, are you sure about that?"

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

But Jesus knew exactly what he was saying. He told them, "God sends sunshine to good people AND to mean people. God sends rain to help everyone's gardens grow, even people who do wrong things."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, gesturing to the sky]

Think about that! When you look outside, does the sun only shine on nice people's houses? No! It shines on everyone's house! Does the rain only water good people's flowers? No! It waters everyone's flowers!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Jesus said, "God loves everyone, even people who are mean. And I want you to love like God loves, be kind even to people who aren't kind to you."

[Speak with excitement]

Now, this doesn't mean you let people hurt you! If someone is being mean, you should still tell a grown-up and get help. But in your heart, you can choose to be kind instead of mean back.

[Pause dramatically]

The big truth is this: God can help us be kind even when other people are mean to us. We don't have to be mean back!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we have people who are mean to us too, maybe kids at school who aren't nice, or a brother or sister who bothers us. Jesus says we can pray for them and look for ways to be kind.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can choose kindness instead of meanness. You can pray, "God, help that person learn to be nicer." You can look for chances to share or help or say something good.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

And God will help you do it! God loves to help his children be kind, even when it's hard. That's how we show everyone what God is like!

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 a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk.

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you feel when someone is mean to you?

2. What does it look like to be kind to someone who wasn't kind to you?

3. Why do you think Jesus wants us to pray for mean people?

4. What would you do if someone took your toy and wouldn't give it back?

5. How does God show kindness to everyone?

6. What happens when you're mean back to someone who's mean to you?

7. What happens when you're kind to someone who's mean to you?

8. Can you think of a time when someone was kind to you when you didn't deserve it?

9. How can we be kind at school?

10. How can we be kind at home with our family?

11. What can we pray for people who hurt our feelings?

12. Why does God want us to be different from everyone else?

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

14. How can God help us be kind when it's hard?

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

16. Why is it sometimes hard to be kind to mean people?

17. What makes you feel better when someone hurts your feelings?

18. How can we pray for our enemies?

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

20. How can we be like God in the way we treat people?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about kindness or loving others. Suggestions: "Love, Love, Love," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or "This Little Light of Mine." Use movements: hug yourself on "love," point to others on "you," make praying hands on "pray," and let your light shine with jazz hands.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for our prayer time. Sit criss-cross applesauce and fold your hands quietly.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for loving everyone, even when they're not very nice.

[Pause]

Help us remember to be kind to people who are mean to us. When someone hurts our feelings, help us pray for them instead of being mean back.

[Pause]

Help us be like you, God. You are always kind and loving, and we want to be kind and loving too.

[Pause]

*Thank you that you love us so much and help us know how to treat other people. 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: "Help me be nice to my brother when he's mean" or "Help me pray for kids who are bullies."

Remember, Jesus wants us to be kind even to people who are mean to us. God will help you do this!
Have a wonderful week, and look for ways to show God's love to everyone!

When Enemies Hurt

Unexpected Grief, How can we genuinely mourn for those who repay evil for good?

Psalm 35:9-20

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 35:9-20 (NIV)

9 Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in his salvation. 10 My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, Lord? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them." 11 Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. 12 They repay me evil for good and leave me like one bereaved. 13 Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. 14 I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. 15 But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; assailants gathered against me without my knowledge. They slandered me without ceasing. 16 Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me. 17 How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. 18 I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among the throngs I will praise you. 19 Do not let those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; do not let those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. 20 They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land.

Context

This psalm comes from David during a period when political allies had turned against him, returning his past kindness with betrayal and false accusations. The speaker describes having treated these same people with the kind of devotional care typically reserved for family members, even when they were suffering. This isn't about abstract forgiveness but about actual past actions, the psalmist had already demonstrated this countercultural grief for enemies.

The immediate context reveals the painful contrast between the speaker's compassionate response to their illness and their gleeful response to his suffering. The psalmist had fasted and mourned for them as if they were dying brothers or mothers. When his situation reversed and he faced trouble, these same people gathered to mock and celebrate his pain. This sets up the profound ethical tension of the passage.

The Big Idea

When our enemies suffer, the appropriate response is grief at their pain, not satisfaction at their downfall. We should mourn for those who hurt us with the same intensity we would reserve for losing our closest family members.

This isn't merely about being "nice" to difficult people. The psalm describes fasting, wearing sackcloth, and bowing the head in grief, intensive mourning practices that require genuine internal transformation. The fact that the psalmist's prayers for his enemies went unanswered doesn't diminish the significance of his grief; the practice itself matters regardless of the outcome.

Theological Core

- **Grief over satisfaction.** Our natural response to enemy suffering should be transformed from satisfaction to genuine mourning, recognizing their pain as real human loss.
 - **Family-level care for adversaries.** The intensity of our grief for enemies should match what we would feel for the death of a mother or brother, not casual sympathy but profound mourning.
 - **Practices shape hearts.** Fasting, prayer, and physical expressions of mourning can transform our natural responses to enemy suffering from satisfaction to compassion.
 - **Unreturned goodness as virtue.** The fact that kindness to enemies often goes unreciprocated doesn't invalidate the practice; virtue stands independent of response or outcome.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- That our natural satisfaction when enemies suffer reveals something about human nature that needs transformation
 - The complexity of genuinely grieving for those who "repay evil for good" while acknowledging our hurt and anger
 - How spiritual practices like fasting and prayer can reshape our emotional responses to others' pain
 - That virtue exists independent of reciprocity, doing good matters even when it's not returned or appreciated
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Grades 4, 6

- That caring about mean people when they're hurt is hard but right
 - How our first instinct might be "they deserve it" but God calls us to something better
 - That choosing kindness over getting even changes us and honors God
 - That our feelings of hurt are valid, but we can still choose to do good anyway
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be sad when anyone is hurt, even people who are mean to us
 - God is kind and wants us to be kind too
 - We can pray for people who are mean to us
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Ignoring the emotional cost.** Don't present this as easy or natural. The psalm acknowledges that enemies "repay evil for good", this teaching asks for a profound transformation of natural human response, not simple niceness.
 - **Minimizing legitimate hurt.** The psalmist doesn't deny or minimize the pain of betrayal. Avoid suggesting that caring for enemies means pretending their actions don't hurt or that boundaries aren't necessary.
 - **Focusing only on outcomes.** The text notes that prayers for enemies "returned unanswered", they weren't healed. Don't promise that caring for enemies will change them or improve relationships; the virtue stands independent of results.
 - **Making it about technique rather than transformation.** This isn't a strategy for winning over enemies or a method for conflict resolution. It's about the kind of people God calls us to become, regardless of others' responses.
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Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't this just enable bad people to keep hurting others?"

Mourning for someone's suffering doesn't mean allowing them to continue harmful behavior. The psalmist grieves their illness while also calling on God for protection from their attacks. We can simultaneously care about someone's wellbeing and maintain necessary boundaries against their harmful actions. Compassion for enemies and wise self-protection can coexist, the psalm models both.

"How can I genuinely feel sad for someone who has deeply hurt me?"

The psalm suggests that practices like fasting and prayer can reshape our hearts over time. This isn't about manufacturing fake emotions, but about asking God to transform our natural responses. Start with actions (praying for their wellbeing) even when the feelings aren't there yet. Many find that practicing compassion gradually creates space for genuine grief at others' pain, even former enemies.

"What if my enemy's suffering is actually justice for what they did?"

The psalm doesn't deny that consequences exist or that justice matters. Rather, it suggests that even when someone faces just consequences for their actions, we can still grieve the human cost of their choices and their pain. Believing in justice and mourning suffering aren't contradictory, we can acknowledge that someone brought consequences on themselves while still feeling genuine sadness that they're experiencing pain.

The One Thing to Remember

God calls us to grieve our enemies' pain as deeply as we would mourn a family member's death, even when our kindness goes unreciprocated and our natural instinct is satisfaction.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the profound tension between their natural emotional response to enemy suffering and the psalm's call to grieve for those who hurt us with family-level intensity.

The Tension to Frame

How can we genuinely mourn for people who "repay evil for good" when our natural instinct is satisfaction that they're finally facing consequences?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate that satisfaction at enemy suffering feels natural and understandable
 - Honor the complexity of maintaining boundaries while caring for those who hurt us
 - Let students wrestle with the difficulty rather than offering quick solutions or easy answers
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: Someone at school has been spreading rumors about you for months. They've turned mutual friends against you, made fun of your family situation, and generally made your life miserable. You've never done anything to provoke this, they just seem to enjoy targeting you. Then you hear they've been in a serious car accident and are in the hospital with multiple broken bones.

If you're honest, your first reaction might be a small sense of satisfaction. "Finally, they're getting what they deserve." That reaction makes complete sense, it's natural to feel some satisfaction when someone who has hurt us faces consequences or suffering. Most people would understand that feeling.

But today we're reading about someone who faced almost identical circumstances, people who "repayed evil for good", except his response was radically different. Instead of satisfaction, he describes grieving for their suffering with the same intensity he would feel if his mother or brother had died.

As we read, pay attention to two things: first, the specific practices he describes, what did grieving for enemies actually look like in action? And second, notice that his prayers for them weren't even answered. They didn't get better. Yet he continued mourning for them anyway.

Let's read this together and see what we make of it. Open your Bibles to Psalm 35, and we'll read verses 9 through 20.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage contains some difficult concepts and emotions, let students sit with the weight of what David is describing. Help with vocabulary if needed (sackcloth, bereaved). Watch for early finishers and redirect them to reread verses 12-14 specifically.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions did the psalmist take when his enemies were suffering?
 - Why does he compare his grief to losing family members, what's the significance of that comparison?
 - What's surprising or difficult about his response compared to how his enemies treated him?
 - How would you honestly feel and react in a similar situation?
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Psalm 35:9-20 (NIV)

9 Then my soul will rejoice in the Lord and delight in his salvation. 10 My whole being will exclaim, "Who is like you, Lord? You rescue the poor from those too strong for them, the poor and needy from those who rob them." 11 Ruthless witnesses come forward; they question me on things I know nothing about. 12 They repay me evil for good and leave me like one bereaved. 13 Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. 14 I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother. 15 But when I stumbled, they gathered in glee; assailants gathered against me without my knowledge. They slandered me without ceasing. 16 Like the ungodly they maliciously mocked; they gnashed their teeth at me. 17 How long, Lord, will you look on? Rescue me from their ravages, my precious life from these lions. 18 I will give you thanks in the great assembly; among the throngs I will praise you. 19 Do not let those gloat over me who are my enemies without cause; do not let those who hate me without reason maliciously wink the eye. 20 They do not speak peaceably, but devise false accusations against those who live quietly in the land.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who are comfortable reading with emotion. This psalm has intense feelings, both grief and anger. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers who can convey the drama.

Reader 1: Verses 11-12 (The betrayal and accusation) **Reader 2:** Verses 13-14 (The grief and mourning) **Reader 3:** Verses 15-16 (Their response to his suffering)

Listen for the emotional contrast as we read this aloud, notice how different the psalmist's response is from his enemies' response.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them 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 response?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two real questions about what we just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Don't worry about having the "right" questions. Good questions might be "Why would he do that?" or "How is that even possible?" or "What does this mean for us?" You have three minutes to talk and come up with questions that your group genuinely wants to discuss.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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

Collecting Questions: Have each group share one question. Write them on the board. Look for themes around difficulty, authenticity, and application.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What specific actions did David take when his enemies were sick, what did 'putting on sackcloth and fasting' actually involve?"
 - "Why do you think he compares his grief to losing a 'friend,' 'brother,' and 'mother', what's he trying to communicate about the intensity?"
 - "What do you make of the fact that his prayers for them 'returned unanswered', they didn't get better, but he kept mourning anyway?"
 - "The text says they 'repay evil for good', so David wasn't naive about who these people were. How do you make sense of that?"
 - "When you hear about someone who has hurt you facing serious consequences or suffering, what's your honest first reaction?"
 - "Is there a difference between feeling satisfied that justice is happening and feeling satisfied that someone is in pain?"
 - "How would practicing something like this change a person, what would it do to you internally to mourn for your enemies?"
 - "Do you think this passage is describing something David actually achieved, or an ideal he was striving toward?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? David is describing a complete transformation of the natural human response to enemy suffering. Instead of satisfaction, which would be totally understandable, he chooses practices that reshape his heart toward genuine grief. The intensity matters: this isn't casual sympathy, but family-level mourning. And it's not dependent on their response or even on his prayers being answered. He's describing what it looks like to let God transform how we respond to others' pain, even when they've hurt us deeply.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about school, social media, family dynamics, friendships, where do you encounter people who have hurt you, and where do you get the opportunity to choose between satisfaction and grief when they face consequences or suffering?

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a bully at school gets suspended or faces family problems at home
 - When a former friend who spread rumors about you fails an important test or doesn't make the team
 - When a family member who has been critical or harsh toward you gets seriously sick
 - When someone who cyberbullied you faces their own online harassment or social media pile-on
 - When a teacher or coach who treated you unfairly faces criticism from other students or parents
 - When someone who broke your trust in a relationship faces their own heartbreak or betrayal
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Different situations may call for different responses. Help them think through what genuine grief might look like rather than giving blanket advice about what they should do.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose compassion over satisfaction when an enemy was suffering?"
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- "What would help you move from natural satisfaction toward genuine grief when someone who hurt you is facing pain?"
- "How do you discern the difference between justice happening and taking pleasure in someone's pain?"
- "What's the difference between this kind of mourning and being a pushover who enables harmful behavior?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God is calling us to something that goes completely against our natural instincts. When people who have hurt us face suffering, our first response should be grief for their pain, not satisfaction at their downfall. This isn't easy, and it's not about pretending their actions don't matter or that boundaries aren't necessary. It's about the kind of people God is shaping us to become.

This week, pay attention to your emotional responses when you see or hear about suffering, especially when it happens to people who have hurt you or others. Notice your first reaction. Ask yourself whether you're feeling satisfaction or grief. And if you're honest enough to recognize satisfaction, ask God to begin transforming that response over time.

I'm genuinely impressed by the thoughtful questions you wrestled with today. These are not easy concepts, and there are no simple answers. Keep wrestling with hard questions, that's how wisdom develops. You're becoming the kind of people who think deeply about what it means to follow God, and that matters more than you know.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to care about people even when they're mean to us, and that choosing kindness over "getting even" changes our hearts in good ways.

If Kids Ask "But what if they really deserve to get in trouble?"

Say: "People can face consequences for their choices and we can still feel sad that they're hurting. Both can be true at the same time."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school be really mean to you for no good reason. Maybe they called you names, or spread rumors, or excluded you from games, or made fun of something you cared about. Keep your hands up if this went on for a while, not just one bad day, but someone who was consistently mean to you.

Now here's a harder question, and you don't have to raise your hands for this one. Has that mean person ever gotten in trouble or had something bad happen to them? Maybe they got suspended, or their parents found out and they got grounded, or they failed a test, or got hurt, or had their own friendship problems. Part of you probably thought "Good! They deserve that!" But maybe another part of you felt a little bit bad for them, even though they were mean to you.

Those feelings are totally normal and make complete sense. When someone hurts us, it's natural to feel happy when they face consequences or have problems. Your brain is trying to make sense of fairness and justice. There's nothing wrong with that first reaction, most people feel that way.

This reminds me of movies where the villain finally gets defeated. Think about when Jafar gets trapped in the lamp in Aladdin, or when Gaston falls from the castle in Beauty and the Beast. The audience cheers because the bad guy is finally stopped. We feel satisfied when someone who has been causing harm finally faces consequences.

But here's what gets tricky: What's the difference between being glad that someone can't hurt people anymore and being happy that they're in pain? And is there a way to care about mean people even when they've been awful to us?

Today we're going to hear about someone from the Bible named David who had some enemies, people who were really mean to him and treated him terribly. But when these enemies got sick and were suffering, David did something that might surprise you. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids may share specific examples of mean treatment. Acknowledge briefly, "That sounds really hard", but keep momentum moving toward the story without getting stuck on processing individual situations.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

This story comes from a time when David was older and had become king. But even though he was the king, he still had enemies, people who didn't like him and wanted to hurt him.

These weren't just people who disagreed with David about politics or who thought someone else should be king. These were people who told lies about him, who tried to get him in trouble for things he didn't do, and who were mean to him even when he had been kind to them.

David describes it like this: "They repay me evil for good." That means when David was nice to them, they were mean back. When David tried to help them, they tried to hurt him instead. That had to feel really confusing and hurtful.

Imagine if you shared your lunch with someone every day, and then they started spreading rumors that you were stealing from other kids' lunches. Or imagine if you helped someone with their homework, and then they told the teacher you were cheating. That's what "repaying evil for good" feels like.

Now, you might think David would be angry with these people. You might think he would want them to get in trouble or face consequences for being so mean. And honestly, David did feel hurt and angry sometimes, he talks about that in other parts of this psalm.

But then something interesting happened. These enemies of David's got really sick. We don't know exactly what kind of illness it was, but it was serious enough that people were worried they might die.

And here's what David did when he heard his enemies were sick: instead of thinking "Good! They deserve it!" or being happy that they were finally facing problems, David did something completely unexpected.

David put on special clothes called sackcloth, rough, uncomfortable clothes that people wore when they were very sad about something. He stopped eating food for a while, which is called fasting. People only did this when someone they loved very much had died or was dying.

But David wasn't doing this for someone he loved. He was doing this for his enemies, the very people who had been mean to him!

Psalm 35:13-14 (NIV)

13 Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting. When my prayers returned to me unanswered, I went about mourning as though for my friend or brother. 14 I bowed my head in grief as though weeping for my mother.

Can you picture this? David walking around, head hanging down, looking as sad as if his own mother had died. But he wasn't sad about his mother, he was sad about his enemies being sick!

David said he grieved "as though for my friend or brother." When someone's brother dies, they cry for days and days. When someone's best friend gets really sick, they can't think about anything else. That's how sad David was about his enemies being ill.

And David prayed for them! He asked God to make his enemies feel better. He wanted them to get well, even though they had been awful to him.

But here's something really important: David's prayers didn't work the way he wanted. The Bible says "when my prayers returned to me unanswered." That means God didn't heal these people. They didn't get better just because David prayed.

But David kept being sad for them anyway. Even though his prayers weren't answered the way he hoped, he continued to mourn for their suffering. He didn't stop caring just because God didn't fix the situation immediately.

Now, you might wonder: did these enemies change their behavior because David was so kind? Did they stop being mean and start being nice? Unfortunately, no. Later in the psalm, David describes how when HE got in trouble, these same people were happy about it. They gathered around and made fun of him and celebrated his problems.

So David's kindness didn't change his enemies. His prayers didn't heal them. And they continued to be mean to him even after he had been so caring toward them.

You might think, "Well then why did David bother? What was the point of caring about people who stayed mean to him?"

Here's what David understood: When we choose to care about people who are mean to us, it changes US. It doesn't always change them, but it changes our hearts in good ways. When we practice caring about people who hurt us, we become more like God.

God cares about everyone, even people who don't care about God. God feels sad when anyone is hurting, even people who have done bad things. And God wants us to have hearts like His.

This doesn't mean David was a pushover or that he let people walk all over him. You can care about someone and still protect yourself from their mean behavior. You can feel sad that someone is hurting while still having boundaries with them.

What David shows us is that it's possible to have a heart that feels sad when anyone is in pain, even people who have been unkind to us. That's the kind of heart God wants to give us too.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Choice

Imagine someone at your school has been bullying you for weeks. They've called you names, knocked your books down, and convinced other kids not to sit with you at lunch. Then you find out this person broke their arm in a skateboarding accident and is in a lot of pain. What would your first feeling probably be, and what do you think David would want you to do with that feeling?

Listen For: "I'd be happy they got hurt," "They deserve it", affirm: "That's a really honest and normal first reaction. Your feelings make sense."

Question 2: The Difference

David's enemies didn't become nice to him even after he was kind during their illness. They stayed mean. So why do you think David kept caring about them anyway? What might caring about mean people do to David's heart, even if it didn't change theirs?

If They Say: "It's stupid to be nice to mean people", respond: "I hear you. It does seem pointless sometimes. What do you think might happen inside David when he chose kindness?"

Question 3: The Prayer

David prayed for his enemies to get better, but they didn't get healed. His prayers weren't answered the way he wanted. How do you think David felt about that, and why do you think he kept praying for them even when it didn't seem to work?

Connect: "This shows us that caring about others isn't really about whether it changes them, it's about the kind of person God is helping us become."

Question 4: In Our Lives

Think about your own life. When someone who has been mean to you faces trouble or gets in pain, what would it look like to choose David's way instead of just feeling happy that they're getting what they deserve? What could you actually do?

If They Say: "But I can't control my feelings", respond: "You're right, feelings happen automatically. But you can choose what to do with those feelings once you have them."

David shows us something amazing: it's possible to have a heart that cares about everyone, even people who don't care about us. This isn't easy, and it doesn't happen overnight. But when we practice caring about people who hurt us, God changes our hearts to be more like His.

4. Activity: The Choice Bridge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of choosing care over satisfaction by having kids physically experience the difference between moving toward revenge/satisfaction and moving toward compassion. Success looks like kids discovering that choosing the compassion path feels different internally and

creates connection rather than isolation.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play something called "The Choice Bridge." I need you to spread out around the room. I'm going to describe different scenarios where someone who has been mean to you faces a problem. You'll have two choices of how to respond, and you'll show your choice by moving to different sides of the room.

One side of the room represents "Satisfaction Station", when you choose to feel happy that the mean person is finally getting what they deserve. The other side represents "Compassion Corner", when you choose to feel sad that anyone is hurting, even someone who hurt you. The middle of the room is "The Choice Bridge", the place where you have to decide which way to go.

Here's the important part: I want you to pay attention to how it feels inside your body and heart when you choose each side. Notice what happens to your face, your shoulders, your breathing. Notice what happens to how you feel about yourself and other people.

We're doing this because it's exactly like David's situation, he had to choose between satisfaction at his enemies' suffering and genuine grief for their pain. Let's see what each choice feels like when we practice it.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Everyone start at Choice Bridge in the middle. Here's scenario one: Someone who spreads rumors about you gets sick and has to miss their birthday party. Feel your first reaction, then choose which side to walk toward. Once you get there, stay for thirty seconds and notice how it feels.

Now scenario two: Someone who pushes you around at recess gets in trouble at home and can't come to the fun field trip. Again, start at Choice Bridge, feel your reaction, then choose. Walk slowly and pay attention to how each choice affects your heart.

I'm noticing some of you are walking more slowly toward Compassion Corner, that makes sense. David had to work at this too. I'm also noticing some of you glancing back and forth. That's normal, this choice is harder than it looks.

Final scenario: Someone who makes fun of your family doesn't make the team they really wanted to be on. Start at Choice Bridge one more time. This time, I want you to notice: which choice makes you feel

more alone, and which choice makes you feel more connected to other people?

Look around the room. Notice who chose what. Pay attention to how the two groups feel different from each other. The Satisfaction Station group, how do your faces look? How do your hearts feel? The Compassion Corner group, what's happening with your energy and emotions?

Watch For: The moment when kids notice that choosing compassion feels different in their bodies, more open, more connected, less tense. This is the physical representation of what David experienced when he chose mourning over satisfaction.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you chose Satisfaction Station versus Compassion Corner? Many people find that satisfaction makes them feel powerful for a moment but then kind of empty or alone. Compassion is harder work but often leaves people feeling more connected and peaceful. David discovered that choosing to grieve for his enemies changed something in his own heart, it made him more like God, even when it didn't change his enemies at all.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to care about people even when they're mean to us. This doesn't mean we have to be best friends with everyone or let people hurt us. It means our first concern should be that anyone who is suffering feels better, even if they've been unkind to us.

This doesn't mean you can't feel happy when a bully gets in trouble for their actions. People can face consequences for their choices, and that can be good and fair. But we can also feel sad that they're hurting, even when they brought it on themselves.

When we practice caring about people who hurt us, it changes our hearts in amazing ways. We become more like God, who cares about everyone. We become people who can feel sad about anyone's pain, even our enemies.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you hear about someone who has been mean to you or someone else facing a problem or getting in trouble, pause before you react. Notice your first feeling, that's normal and okay. Then ask yourself: "How can I choose care over getting even?" Maybe that means praying for them, or just not

celebrating their pain, or feeling a little sad that anyone is hurting.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us through David's story that we can choose to care about everyone, even people who are mean to us. Please help us when we feel happy that someone who hurt us is facing problems. Help our hearts become more like yours, hearts that feel sad when anyone is hurting. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to be sad when anyone is hurt, even people who are mean to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare caring about mean people to how a doctor feels sad when anyone is hurt, even people who aren't nice to the doctor.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or kindness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "God is So Good," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: point up to God during verses about God, hug yourself during verses about love, and spread arms wide during verses about "everyone" or "all people."

Great singing! I love how you sang about God loving everyone. Now we're going to hear a story about someone who learned how to love like God loves. Everyone sit down in a horseshoe shape on the floor facing me. Get comfortable because this is a really special story!

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 sickness and hurt. Sound strong and warm when talking about David's kindness.

Today we're going to meet a man named David who learned something very important about God's heart!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

David had some people in his life who were not very nice to him. They said mean things about him and tried to get him in trouble for things he didn't do.

[Make a sad face and speak with a hurt voice]

That made David feel really sad and confused. Have you ever had someone be mean to you when you were trying to be nice to them?

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

Then something happened. These mean people got very sick. They were so sick that they had to stay in bed and couldn't eat their food.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Now, David could have said "Good! They deserve to be sick because they were mean to me!" But that's not what David did.

[Look directly at the children with wonder]

Instead, David felt really, really sad that these people were sick. Even though they had been mean to him!

Psalm 35:13 (NIV)

13 Yet when they were ill, I put on sackcloth and humbled myself with fasting.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what David did? He put on special sad clothes and he stopped eating his food because he was so worried about the sick people!

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

David prayed to God and said, "God, please make these sick people feel better!" Even though they had been mean to him, David wanted them to get well.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

David was so sad about their sickness that he cried like someone in his own family was sick. He felt as sad as if his mommy or his brother was hurt.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

But do you know what happened? The mean people didn't get better right away. And they didn't start being nice to David just because he was kind to them.

[Speak with gentle excitement]

But something wonderful happened inside David's heart. When he chose to care about the mean people, his heart became more like God's heart!

[Pause dramatically]

You see, God feels sad when anyone is hurt or sick, even people who do bad things. God loves everyone and wants everyone to feel better.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, someone might be mean to you. When that person gets hurt or gets in trouble, you might feel happy at first. That's a normal feeling!

[Move closer to the children]

But God wants us to learn what David learned: we can choose to feel sad when anyone is hurt, even people who aren't nice to us.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

When we do this, our hearts become more like God's heart. And God can help us care about everyone, just like He does!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Everyone stand up and find a partner! I'm going to give you and your partner a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think. You'll have about one minute to share 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 David felt when the mean people got sick?
 2. What would you do if someone who was mean to you got hurt?
 3. Why do you think David prayed for people who weren't nice to him?
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4. How do you think it feels when someone is mean to you?

5. What happened to David's heart when he chose to care?

6. How does God feel when anyone gets hurt?

7. What does it mean to have a heart like God's heart?

8. Can you think of a time when someone at school got hurt?

9. What would your mom or dad want you to do if someone mean got sick?

10. How can we pray for people who aren't nice to us?

11. Why is it hard to care about mean people?

12. What can God help us do when someone is mean?

13. How do you think God wants us to treat everyone?

14. What did you learn about David today?

15. How can we be kind to people who aren't kind to us?

16. What would happen if everyone cared about everyone like David did?

17. When is it hard to be kind to others?

18. How can we ask God to help our hearts?

19. What if someone who pushed you got a scraped knee?

20. How can we be more like God in how we treat others?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our 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 a song about kindness or helping others. Suggestions: "I Will Be Kind," "Love One Another," or "If You're Happy and You Know It" (modified with kind actions). Include movements like hugging motions for verses about love and helping gestures for verses about kindness.

Beautiful singing! You sang about being kind to everyone. Now let's sit down for prayer. Cross your legs and fold your hands. Let's 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 David who showed us how to care about everyone...

[Pause]

Help us when someone is mean to us. Help us choose to feel sad when anyone gets hurt, even people who aren't nice to us...

[Pause]

Help us remember that you love everyone and want us to love everyone too. Make our hearts more like your heart...

[Pause]

Thank you that you care about all people and help us care too. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about caring for others. Examples: "Help me be kind to mean people" or "Thank you for loving everyone."

Remember, God wants us to have hearts that care about everyone, even people who aren't always nice to us. You can choose to be kind like David was. Have a wonderful week, and remember that God loves

you so much!

Bless Your Enemies

Radical Response, What does it actually mean to bless those who persecute you?

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 writes to Roman Christians living under an increasingly hostile empire. These believers face social rejection, economic persecution, and the looming threat of official government persecution. They are not theoretical victims but real people losing jobs, facing exile, and experiencing active opposition from neighbors, family members, and authorities. Paul's letter addresses believers who know what it means to have enemies.

This command comes in the practical section of Romans, after eleven chapters of theology, Paul turns to daily Christian living. Verse 14 sits in a rapid-fire list of imperatives about love, community, and conflict. The immediate context moves from internal community relationships (verses 9-13) to external hostility (verse 14) to general peaceful living (verses 15-21). Paul is teaching believers how to navigate a hostile world.

The Big Idea

Persecution creates a blessing obligation, not a cursing permission, and Paul doubles down by commanding both the positive response and prohibiting the negative one.

This isn't a general principle about being nice to difficult people. Paul specifically addresses those who "persecute" believers, active opponents working to harm them. The doubled command structure (bless + don't curse) reveals Paul's awareness of how radical and counterintuitive this sounds. He knows our natural response and explicitly forbids it.

Theological Core

- **Active opposition requires active blessing.** The word "persecute" implies intentional, ongoing harassment, not mere disagreement or discomfort, but systematic effort to harm believers.
 - **Natural responses are explicitly prohibited.** Paul doesn't just say "bless them", he adds "do not curse," acknowledging and forbidding the revenge we want to take.
 - **God's people overcome evil with good.** The blessing response is part of a larger pattern of refusing to be shaped by our enemies' tactics or values.
 - **Practical love extends beyond the community.** This radical ethic flows from the sincere love commanded in verse 9, it's not abstract theology but concrete practice.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Blessing persecutors means actively seeking their good through prayer, speech, and action, even when we feel they deserve punishment
 - The prohibition against cursing reveals that God knows our natural desire for revenge and explicitly forbids it
 - Practical blessing might include praying for enemies, speaking truthfully but not maliciously about them, and looking for opportunities to show kindness
 - This command requires discernment between enabling abuse and choosing a non-retaliatory response
-

Grades 4, 6

- When people are mean to us because we follow Jesus, we choose to respond with good words instead of mean words
 - Saying mean things back makes the problem worse, but blessing words can change the situation
 - Blessing means asking God to help them, saying truthful good things about them, and treating them with kindness
 - It's okay to feel angry or hurt, but we can choose blessing actions even when we don't feel like it
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to say good things about people who are mean to us
 - God helps us choose kind words even when someone is being mean
 - We can pray for people who are mean to us
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Minimizing persecution.** Don't reduce this to general rudeness or disagreement. Paul writes to people facing real persecution for their faith. Acknowledge that some students may face genuine opposition for following Christ.
 - **Promoting doormat theology.** Blessing persecutors doesn't mean accepting abuse or failing to seek appropriate protection. Help students distinguish between blessing enemies and enabling harmful behavior.
 - **Demanding feelings change.** This command is about actions and words, not emotions. Students can choose blessing responses while still feeling hurt, angry, or frustrated about persecution.
 - **Making it about earning favor.** Blessing persecutors isn't a strategy to make them like us or stop persecuting. It's obedience to God regardless of outcomes, trusting Him with justice and results.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if someone is actually hurting me or threatening me?"

Blessing enemies doesn't mean ignoring safety or accepting abuse. You can seek appropriate protection, involve authorities when necessary, and still choose not to curse or seek personal revenge. Blessing means wanting God's good for them while also protecting yourself and others from harm. Sometimes loving action includes setting boundaries or involving authorities to stop harmful behavior.

"How is this fair? Why should the person who's being persecuted have to be the bigger person?"

You're right that this doesn't feel fair from a human perspective. Paul acknowledges that by specifically prohibiting the natural desire to curse. The command isn't about fairness but about not letting our enemies determine how we live. When we respond with blessing, we stay true to who God calls us to be regardless of how others behave. God promises to handle justice, our job is faithfulness.

"What does blessing them actually look like in practice?"

Blessing can include praying for their good, speaking truthfully but not maliciously about them, looking for opportunities to show kindness, and refusing to spread gossip or rally others against them. It doesn't mean lying about their behavior or pretending everything is fine. You can acknowledge wrong while still choosing words and actions that seek their ultimate good rather than their harm.

The One Thing to Remember

Persecution creates a blessing obligation, not a cursing permission, because God's people overcome evil with good, not evil with evil.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle honestly with what it means to bless those who actively persecute them, helping them distinguish between enabling abuse and choosing a non-retaliatory response that seeks their enemies' good.

The Tension to Frame

How do we practically bless people who are actively working against us, and how is this different from being a doormat or enabling harmful behavior?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate that this command feels unfair and counterintuitive, Paul acknowledges this by including the prohibition against cursing
 - Help students explore what blessing looks like without giving simplistic answers to complex persecution situations
 - Let them wrestle with the tension rather than rushing to resolve it, the difficulty is part of the lesson
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: someone at school has been making your life miserable for months. They spread rumors about you, mock your beliefs in front of others, and actively try to turn your friends against you. It's not just annoying, it's systematic, intentional, and it's happening specifically because you're a Christian. You go to bed thinking about what they said, wake up dreading seeing them, and spend way too much mental energy planning how to avoid them.

Your natural response makes perfect sense. You want them to get what they deserve. You fantasize about the perfect comeback, hope someone else will put them in their place, or maybe you start spreading some truth about their own failures. After all, they started it. They're the ones being cruel. Why should you have to be the bigger person when they're actively trying to harm you?

Today we're looking at someone, the apostle Paul, who wrote to Christians facing exactly this kind of systematic opposition, except the stakes were even higher. These weren't just school bullies but neighbors, employers, and government officials who could destroy their lives. And Paul gives them the most counterintuitive advice imaginable.

As we read, I want you to notice two things: first, how specific Paul gets about what not to do, and second, how he distinguishes between different types of difficult people. This isn't generic advice about being nice, it's surgical precision about how to respond to active persecution.

Open your Bibles to Romans 12, and let's read this passage silently first. Start at verse 9 and read through verse 21.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Some students may need help finding the passage.

Watch for early finishers and let them reread or think. Let them feel the weight of verse 14, it should feel radical and difficult.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions does Paul command regarding enemies and difficult people?
 - How does Paul structure his commands, what does he tell them to do and not do?
 - What's the difference between the various types of difficult people Paul mentions?
-

- Which commands feel most difficult or counterintuitive to you personally?
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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 three volunteers, let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic sections. Have them read with appropriate gravity.

Reader 1: Verses 9-13 (Community love and hospitality) **Reader 2:** Verses 14-18 (The enemy commands) **Reader 3:** Verses 19-21 (God's justice and burning coals)

Listen for the emotional weight of these commands. This isn't casual advice, Paul is asking people under real pressure to do revolutionary things.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen and assist. If groups get stuck, prompt with "What surprised you most about this passage?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions dig into specifics: "How do you actually bless someone?" or "What if they're genuinely dangerous?" Don't worry about having answers; focus on asking what you really want to know. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. Facilitate and probe deeper rather than lecturing. Guide discovery of the doubled command structure in verse 14.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around practical application, fairness, and the difference between types of difficult people. Start with questions most students relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between 'those who persecute you' in verse 14 and 'everyone' in verse 18?"
 - "Why does Paul say both 'bless' and 'do not curse', why not just say one or the other?"
 - "What does it mean to 'overcome evil with good' versus being overcome by evil?"
 - "How do these commands handle the tension between justice and mercy?"
 - "What's the difference between blessing someone and enabling their harmful behavior?"
 - "When Paul says 'as far as it depends on you,' what does he mean by that qualification?"
 - "How would a Roman Christian facing actual persecution practically live this out?"
 - "Why does Paul mention that vengeance belongs to God, how does that change the equation?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul gives us both a positive command and a negative prohibition because he knows how our minds work. When someone persecutes us, blessing them doesn't come naturally, cursing does. So Paul doesn't just say "be nice." He says "actively seek their good" AND "refuse the revenge you want to take." This is about choosing a different way to be human when people oppose us.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you actually encounter people who oppose you because of your faith or values? This might not be dramatic persecution, but it could be systematic mockery, social exclusion, online harassment, or family members who actively work against your beliefs. What are the situations where your first instinct is to curse rather than bless?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Classmates who mock your faith or moral stands publicly and consistently
 - Online harassment or cyberbullying related to your Christian beliefs
 - Family members who actively oppose your faith and try to undermine it
 - Teachers or coaches who seem to target you for your convictions
 - Social groups that exclude you because of your values about relationships, honesty, or lifestyle choices
 - Former friends who turned against you when you became more serious about faith
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix everything. Acknowledge that some situations are complex and require wisdom about safety and boundaries.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose blessing over cursing in a real persecution situation?"
 - "What would help you choose blessing when your natural instinct is to fight back or defend yourself?"
 - "How do you discern between blessing someone and protecting yourself from ongoing harm?"
-

- "What's the difference between seeking justice and seeking revenge?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: when people persecute you because of your faith, you have a choice. You can let them determine how you respond, letting their evil shape you into someone bitter, vengeful, or cruel. Or you can stay true to who God calls you to be by actively seeking their good. This isn't about being a doormat or pretending persecution doesn't hurt. It's about refusing to let your enemies turn you into someone you don't want to be.

This week, pay attention to your first instinct when someone opposes or mocks your faith. Notice the desire to curse, to seek their harm rather than their good. Then ask yourself: what would blessing look like here? Maybe it's prayer for them, maybe it's speaking truthfully but not maliciously about them, maybe it's looking for small ways to show kindness. The goal isn't to make them like you but to overcome evil with good.

I'm proud of how honestly you wrestled with this today. These aren't easy commands, and Paul knew that when he wrote them. Keep asking the hard questions, and trust that God will give you wisdom for the specific situations you face.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that when people are mean to them because of their faith, they can choose blessing words instead of mean words, even when it feels hard and unfair.

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

Say: "You're right that it doesn't feel fair. God knows it's hard, which is why He promises to handle the fairness part while we focus on choosing good words instead of mean ones."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone say something really mean to you about something that was important to you. Maybe they made fun of your family, or your clothes, or something you cared about. Keep your hands up if they didn't just say it once, they kept being mean about it over and over.

Now here's a harder question. Raise your hand if, when someone was being mean to you like that, part of you wanted to say something really mean back to them. Part of you thought, "I know exactly what would hurt their feelings, and maybe I should say it." Or maybe you thought, "I hope something bad happens to them so they know how it feels."

Those feelings make complete sense. When someone is being mean to you, especially when they keep doing it, your brain wants to protect you by fighting back. It's totally normal to feel angry or want them to get in trouble. In fact, it would be weird if you didn't feel that way sometimes.

This reminds me of those movies where the main character has a choice between two different paths, like in Frozen when Elsa could choose to use her powers to hurt people or to help them. Or in any superhero movie where the hero has to decide whether to get revenge or do the right thing, even when the villain totally deserves it.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do with those feelings when someone is being mean to you, especially when they're being mean because you believe in Jesus or try to do the right thing. Do you fight back with mean words, or is there another way?

Today we're going to hear about what the apostle Paul told Christians who were dealing with people being really mean to them, not just once, but over and over. These weren't just playground bullies but grown-ups who were trying to make their lives miserable. Let's find out what Paul said they should do.

What to Expect: Many kids will relate to being targeted for their beliefs or family values. Acknowledge their experiences briefly but keep momentum toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Imagine you're living in Rome almost 2,000 years ago, and you've decided to follow Jesus. That sounds exciting, right? But here's the problem: most people in Rome don't understand Christians at all.

Your neighbors think Christians are weird. Your boss might fire you if he finds out you're a Christian. Some of your own family members are angry that you believe in Jesus. And the Roman government? They're starting to think Christians are dangerous troublemakers.

So picture this: you're trying to live your normal life, but everywhere you go, people are making it difficult. Your neighbor spreads rumors about you. Your coworkers make jokes about your faith when they think you can't hear. Some people won't do business with you anymore. Kids throw things at you when you walk down the street.

Imagine how that would feel. You're trying to follow Jesus and do the right thing, but instead of making your life better, it seems like it's making everything harder. You go to sleep wondering if things will ever get better, and you wake up dreading what mean things people might do or say today.

And then, while you're dealing with all of this, you get a letter. It's from Paul, the famous missionary who helped start your church. You're so excited to hear from him! Maybe he'll tell you how to make the mean people stop. Maybe he'll give you permission to fight back. Maybe he'll say it's okay to hide your faith until things get easier.

But as you read Paul's letter, you realize he's telling you to do something that sounds absolutely crazy. Here's what Paul wrote:

Romans 12:14 (NIV)

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

Wait, what? Bless the people who are being mean to you? That means saying good things about them and asking God to help them. And don't curse them, which means don't say mean things about them or ask God to punish them. Are you kidding me, Paul?

You can imagine how the Roman Christians felt when they read this. They probably thought, "But Paul, these people are making our lives miserable! They're the ones doing wrong things! Why should we have to be nice to them? That doesn't seem fair!"

But Paul wasn't finished. He knew this sounded hard and unfair, so he explained more about how to live when people are being mean to you. He said not to pay back evil with evil, don't respond to mean words with mean words.

Instead, Paul said, try as hard as you can to live in peace with everyone. And here's the really important part: let God handle the fairness problem. Don't try to get revenge yourself. Trust God to take care of justice while you focus on doing good.

Then Paul said something even more surprising: "If your enemy is hungry, feed him. If he is thirsty, give him something to drink." In other words, if the person being mean to you needs help, help them! Don't just avoid saying mean things, actually look for ways to be kind to them.

And then Paul explained why this works: "Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

Romans 12:21 (NIV)

"Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

What does that mean? When someone is mean to you, you have two choices. You can let their meanness make you mean too, that's being "overcome by evil." Or you can stay kind and do good things even when they're being mean, that's "overcoming evil with good."

The Roman Christians who got this letter had to make that choice every day. When their neighbor was rude to them, they could be rude back, or they could choose to be kind. When their boss was unfair, they could gossip about him, or they could pray for him. When kids threw things at them, they could throw things back, or they could keep walking and ask God to help those kids.

It wasn't easy. In fact, it was really, really hard. But those Christians discovered something amazing: when you choose good words instead of mean words, you don't become a mean person. You stay the kind of person God wants you to be, no matter how other people act.

Sometimes the mean people were so surprised by kindness that they stopped being mean. Sometimes they didn't stop, but the Christians felt better about themselves because they had done the right thing. And sometimes other people watched Christians being kind to their enemies and thought, "I want to learn more about this Jesus they follow."

The most important thing they learned was this: when people are mean to you, you get to choose who you want to be. You can become mean like them, or you can choose blessing words and stay the kind of person God wants you to be.

Paul was teaching them, and us, that blessing people who are mean to us isn't about making them like us. It's about not letting them turn us into mean people. It's about overcoming evil with good.

And the really cool thing is, God promises to help us make that choice. He knows it's hard, so He gives us the strength to choose good words even when we feel like saying mean words.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Let's say someone at school keeps making fun of you because your family prays before dinner, and they do it in front of other kids to embarrass you. How do you think you would feel inside? What would your heart want to say back to them?

Listen For: "Angry," "hurt," "want to embarrass them back", affirm: "Those feelings make sense. Your heart is trying to protect you."

Question 2: The Fair Problem

Why does it feel unfair that you should have to say good things about someone who's being mean to you? If they started it, shouldn't they have to be the one to fix it first?

If They Say: "It's not fair", respond: "You're absolutely right. Paul knew it wouldn't feel fair, which is why he said God handles the fairness part."

Question 3: The Blessing Choice

What do you think it means to "bless" someone who's being mean to you? What are some actual things you could do or say that would count as blessing them instead of cursing them?

Connect: "Those are exactly the kinds of choices that help you overcome evil with good instead of being overcome by evil."

Question 4: The Good Outcome

What do you think would happen if everyone in your class chose to overcome meanness with kindness? How might things change if people stopped responding to mean words with more mean words?

If They Say: "People would be nicer", respond: "And you would get to be part of making that change happen by choosing blessing words first."

You guys understand something really important: choosing blessing over cursing isn't about the other person, it's about who you want to be. Now let's do an activity that shows how blessing and cursing work differently.

4. Activity: The Blessing Bridge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the power of blessing over cursing by having kids physically experience how mean words create barriers while blessing words create bridges. Success looks like kids discovering that blessing creates connection while cursing creates separation.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to create "The Blessing Bridge." I need everyone to stand up and spread out around the room. You're going to be divided into two groups, the "Meanies" and the "Blessing Choosers." But here's the twist: your goal is to end up connected to each other.

Group 1, you're the Meanies. Your job is to face away from Group 2, cross your arms, and say mean things (but not actually mean, just pretend mean like "You're a banana brain!" or "Your shoes are silly!"). Group 2, you're the Blessing Choosers. Your job is to try to get close enough to the Meanies to put your hand on their shoulder while saying blessing things like "I hope you have a great day!" or "You're really good at sports!"

Here's the challenge: Meanies, every time someone says something mean, even you, everyone has to take one step backward from each other. But every time someone says something blessing, everyone

can take one step closer to each other. The goal is for the Blessing Choosers to reach the Meanies and create a connected group.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul taught, mean words (cursing) push people apart, but blessing words bring people together and help us overcome evil with good.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start with both groups about 10 feet apart. Let the Meanies try their strategy first, they'll quickly realize that saying mean things makes everyone move further apart, making it impossible for anyone to connect.

As they struggle to get closer while saying mean things, watch for the moment when someone realizes the problem. Let them wrestle with it for about a minute before giving any coaching.

Coach them by saying: "I notice that every time someone chooses mean words, everyone moves apart. I wonder what would happen if the Meanies tried a different kind of words?" Don't give away the answer, but guide them toward the realization that they need to switch strategies.

The breakthrough comes when the Meanies realize they need to start saying blessing words instead of mean words. Once they switch to blessing, everyone can move closer together until they're connected.

When they succeed in connecting, have them notice how different it feels to be close and connected versus far apart and separated. Point out that they had to choose blessing words to make connection possible.

Watch For: The moment when kids realize that mean words make connection impossible while blessing words make connection possible, this is the physical representation of overcoming evil with good.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when people were saying mean words versus blessing words? The mean words kept pushing everyone apart, that's what happens when we choose cursing. But the blessing words let everyone come together, that's how we overcome evil with good. Even the people who started out being mean had to choose blessing words to make connection possible!

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when people are mean to you because you follow Jesus or try to do the right thing, you get to choose who you want to be. You can let their meanness make you mean too, or you can choose blessing words instead of cursing words.

This doesn't mean you have to pretend it doesn't hurt or that you can't feel angry. Those feelings are totally normal. It also doesn't mean you have to let people hurt you or that you can't ask for help when someone is being really mean.

But what it does mean is that you can choose blessing words instead of mean words, and when you do that, you overcome evil with good. You stay the kind of person God wants you to be, no matter how other people choose to act.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone says something mean to you, count to three before you respond. In those three seconds, ask yourself: "Do I want to choose cursing words or blessing words?" Then try to pick at least one blessing word to say, even if you still feel mad inside.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us that we can choose blessing words instead of mean words when people are mean to us. Help us remember that You handle the fairness part while we focus on staying kind. Give us strength to overcome evil with good, even when it's really hard. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to say good things about people who are mean to us, and God helps us choose kind words even when it's hard.

Movement & Formation Plan

- **Opening Song:** Standing in a circle

- **Bible Story:** Sitting in a horseshoe shape facing the teacher

- **Small Group Q&A:** Standing in pairs facing each other

- **Closing Song:** Standing in straight lines

- **Prayer:** Sitting cross-legged in rows

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare blessing words to giving someone a hug with your words, and cursing words to hitting someone with your words, then ask which one God wants us to choose.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about choosing kind words or loving our enemies. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "God's Love is So Wonderful," or "Choose Kind Words." Use movements: point to mouth during words about speaking, hug yourself during words about love, point upward during words about God.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape for story time. I have an exciting story to tell you about choosing the right words when someone is being mean to 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 sad when talking about mean people, sound strong and confident when talking about God's instructions.

Today we're going to meet some Christians who lived a long, long time ago in a place called Rome.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

These Christians loved Jesus very much, and they tried to be kind and good like He taught them. But there was a big problem!

[Use a worried expression and speak with concern]

Some people in Rome didn't like Christians at all. These people said mean things about the Christians. They called them names. They were really, really mean!

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

The Christians felt very sad. They wondered, "What should we do? Should we say mean things back to these mean people?"

[Move to center, speak with authority like Paul]

Then a man named Paul, who loved Jesus very much, wrote them a letter. Paul said, "I know people are being mean to you. But God wants you to do something very special!"

[Move to side, speak gently but firmly]

Paul told them, "When people are mean to you, don't say mean things back. Instead, say good things about them! Pray for them! Ask God to help them!"

Romans 12:14 (NIV)

"Bless those who persecute you; bless and do not curse."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think the Christians felt surprised? Yes! They probably thought, "But Paul, they're being mean to us! Why should we be nice to them?"

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

But Paul explained something very important. He said when someone says mean words to you, you can choose to say mean words back, or you can choose to say kind words instead.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Paul told them, "When you choose kind words instead of mean words, something amazing happens. The meanness doesn't win! Your kindness is stronger than their meanness!"

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So the Christians decided to try what Paul said. When someone was mean to them, they said, "I hope you have a good day." When someone called them names, they said, "God loves you."

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what happened? The Christians felt much better! They didn't feel angry and mean inside. They felt happy because they chose to do what God wanted!

[Pause dramatically]

Paul taught them that God can help us choose kind words even when people are mean to us. God gives us strong hearts to be kind when it's hard!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, people might say mean things to us too. Maybe at school, or at the playground, or even in our families. When that happens, we can remember what Paul taught the Christians.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone says mean words to you, you can choose kind words instead. You can say, "I hope you feel better," or "God loves you," or you can just walk away quietly and pray for them.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God will help you choose kind words, just like He helped those Christians long ago. Kind words are always stronger than mean words!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think the Christians felt when people were mean to them?
2. What would you want to say if someone called you a name?
3. Why do you think Paul told them to say good things instead of mean things?
4. What are some kind words you could say to someone being mean?
5. How do you think it would feel to choose kind words when someone is mean?
6. Who helps us choose kind words when it's hard?
7. What happened when the Christians chose to be kind?
8. What would happen if everyone at school chose kind words instead of mean words?
9. When is it hard to choose kind words?
10. How does God help us when someone is being mean?
11. What does it mean that kind words are stronger than mean words?
12. How can we pray for people who are mean to us?
13. What makes God happy, kind words or mean words?
14. If your friend was being mean to you, what kind words could you say?
15. How do kind words make you feel inside?

16. How do mean words make you feel inside?

17. What should we remember when someone hurts our feelings?

18. How can we ask God to help us choose kind words?

19. What would happen if everyone chose kind words all the time?

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

Great discussions! Let's come back together in straight 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 a song about kind words or God's help. Suggestions: "Kind Words," "God Will Help Me," or "Choose to Be Kind." Include movements: cover mouth gently during words about not saying mean things, point to heart during words about kindness, reach up during words about God helping us.

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

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about choosing kind words when people are mean to us.

[Pause]

Help us remember that You want us to say good things about people, even when they say mean things to us. Give us strong hearts to choose kind words.

[Pause]

Help us remember that kind words are stronger than mean words, and that You will help us when it's hard to be kind.

[Pause]

Thank you that You love us so much and that You give us the power to choose good words. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about choosing kind words. Examples: "God, help me say nice things" or "Thank you for helping me be kind."

Remember this week: when someone says mean words, you can choose kind words instead. God will help you! Have a wonderful week, and I'll see you next time!

Breaking the Cycle

Peace Pursuit, When is conflict unavoidable despite our best efforts?

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 is writing to the Roman church, a diverse community of Jewish and Gentile believers facing tensions both within their fellowship and with the broader Roman society. This passage appears in the practical section of Romans, where Paul moves from theological doctrine to everyday Christian living. The believers needed guidance on how to maintain their witness and integrity while facing persecution, misunderstanding, and conflict.

Paul has just finished teaching about spiritual gifts and unity in the body of Christ (Romans 12:1-8). Now he turns to the challenge of relating to those outside the Christian community and even those who might oppose or harm them. This instruction comes as believers are learning to live counter-culturally in an empire where retaliation and social status often determined responses to conflict.

The Big Idea

Christians are called to break cycles of evil by refusing retaliation, maintaining a reputation for doing right, and actively pursuing peace within their sphere of influence.

This isn't about passive acceptance or being a doormat. Paul acknowledges that peace "depends on you" only partially, some conflicts cannot be resolved through our efforts alone. The call is for intentional, courageous action that interrupts destructive patterns while recognizing the limits of what any individual can control.

Theological Core

- **Non-retaliation as Resistance.** Refusing to repay evil for evil isn't weakness, it's a form of moral resistance that breaks destructive cycles and demonstrates an alternative way of being human.
 - **Public Witness Through Right Action.** Our reputation with outsiders matters because it affects our ability to represent Christ. "Right in the eyes of everyone" means maintaining integrity that even opponents must acknowledge.
 - **Peace as Active Pursuit.** Biblical peace isn't merely the absence of conflict but the presence of right relationship. We're called to work actively toward reconciliation and justice within our sphere of influence.
-

- **Personal Responsibility with Realistic Limits.** "As far as it depends on you" acknowledges both our genuine responsibility to pursue peace and the reality that we cannot control others' responses or guarantee peaceful outcomes.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Non-retaliation requires wisdom and courage, it's not passive but actively chooses a better way
 - Some conflicts cannot be resolved despite our best efforts, and that's not always our failure
 - Our public reputation affects our ability to represent Christ and influence others toward peace
 - Discernment helps us know when to engage conflict, when to withdraw, and when to seek help
-

Grades 4, 6

- Fighting back usually makes problems bigger rather than solving them
 - We can choose to do the right thing even when our feelings are hurt or when we're angry
 - Being a peacemaker means looking for ways to solve problems rather than make them worse
 - It's okay to feel mad, but we don't have to act mean back when people are mean to us
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind even when people are not kind to us
 - God loves everyone and wants us to try to be friends
 - When someone is mean, we can choose to be nice instead
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Promoting Doormat Mentality.** Paul isn't calling for passive acceptance of abuse or injustice. Non-retaliation is an active, courageous choice that often requires great strength. Teach the difference between choosing not to retaliate and failing to address genuine wrongdoing.
 - **Guaranteeing Peaceful Outcomes.** The phrase "if it is possible" acknowledges that sometimes conflict is unavoidable despite our best efforts. Don't burden students with the idea that they've failed if relationships remain broken after they've genuinely tried.
 - **Ignoring Safety Concerns.** This passage doesn't prohibit self-defense, calling authorities, or removing oneself from dangerous situations. Pursuing peace doesn't mean accepting harm. Help students understand when to seek adult help or intervention.
 - **Oversimplifying Complex Situations.** Real-life applications often involve multiple relationships, systemic injustices, or situations where multiple biblical principles come into tension. Acknowledge complexity rather than offering simplistic formulas that don't match students' lived experiences.
-

Handling Hard Questions

"What if someone keeps bullying me and won't stop no matter how nice I am?"

This is exactly what Paul means by "if it is possible." Sometimes you can't make peace happen by yourself, and that's not your fault. Non-retaliation doesn't mean accepting ongoing harm. It means we don't fight back with the same kind of meanness, but we can still get help from adults, remove ourselves from unsafe situations, and work with others to address the problem. The goal is to stop the cycle of harm, not to endure it indefinitely.

"Isn't it unfair to let people get away with doing wrong things?"

Paul isn't saying to let people "get away" with wrongdoing. Notice he talks about doing "what is right in the eyes of everyone", this includes addressing injustice appropriately. The difference is between seeking revenge (getting them back) and seeking justice (addressing the wrong properly). Sometimes the most loving thing is to help someone face consequences for their actions through appropriate

channels rather than taking matters into our own hands.

"How do I know when I should keep trying to make peace and when I should give up?"

Look for the phrase "as far as it depends on you." Ask yourself: Have I done what I can reasonably do? Am I the only one trying? Is continued engagement making things better or worse? Sometimes stepping back is the most peace-promoting thing you can do. Wisdom comes in recognizing when your efforts are helping and when they might be enabling harmful patterns. It's okay to invest more energy in relationships where both people are trying.

The One Thing to Remember

We can choose to break cycles of harm even when others won't join us, and that choice often creates space for something better to grow, even if it takes time.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to explore the tension between pursuing peace and accepting that we cannot control others' responses. Help them develop wisdom about when conflict is unavoidable and how to maintain integrity in difficult relationships.

The Tension to Frame

When is conflict unavoidable despite our genuine efforts to pursue peace? How do we know when we've done "as far as it depends on you"?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate experiences of failed attempts at reconciliation, sometimes peace efforts don't work despite good intentions
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- Honor the complexity of real-life situations where multiple relationships and safety concerns intersect
- Let students wrestle with scenarios rather than providing quick answers to complex relational dynamics

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: Someone at school starts a rumor about you that's completely false. Within hours, it's all over social media. People you thought were friends are laughing and sharing it. You're hurt, embarrassed, and honestly, pretty angry. Your first instinct might be to fight fire with fire, start your own rumor about them, or find some way to get them back.

That instinct makes perfect sense. They hurt you, so hurting them back feels like justice. It feels like the only way to even the score and maybe get them to stop. Plus, if you don't respond, won't people think you're weak? Won't they think the rumor might actually be true?

But here's where it gets complicated. What if fighting back just escalates things? What if it becomes this ongoing war where everyone keeps getting hurt worse and worse? And what if, despite your best efforts to handle it differently, the conflict just... doesn't resolve? What if they're not interested in peace no matter how maturely you try to handle it?

Today we're looking at something Paul wrote about exactly this kind of situation, how to respond when people treat you badly, and what to do with the fact that sometimes, no matter how hard you try, you can't make peace with someone who doesn't want peace.

Let's open our Bibles to Romans 12 and read what might be some of the most challenging words in the entire New Testament. As you read, pay attention to what Paul says we should do and what he doesn't say we're responsible for.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Some students may find this passage frustrating or unrealistic, let them sit with that tension. Watch for students who finish early and encourage them to reread verses 17-18 specifically.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific actions does Paul prohibit and what does he command?
- What does "as far as it depends on you" suggest about our limits and responsibilities?
- Which parts of this feel realistic and which parts feel nearly impossible?
- What would your life look like if you actually lived this way?

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 for the three sections. Choose confident readers since this is challenging material that deserves clear delivery.

Reader 1: Verses 9, 13 (Foundation of Christian love) **Reader 2:** Verses 14, 18 (Responding to persecution and conflict) **Reader 3:** Verses 19, 21 (Leaving vengeance to God)

Listen for the progression in Paul's argument, how he builds from general principles of love to specific challenges about enemies and revenge.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Groups of 3-4, exactly 3 minutes. Listen for questions about fairness, practicality, and whether this actually works. If groups are stuck, prompt with "What surprised you most about Paul's approach?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious or confused about. These aren't quiz questions; they're things like "How is this actually supposed to work when..." or "What about situations where..." You've got three minutes to discuss and formulate questions you'd actually want to explore.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Your job is to facilitate discovery, not to lecture about the "right" answers to complex relational situations.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around fairness, practicality, safety, and the limits of personal responsibility.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between what Paul prohibits (repaying evil for evil) and what he commands (doing what's right)?"
 - "What do you think 'as far as it depends on you' includes and what does it exclude?"
 - "When might pursuing peace actually enable someone to keep causing harm?"
 - "What's the difference between being at peace with someone and being in relationship with them?"
 - "How would you know if you've done 'as far as it depends on you' in a specific situation?"
-

- "What would 'doing what is right in the eyes of everyone' look like in a situation where someone keeps hurting you?"
- "If Paul had written this to abuse victims or people facing systemic oppression, what additional guidance might he have included?"
- "What's the goal of non-retaliation, what is it supposed to accomplish that fighting back doesn't?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul is giving us a way to interrupt cycles of harm without becoming part of the problem. He's not saying "be a doormat" or "let people walk all over you." He's saying "don't let their evil turn you evil." The goal isn't to guarantee that others will change, it's to make sure that their choices don't corrupt your character or your witness. Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is refuse to participate in escalating the damage.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see cycles of retaliation playing out? Where are people trapped in patterns of hurting each other back and forth? Think about school drama, family conflicts, social media wars, even larger social and political divisions. Where do you have actual influence to break a cycle or pursue peace?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Social media conflicts that escalate when people keep posting responses to responses
 - Friend group drama where everyone takes sides and the conflict spreads to more people
 - Family tensions where everyone keeps bringing up old hurts in new arguments
 - Classroom or teammate conflicts where competition turns into personal attacks
 - Political or social justice conversations where people demonize those who disagree
 - Dating relationships where breakups become wars with mutual friends choosing sides
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to give advice. Some situations require professional help, legal intervention, or ending relationships. Focus on helping them think through principles rather than giving blanket solutions.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone successfully break a cycle by refusing to retaliate?"
- "What would help you when you're angry enough to want to get someone back?"
- "How do you tell the difference between pursuing peace and enabling someone's harmful behavior?"
- "What does it look like to maintain your reputation for doing right even when someone is trying to damage it?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Non-retaliation isn't weakness, it's one of the most powerful choices you can make. When you refuse to let someone else's evil turn you evil, you're not just protecting your own character; you're creating space for something better to grow. Not everyone will take that opportunity, and that's not your failure.

This week, pay attention to moments when you have the choice to escalate or de-escalate conflicts. Notice what it feels like to choose the harder path of not fighting back. Experiment with asking yourself "What would pursuing peace look like here?" rather than "How can I get them back?" See what happens when you focus on what depends on you rather than trying to control what doesn't.

You did really good thinking today about some genuinely hard situations. Keep wrestling with these questions, they'll serve you well in a world that desperately needs people who know how to break cycles of harm rather than perpetuate them.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that fighting back usually makes problems bigger, and that they have the power to choose to be peacemakers even when others are mean to them.

If Kids Ask "What if they keep being mean no matter what I do?"

Say: "That's exactly when you need to tell a grown-up who can help. Being a peacemaker doesn't mean letting people hurt you over and over. It means you don't hurt them back, but you can still get help."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in an argument that started small but kept getting bigger and bigger. Maybe it started with someone saying something mean, then you said something mean back, then they said something even meaner, and before you knew it, you were both really angry and the problem was way worse than when it started.

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever wanted to get someone back when they were mean to you. Maybe they made fun of you, or excluded you, or said something that really hurt your feelings. Part of you thinks "They deserve it, they were mean first!" But another part of you knows that getting them back probably won't actually make things better.

Those feelings make perfect sense. When someone hurts us, our brains automatically think about how to protect ourselves or how to make them stop. Getting them back feels like it might solve the problem. And honestly? Sometimes it feels like it would be kind of satisfying to see them get a taste of their own medicine.

This reminds me of what happens in a lot of movies and shows. Think about characters who get into conflicts, whether it's superheroes fighting villains, or even characters in Disney movies facing mean people. Often the story is about the good character learning that fighting back with meanness doesn't actually fix anything. It just makes everything more complicated and painful.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do with those feelings when someone is genuinely treating you unfairly. How do you stand up for yourself without making the problem worse? How do you protect your heart without hurting theirs back?

Today we're going to hear about what the apostle Paul taught about exactly this kind of situation. He was writing to people who were being treated very badly by others, and he had some surprising advice about how to respond. Let's find out what he said and whether it actually works.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to escalating conflicts and may share specific examples. Acknowledge them briefly ("That sounds really frustrating") and keep moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Our story takes place in ancient Rome, one of the most powerful cities in the world. Imagine a huge city with massive stone buildings, busy marketplaces, and people from all over the world living together. But here's the thing, it wasn't always a peaceful place.

In this city lived a group of people who followed Jesus. They were called Christians, and they were trying to figure out how to live like Jesus in a place where a lot of people didn't understand them or even like them very much. Some people made fun of them. Some people treated them unfairly. Some people even tried to get them in trouble with the authorities.

Now, these Christians had a problem. When people were mean to them, what should they do? Should they fight back? Should they try to get revenge? Should they be mean right back to the people who were mean to them first? It would have been really easy to say, "Well, they started it, so we can be mean too."

Imagine how frustrated and confused they must have felt. You know what it's like when someone treats you unfairly, you want to make them stop, and you want them to understand how much they hurt you. These Christians were feeling all of those same things.

That's when the apostle Paul wrote them a letter. Paul was like a wise teacher who helped Christians understand how Jesus wanted them to live. And what he told them was pretty surprising, maybe even a little shocking.

Paul said, "Here's what I want you to remember: Don't fight back with meanness when people are mean to you." Can you imagine hearing that? When someone hurts you, every part of you wants to hurt them back. But Paul said, "Don't do it."

But he didn't stop there. He knew they'd be thinking, "But Paul, that's not fair! They were mean first!" So Paul explained his reasoning. He said, "When you fight back with meanness, you're not solving the problem, you're making it bigger. You're becoming part of the problem instead of part of the solution."

Then Paul said something really wise. He said, "Instead of trying to get people back, focus on doing what's right. Make sure that anyone who watches how you handle conflict would say, 'Wow, they really tried to do the right thing.'"

But here's the part that shows Paul really understood how hard this is. He didn't say "Make peace with everyone, no matter what." Instead, he said something much more realistic.

Romans 12:17-18 (NIV)

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.

Did you catch those important words? "If it is possible" and "as far as it depends on you." Paul was being honest about something really important: sometimes you can't make peace happen by yourself. Sometimes other people don't want peace, no matter how hard you try.

Paul was saying, "Do your part. Try your hardest to solve problems instead of making them worse. But don't blame yourself if the other person won't cooperate. You're only responsible for what YOU do, not what they do."

This was such a relief to those Christians! They realized they didn't have to control how other people acted. They just had to make sure their own actions were loving and right, even when other people's actions weren't.

But then Paul went even further. He said, "Don't just avoid being mean back, actually look for ways to be kind to people who are mean to you." This must have sounded completely crazy! Be nice to people who are mean to you? How does that make any sense?

Paul explained it this way: "When you respond to meanness with kindness, something amazing happens. You break the cycle. Instead of the problem getting bigger and meaner and more hurtful, you stop it in its tracks. You show everyone watching that there's a better way."

Now, Paul wasn't saying to let people hurt you over and over again. If someone keeps being mean despite your kindness, you get help from grown-ups who can protect you and address the situation properly. Paul was talking about not making the problem worse by fighting back with the same kind of meanness.

And you know what? Many of those Christians tried Paul's advice and discovered something incredible. When they refused to fight back with meanness, when they focused on doing what was right instead of getting revenge, when they tried their hardest to make peace, even when it didn't always work, they felt better about themselves.

More importantly, people around them started to notice. Even people who didn't follow Jesus began to say, "There's something different about these Christians. When people are mean to them, they don't get mean back. They actually try to solve problems. Maybe there's something to this Jesus they talk about."

Sometimes in our lives, people are mean to us too. Maybe at school, maybe online, maybe even in our own families sometimes. And just like those Christians in Rome, we have a choice: Do we make the problem bigger by fighting back with meanness, or do we try to be peacemakers?

Paul's advice is still good advice today: Don't fight meanness with meanness. Focus on doing what's right, even when others don't. Try your hardest to make peace, but remember that you can only control what you do, not what others do. And sometimes, being a peacemaker is the bravest, strongest thing you can possibly do.

The amazing thing Paul discovered is that when we choose kindness over revenge, when we choose to solve problems instead of making them bigger, we become the kind of people who make the world a little bit better everywhere we go.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine your best friend suddenly starts ignoring you at school and won't tell you why. When you try to talk to them, they roll their eyes and walk away. You find out later they're telling other people that you did something you never actually did. How would you feel, and what would you want to do about it?

Listen For: "Angry," "confused," "want to tell everyone the truth," "get them back", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. Your heart is trying to figure out how to handle something really hurtful."

Question 2: The Escalation

Let's say you decided to get your friend back by starting a rumor about them or by convincing your other friends not to be friends with them anymore. What do you think would happen next? How do you think the problem would change?

If They Say: "It would get worse", respond "What would that look like? How would everyone end up feeling?"

Question 3: The Different Way

Now imagine you decided to follow Paul's advice instead. You don't spread rumors back, you don't try to get other friends to take sides, and you even continue being kind to this friend when you see them. Why do you think Paul thought this approach would work better?

Connect: "This is exactly what those Christians in Rome had to figure out, how to stop cycles of meanness rather than keep them going."

Question 4: The Realistic Part

Paul said "if it is possible" and "as far as it depends on you." What do you think he meant by that? When might it NOT be possible to make peace with someone, even if you're trying really hard to be kind and do the right thing?

If They Say: "When they won't stop being mean", respond "And whose choice is that? What would you need to do to make sure you've done your part?"

You're thinking really well about this. The key insight is that we can't control other people's choices, but we can control our own. And often, when we choose to be peacemakers instead of fighters, we feel better about ourselves and create opportunities for good things to happen.

4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the lesson that working together to solve problems is more effective than fighting. Kids will physically experience how cooperation creates connection while conflict creates barriers. Success looks like kids discovering that building bridges together works better than tearing them down.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Bridge Builders." I need everyone to find a partner and stand on opposite sides of the room facing each other. Pretend there's a wide river between you and your partner, and your goal is to build an invisible bridge so you can meet in the middle.

Here's how it works: You and your partner have to take turns making bridge-building motions, like laying down planks, hammering nails, or securing ropes. But here's the catch: every bridge-building motion you make has to help your partner's motion too. You're building ONE bridge together, not competing bridges.

But wait, there's a twist. Every 30 seconds, I'll call out a "storm" and point to some of you. During the storm, instead of building, those people have to make motions that tear down bridges or create obstacles. Everyone else has to keep trying to build despite the "storm damage."

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul was teaching those Romans: when people work together to build connections, everyone benefits. But when people tear things down or fight back, everyone's progress gets damaged.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First phase: Let everyone start building cooperatively for about a minute. Watch how naturally they mirror each other's motions and create shared rhythms. Call out encouragement: "I see partners really working together!"

Storm phases: Call "storm" and designate 3-4 kids to be "tearing down" while others continue building. Run 2-3 storm cycles, each lasting about 30 seconds. Watch how the builders respond to the "tearers."

Coaching phrases: "Builders, what can you do when someone tears down your work? Can you rebuild faster than they can tear down? Storm people, notice how your actions affect everyone else's progress."

Breakthrough moment: Eventually, some building pairs will reach each other despite the storms. Celebrate: "Look! Some bridges made it through every storm because the builders didn't give up and didn't start tearing down other people's bridges in response."

Completion: Have everyone freeze when the first few pairs successfully meet in the middle. Point out the difference between pairs who kept building despite storms versus any who got distracted into "storming" back.

Watch For: The moment when some "builders" want to fight back against the "stormers" instead of continuing to build, this is the physical representation of choosing retaliation vs. persevering in doing good.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were building together versus when storms were trying to tear down your work? Which pairs succeeded in meeting each other? The ones who kept building, right? This is exactly what Paul meant, when we choose to keep doing good instead of fighting back, we can actually accomplish our goal of connection, even when other people are being destructive.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Fighting back when people are mean to us usually makes problems bigger instead of solving them. But when we choose to be peacemakers, when we do what's right even when others don't, we can actually break cycles of meanness and create space for good things to happen.

This doesn't mean letting people hurt you over and over. If someone keeps being mean despite your kindness, that's when you get help from grown-ups. Paul's point isn't that you have to fix everything by yourself, it's that you don't make things worse by being mean back.

The amazing result is that when you choose to be a bridge-builder instead of a bridge-burner, you become someone who makes places better instead of worse. People notice the difference, and sometimes they even want to learn how to be peacemakers too.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is mean to you or when you feel like getting someone back, pause and ask yourself: "What would a bridge-builder do right now?" Try choosing the peacemaker response at least once and see what happens. It might not change the other person immediately, but notice how it makes you feel about yourself.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us how to be peacemakers. Help us remember that we don't have to fight back when people are mean to us. Give us courage to do what's right even when it's hard, and help us trust you to take care of the rest. 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 kind even when people are not kind to us, and that we can choose to be nice back instead of being mean back.

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 fighting back to hitting a bouncy ball harder and harder, it just bounces back bigger. Ask "Do you want the problem to get bigger or smaller?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness or being friends. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Jesus Loves Me," or "Make Me a Servant." Use movements: point to others during "kind to one another," hug yourself during "Jesus loves me," make helping motions during "servant."

Great singing! Now let's sit in our special listening shape for a story about choosing to be kind. Everyone find a spot in our horseshoe so you can see me well. Today we're going to learn about a very important choice.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound concerned when talking about mean people, sound strong and wise when talking about Paul's advice, sound happy when talking about choosing kindness.

Today we're going to meet some very special people who learned something very important about being kind.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

A long, long time ago, there lived some people who loved Jesus very much. They were called Christians, and they wanted to live like Jesus every day. They were good, kind people who cared about each other.

[Use sad facial expression and concerned voice]

But there was a problem. Some other people in their city were not very nice to them. These people sometimes said mean things to the Christians. Sometimes they were unfair to them. Sometimes they even tried to get them in trouble!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, look confused]

The Christians didn't know what to do. When someone is mean to you, what do you want to do back? That's right, sometimes we want to be mean back to them! The Christians felt that way too.

[Move to center, speak with wise, caring authority]

That's when a wise teacher named Paul wrote them a letter. Paul loved God and he loved these Christians. He wanted to help them know what to do when people were mean to them.

[Move to side, sound like you're reading an important letter]

Paul said, "Dear friends, I know some people are being mean to you. I know you want to be mean back. But here's what I want you to remember: don't be mean back to people who are mean to you."

Romans 12:17 (NIV)

Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think those Christians were surprised to hear that? Yes! They probably thought, "But Paul, they were mean to us first! Don't we get to be mean back?"

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

But Paul was very wise. He knew that when you're mean back to someone who is mean to you, something bad happens. The problem gets bigger instead of smaller! It's like when you throw a ball really hard, it bounces back even harder!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Paul told them, "Instead of being mean back, try your best to be kind. Try your best to do what's right. Try your best to be friends with everyone you can."

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

And you know what? Those Christians decided to try Paul's idea. When people were mean to them, they chose to be kind back. When people said mean things, they said kind things instead.

[Speak with excitement]

And something wonderful happened! The problems didn't get bigger, they got smaller! People started to notice that these Christians were different. Even when people were mean to them, they stayed kind and good.

[Pause dramatically]

God was so happy with his people! They learned that being kind is always better than being mean, even when someone is mean to you first.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, people might be mean to us too. Maybe at school someone says something unkind. Maybe a brother or sister is not nice. Maybe someone doesn't want to play with us. We have the same choice those Christians had.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can choose to be kind back. You can choose to do what's right. You can choose to try to be friends. God will help you make good choices!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we choose kindness. God loves it when we try to solve problems instead of making them bigger. And God will always help us be kind, even when it's hard.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

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

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

Discussion Questions

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

-
1. How do you think the Christians felt when people were mean to them?

 2. When someone is mean to you at school, how does that make you feel?

 3. What do you think Paul meant when he said "don't be mean back"?

 4. If someone pushed you on the playground, what would be a kind thing to do?

 5. What happened when the Christians chose to be kind instead of mean?

 6. Why do you think God wants us to be kind even when others aren't?

 7. What would happen if everyone always tried to get back at mean people?

 8. How can you tell the difference between being kind and being mean?

 9. When is it hard to choose to be kind?

 10. Who helps you when you want to make good choices?

 11. What does it feel like when you choose to be kind to someone who was mean to you?

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

 13. What would your family be like if everyone chose kindness?

 14. When someone says "sorry," what should you do?

 15. What kind things can you do when someone is sad?

 16. How does being kind make God feel?

 17. What can you do if someone keeps being mean even when you're kind?

 18. Who in your life is really good at being kind?

 19. What would happen if you were kind to someone who had no friends?

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

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about kindness, love, or helping others. Include movements like hugging motions for "love," helping gestures for "helping," or hand-holding motions for "friends." Popular choices: "Love, Love, Love," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or simple action songs.

Beautiful singing about love and kindness! Now let's sit quietly for prayer time. Sit in your rows and fold your hands. We're going to talk to God.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for Paul who taught people how to be kind.

[Pause]

Help us remember to choose kindness when people are mean to us. Help us not be mean back, but to be nice instead like Jesus would do.

[Pause]

When it's hard to be kind, please help us remember that you love everyone and you want us to be kind too. Thank you for loving us so much.

[Pause]

Help us be good friends to everyone and choose kindness every day. 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 nice to my sister" or "Thank you for helping me make good choices."

Remember friends, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose to be kind back. God will help you make good choices! Have a wonderful week being God's kind helpers!
