

Managing Anger and Conflict

Volume 17

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Managing Anger and Conflict

Volume 17

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About This Series

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

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

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

A Note on Scripture Sources

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

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

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

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

How to Use This Book

For Teachers and Group Leaders

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

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

For Individual Study

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

For Families

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

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

The 1611 Press Team

When Losing Wins

Choosing Relationship Over Rights, When is accepting wrong better than fighting for justice?

1 Corinthians 6:1-11

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

1 Corinthians 6:1-11 (NIV)

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? 2 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you appoint as judges men of little account in the church? 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother takes another to court, and this in front of unbelievers!

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. 9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were made holy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Context

Paul writes to a fractured church in Corinth where believers are taking each other to civil court over personal disputes. The Corinthian church was struggling with divisions, pride, and worldly thinking infiltrating their community life. Some members were using the Roman legal system to settle grievances against fellow Christians, dragging their conflicts before non-believing judges in public forums.

This situation arose from deeper issues of trust, forgiveness, and understanding of Christian identity. The believers were treating each other like business adversaries rather than family members. Paul had already addressed their spiritual immaturity and factionalism in earlier chapters, and now he confronts how these problems were spilling into the secular legal system, damaging their witness and missing the heart of gospel transformation.

The Big Idea

Paul teaches that willingness to accept being wronged is superior to fighting for our rights when that fight damages what matters more, our relationships and witness as God's people.

This isn't naive passivity or enabling abuse. Paul recognizes that the "defeat" isn't in the lawsuit's outcome but in needing lawsuits at all. When we fight for our rights at the expense of our relationships and witness, we've already lost the most important battle. This principle inverts our typical thinking where legal victory equals success.

Theological Core

- **Rights versus Relationship.** Sometimes protecting our rights damages something more valuable, our connection to God's people and our testimony to the world.
 - **The Nature of Defeat.** True defeat isn't having our rights violated; it's allowing conflicts to destroy the unity and love that should characterize God's family.
 - **Gospel Transformation.** Those who have been "washed, sanctified, and made holy" should live differently than the world, especially in how we handle disputes with each other.
 - **Wisdom and Discernment.** Choosing to accept wrong requires spiritual maturity to discern when fighting damages more than losing, and when accepting loss actually demonstrates strength.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Sometimes protecting our rights costs more than losing them, especially when it damages relationships and our witness
 - The "defeat" Paul describes isn't about the lawsuit's outcome but about needing to fight at all with fellow believers
 - Choosing to accept wrong can be a position of strength, not weakness, when guided by gospel wisdom
 - Discernment is needed to distinguish between accepting loss for relationship's sake and enabling ongoing injustice or abuse
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Grades 4, 6

- Keeping good friendships is sometimes more important than proving you're right
 - Fighting to win can actually make you lose something more valuable, trust and closeness with others
 - Choosing to forgive and move on often leads to better results than fighting back
 - It's okay to feel hurt when someone wrongs you, but you can still choose to respond with kindness
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind and forgiving even when others are mean to us
 - God loves us so much that He helps us choose to be good when we're hurt
 - We can pray for help to be nice even when we don't feel like it
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Blanket Pacifism.** This passage isn't saying believers should never seek justice or protection. Paul's concern is specifically about believers taking other believers to court before unbelievers, and the broader principle about when fighting for rights damages more important values.
 - **Enabling Abuse.** Accepting wrong doesn't mean tolerating ongoing abuse or exploitation. Paul's context involves disputes between equals, not systematic oppression or dangerous situations requiring intervention for safety.
 - **Ignoring Justice.** Paul isn't dismissing the importance of justice but questioning whether secular litigation between believers serves justice or damages the gospel witness. The goal is redemption and restoration within the community.
 - **Spiritual Superiority.** Don't present accepting wrong as the "more spiritual" choice that makes someone better than others. This creates pride and judgment, missing Paul's point about humility and community healing.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What about serious crimes or abuse, should Christians never involve the police or courts?"

Paul's context is civil disputes between believers, not criminal behavior or situations requiring protection from harm. When someone is in danger or serious crimes have occurred, involving authorities can be an act of love, protecting victims and calling wrongdoers to accountability. The principle is about when pursuing our rights damages what matters more, not about avoiding all use of justice systems when protection is needed.

"Doesn't this just let people get away with treating others badly?"

Paul isn't suggesting we ignore wrongdoing but questioning whether litigation serves the goal of restoration and community health. There's a difference between accepting a loss and enabling ongoing harm. Sometimes accepting wrong for the sake of relationship actually creates space for genuine repentance and change that fighting never could. The goal is redemption, not revenge.

"How do we know when to fight for our rights versus when to accept wrong?"

This requires wisdom that considers multiple factors: Is safety at stake? Will fighting damage our witness or relationships in ways that outweigh the benefits? Are we responding from hurt pride or genuine concern for justice? Can the situation be addressed through reconciliation rather than litigation? The principle helps us ask better questions, not follow rigid rules.

The One Thing to Remember

Sometimes the most powerful thing we can do is choose to lose, especially when fighting for our rights would cost us something more valuable than what we're fighting for.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between pursuing justice for ourselves and protecting relationships and witness. Help them discover that accepting wrong can sometimes be a position of strength, not weakness.

The Tension to Frame

When is fighting for your rights actually a way of losing what matters most? How do we know when accepting wrong is wisdom versus enabling injustice?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of being wronged and the natural desire for justice, these feelings make sense
 - Honor the complexity of real situations, there aren't always simple answers to these dilemmas
 - Let students wrestle with the tension rather than giving quick answers; the struggle is where learning happens
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you're working on a group project and one team member takes credit for your best idea in front of the teacher. You have the screenshots to prove the idea was yours. You could easily expose them and get the credit you deserve. Part of you wants to fight for what's right.

But then you realize that exposing them would humiliate them in front of the whole class, probably end any chance of working together again, and create drama that would make the rest of the project miserable for everyone. Plus, fighting over it might make you look petty to the teacher and other classmates.

Now you're stuck. Your instinct for justice says "fight for what's yours", and that instinct makes total sense. But another part wonders if winning this battle might cost you something more valuable than what you'd gain. This isn't about being a pushover; it's about strategic wisdom.

Today we're looking at the apostle Paul, who faced a situation where believers were taking each other to court over personal disputes. His response turns our typical thinking upside down. He asks: "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" And he suggests that sometimes accepting loss is actually a way of winning.

Open your Bibles to 1 Corinthians 6. As you read, pay attention to Paul's reasoning. What does he think is more important than getting your rights? And what does he mean when he says having lawsuits at all means you've "already been defeated"?

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with unfamiliar terms like "ungodly," "sanctified," or "slanderers." Watch for early finishers and have them reread verse 7, thinking about what Paul means by "already defeated."

As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly were the Corinthian believers doing that upset Paul so much?
 - Why does Paul think believers taking each other to court is problematic?
 - What's surprising about Paul's solution in verse 7, "why not rather be wronged?"
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- How would you feel if someone told you to just accept being cheated or treated unfairly?
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1 Corinthians 6:1-11 (NIV)

1 If any of you has a dispute with another, do you dare to take it before the ungodly for judgment instead of before the Lord's people? 2 Or do you not know that the Lord's people will judge the world? And if you are to judge the world, are you not competent to judge trivial cases? 3 Do you not know that we will judge angels? How much more the things of this life! 4 Therefore, if you have disputes about such matters, do you appoint as judges men of little account in the church? 5 I say this to shame you. Is it possible that there is nobody among you wise enough to judge a dispute between believers? 6 But instead, one brother takes another to court, and this in front of unbelievers!

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? 8 Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters. 9 Or do you not know that wrongdoers will not inherit the kingdom of God? Do not be deceived: Neither the sexually immoral nor idolaters nor adulterers nor men who have sex with men 10 nor thieves nor the greedy nor drunkards nor slanderers nor swindlers will inherit the kingdom of God. 11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were made holy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the more intense sections like verses 7-8.

Reader 1: Verses 1-3 (Paul's initial challenge) **Reader 2:** Verses 4-6 (escalating the shame) **Reader 3:** Verses 7-11 (the radical solution)

As you listen, notice Paul's tone and emotion. This isn't a calm theological lecture, he's frustrated, disappointed, and trying to shock them into a different perspective.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen for good questions. If a group is stuck, suggest they start with "Why does Paul think..." or "How would this work in..."

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why does Paul..." or "How would this work when..." or "What about situations where..." You have three minutes to discuss and come up with questions that would actually help you understand this passage better.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Build on their insights.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes. Start with questions that will engage most students personally.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see in the text for why Paul thinks lawsuits between believers are problematic?"
 - "Paul says the very fact of having lawsuits means they're 'already defeated.' What kind of defeat do you think he means?"
 - "When Paul asks 'Why not rather be wronged?' is he talking about being weak or something else? What do you think?"
 - "What's the difference between accepting wrong and enabling someone to keep treating people badly?"
 - "How do you decide when fighting for your rights is worth it versus when it costs too much?"
 - "Paul mentions their witness to 'unbelievers' in verse 6. Why would that matter in this situation?"
-

- "If Paul's solution is 'be willing to be wronged,' what would that look like in conflicts you see at school or online?"
- "What would be different about how believers handle disputes compared to how the world typically handles them?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul isn't saying justice doesn't matter. He's saying that when believers fight each other in public, they've already lost something more valuable than whatever they're fighting over, their witness, their unity, their demonstration of what God's love looks like. He's asking: what if being willing to lose could actually be a way of winning something bigger?

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about school conflicts, family drama, friend betrayals, social media disputes, or even broader issues of justice and fairness in society. When have you had to choose between fighting for what's right and preserving something you value?

Real Issues This Connects To

- A friend spreads rumors about you, do you expose their secrets in return or take the hit to preserve the friendship?
 - Your sibling breaks something of yours and lies to your parents about it, do you prove them wrong or let it go?
 - Someone takes credit for your work in a group project, do you fight for recognition or focus on the team's success?
 - A classmate posts something hurtful about you on social media, do you respond publicly or handle it privately?
 - You witness injustice in your community, when is speaking up worth potential backlash, and when might other approaches be more effective?
 - Church conflicts where standing your ground might be right but could split relationships or damage the community's reputation
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to give them answers. Some situations call for different responses. Help them think through the decision-making process rather than providing blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose relationship over being right, and what happened?"
- "What would help you make this kind of decision when you're hurt or angry?"
- "How do you tell the difference between wise restraint and just being a pushover?"
- "What's the difference between accepting wrong for a good reason versus enabling someone to keep hurting people?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Sometimes the most powerful thing you can do is choose to lose, especially when fighting for your rights would damage something more valuable. This isn't about being weak or letting people walk all over you. It's about strategic wisdom, knowing when winning the battle costs you the war.

This week, pay attention to conflicts in your life where you have a choice: fight for your rights or protect the relationship. Notice what you value most in those moments. Sometimes fighting is necessary. But sometimes, the strongest response is saying, "I'm willing to take this loss because what we have together matters more than what you did to me."

You asked great questions today and wrestled with genuinely hard situations. Keep doing that. The fact that you're thinking deeply about how to live wisely, even when it's complicated, tells me you're growing into people who can change the world through the power of strategic love.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that keeping friendships and peace is sometimes more important than proving you're right or getting what you deserve.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps being mean to me?"

Say: "You should always tell a trusted adult when someone keeps hurting you. This lesson is about small problems, not big ones where you need help staying safe."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone cut in front of you in line, take something that belonged to you, or break something of yours and not say sorry. I see those hands! That feeling when someone does something unfair to you, that's a feeling everyone has.

Now here's a harder question. Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where you knew you were right, and you could prove it, but fighting about it would make things worse. Maybe it would hurt someone's feelings, or cause a bigger argument, or get you both in trouble. That's trickier, right?

Part of you thinks, "I should stand up for myself! I should prove I'm right!" And that makes sense, being treated unfairly doesn't feel good, and wanting fairness is normal. But another part of you might think, "If I fight about this, everything's going to get worse, and no one will be happy."

It's like in Frozen when Anna has to choose between proving that Hans is the bad guy and saving Elsa. She could have exposed Hans, but she chose to focus on what mattered more, protecting her sister. Sometimes the right choice isn't the obvious one.

The tricky part is figuring out when it's worth fighting for what's fair and when it's better to let it go for the sake of peace. That's not always easy to figure out, even for adults.

Today we're going to hear about some people in the Bible who were taking each other to court, that means going to a judge to prove who was right. But Paul, who was teaching them, said something surprising about how they should handle their disagreements. Let's find out what he suggested instead.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to fairness issues but may initially resist the idea of "letting someone get away with something." Acknowledge that this feels hard but build curiosity about Paul's alternative.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long, long ago, in a city called Corinth, there was a church, a group of people who loved Jesus and tried to follow Him. But even though they all loved Jesus, they had a problem. They were fighting with each other about money, and property, and who owed what to whom.

Picture this: someone in the church borrowed money and didn't pay it back. Someone else had a business deal go wrong. Another person felt cheated in a trade. Instead of working it out together like a family, they started doing something that shocked everyone.

They began taking each other to court! That means they went to the judges in their city, people who didn't even believe in Jesus, and said, "This person from my church owes me money!" or "This person from my church cheated me!" They wanted the judges to decide who was right.

Imagine if you and your brother got in a fight about whose turn it was to play a video game, and instead of working it out, you both marched to the neighbors' house and asked them to decide who was right. And these neighbors didn't even like your family! That would be pretty weird, right?

Well, word got back to Paul, who was like a spiritual father to this church. He had taught them about Jesus, and he cared about them like they were his own children. When he heard what was happening, he was not happy. Not happy at all.

Paul sat down and wrote them a letter. He was frustrated and disappointed, and you can almost hear it in his words. First, he asked them some hard questions.

"Why are you taking your problems to people who don't even follow Jesus? Don't you have anyone wise in your church who could help you figure this out? Why are you embarrassing yourselves and God by fighting in front of people who don't believe?"

Picture the people in Corinth reading this letter. They probably felt embarrassed and maybe a little defensive. "But Paul," they might have said, "we were just trying to get what was fair! We were just trying to get our money back!"

And that's when Paul said something that probably made their mouths drop open. Something that probably made them go, "Wait, what did he just say?"

1 Corinthians 6:7 (NIV)

7 The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

Can you imagine their reaction? "Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?" They probably thought, "Is Paul crazy? Is he saying we should just let people be unfair to us?"

But Paul wasn't crazy. He was trying to teach them something really important about what matters most. He was saying, "You're so focused on winning these fights that you're losing something way more valuable."

"When you drag each other to court," Paul explained, "you've already lost. Not because the judge said you lost, but because you've damaged your friendships. You've embarrassed God in front of people who don't believe. You've shown them that followers of Jesus fight just like everyone else does."

1 Corinthians 6:11 (NIV)

11 And that is what some of you were. But you were washed, you were sanctified, you were made holy in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ and by the Spirit of our God.

Paul reminded them who they were now. "You used to be people who cheated and stole and hurt each other," he said. "But God has changed you! You're different now. You're clean. You're holy. You're supposed to be showing the world what God's love looks like."

"So when someone cheats you," Paul continued, "instead of fighting back like the old you would have done, what if you chose to forgive? What if you chose to absorb the loss because you care more about showing God's love than getting your money back?"

Paul was teaching them that sometimes, choosing to lose is actually a way of winning. When you choose peace over proving you're right, you win something better than money. You win the chance to show what God's love looks like.

When you choose to forgive instead of fighting back, you win trust. When you choose to be kind even when someone is unfair to you, you win respect. When you choose to work things out instead of making it into a big public fight, you win better relationships.

Some of the people in Corinth probably realized that their lawsuits had already cost them more than they lost in the original problem. Fighting to get their money back had cost them friendships, respect, and their reputation in the community.

Paul was showing them a better way. Instead of being known as the church where people fight with each other, they could be known as the church where people forgive each other. Instead of being famous for their arguments, they could be famous for their kindness.

Sometimes in our lives, we have to make the same choice. When someone is unfair to us, we can choose to fight back and try to prove we're right. Or we can choose to forgive and focus on keeping good relationships and showing what God's love looks like.

That doesn't mean we let people hurt us over and over. But it does mean that sometimes, being kind and forgiving actually makes us stronger, not weaker. Sometimes choosing to lose a fight helps us win something much more important, the chance to be like Jesus.

The people of Corinth learned that fighting to get what you deserve isn't always worth it if it costs you the chance to show God's love to the world.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Frustration

Imagine you let your best friend borrow your favorite video game, and they accidentally broke it. Then they said it was already broken when you gave it to them, even though you know it wasn't. How would you feel? What would you want to do?

Listen For: "Angry," "Mad," "Want to prove them wrong", affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. Nobody likes being blamed for something they didn't do."

Question 2: The Choice

Now imagine you could prove your friend was lying, you have a video of the game working perfectly before you gave it to them. But if you show the video, it would embarrass them in front of all your other

friends and probably end your friendship. What would be the hardest part about deciding what to do?

If They Say: "I'd want them to admit they lied", respond "What if they never admit it? What would matter more to you then, being right or keeping the friendship?"

Question 3: The Better Way

Paul suggested that sometimes it's better to accept being wronged than to fight about it. When do you think choosing to let something go might actually make you stronger rather than weaker?

Connect: "This is exactly why Paul thought accepting wrong could sometimes be the braver choice, it takes strength to choose peace."

Question 4: The Bigger Picture

Paul was worried that when Christians fight with each other publicly, it makes God look bad to people who don't believe in Him. If you saw two kids from your school fighting badly in public, how would that make you think about their school?

If They Say: "It would make the school look bad", respond "How do you think it affects what people think about God when Christians treat each other badly?"

You've all made great points about how hard these choices can be. Sometimes there's no perfect answer. But Paul was teaching us that keeping peace and showing God's love is often more important than proving we're right. Now let's try an activity that shows us how this works.

4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces Paul's teaching by having kids physically experience how cooperation builds bridges while competition tears them down. Success looks like kids discovering that helping each other "cross" works better than fighting to go first, even when someone has a "right" to priority.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play a game called Bridge Builders. Split into two groups and line up facing each other about six feet apart. Imagine there's a rushing river between you, and you need to get your whole team safely to the other side.

Here's the challenge: Only one person can cross the "bridge" at a time, and the bridge is very narrow, you have to walk heel-to-toe in a straight line. But here's the twist: both teams need to cross at the same time, going in opposite directions, and you'll meet in the middle.

When you meet someone from the other team in the middle, you have a choice: you can argue about who has the right to go first, or you can figure out how to help each other get across safely. We're doing this because it's exactly like the situation in Corinth, they had to choose between fighting for their rights or finding ways to help each other.

Let's see what happens when two people meet in the middle and both think they have the right to go first!

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start crossing! The first two people begin walking toward each other, heel-to-toe. Watch what happens when they meet in the middle, they'll probably stop and wonder who should go first.

Let them struggle with this for about 30 seconds. They'll likely get stuck, argue, or try to squeeze past each other. Some might claim they started first so they have the right of way.

When they're clearly stuck, say: "I notice you both need to get across, but you're stuck in the middle. I wonder if there are ways to help each other instead of fighting about who goes first. What if one person helped the other person get around them?"

Watch for the breakthrough moment when someone chooses to step aside, help the other person around them, or find a creative solution that gets both people across safely.

As more pairs cross, celebrate each time someone chooses to help rather than fight: "Did you see how Maria helped Jake get around her? That's exactly what Paul was talking about!"

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to help their "opponent" rather than fight for their right to go first, this is the physical representation of Paul's principle.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when people fought about who should go first versus when people helped each other figure it out? When you chose to help someone else cross, did that make you weaker or stronger? You just experienced what Paul was teaching, sometimes choosing to let someone else go first actually helps everyone win.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Sometimes keeping good friendships and showing God's love is more important than proving you're right or getting what you deserve. When we choose to forgive instead of fighting back, we often end up winning something better than what we lost.

This doesn't mean you should let people hurt you over and over, or that you should never stand up for yourself. If someone is really hurting you, you should always tell a trusted adult. But when it's smaller stuff, someone cut in line, or broke your pencil, or said something unkind, sometimes the strongest thing you can do is choose peace.

When you choose kindness over proving you're right, you show people what God's love looks like. And that's pretty amazing.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone does something unfair to you (and it will probably happen!), try asking yourself: "What's more important, proving I'm right, or showing God's love?" Look for one chance to choose peace over being right, and see what happens.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about peace and forgiveness through Paul's words. When someone is unfair to us this week, help us remember that showing Your love is more important than always being right. Help us be brave enough to choose kindness even when it's 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 be kind and forgiving even when others 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 fighting about being right to fighting over toys, sometimes sharing and being nice works better than arguing about whose turn it is.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about forgiveness or kindness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or "God Is So Good." Use movements: point to heaven during "Jesus," hug yourself during "loves," make peaceful flowing motions during peace songs.

Great singing! Now everyone sit down in a horseshoe shape so you can see me really well. We're going to hear a story about some people who had to learn how to be kind when others were mean to them. Are you ready to listen?

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when you're the angry people, sound wise and loving when you're Paul.

Today we're going to meet some people who forgot how to be nice to each other, and a wise teacher named Paul who helped them remember.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

A long time ago, there were people who loved Jesus and went to church together. But they had a big problem. They were fighting with each other! One person said, "You owe me money!" Another person said, "You broke my stuff!" They were very mad at each other.

[Use an angry voice and cross your arms]

Instead of working it out like friends, they went to judges, people who didn't even know about Jesus, and said, "Make them give me my money back! Make them pay for what they broke!" They wanted to prove who was right!

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

This made God sad. When people who love Jesus fight with each other, it doesn't show others how wonderful God is. It just looks like everyone else who fights and argues.

[Move to center, speak with loving authority]

So God used his friend Paul to write them a letter. Paul was like a teacher who cared about these people very much. When Paul heard they were fighting, he was not happy. Not happy at all!

[Shake your head and look disappointed]

Paul wrote, "Why are you fighting with each other? Why don't you ask someone wise in your church to help you instead of going to judges who don't know Jesus?"

1 Corinthians 6:7 (NIV)

7 Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated?

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think those people were surprised when Paul said that? I bet they said, "What?! Let people be mean to us? Let them take our stuff?" But Paul wasn't telling them to let people hurt them all the time.

[Move to center, speak with gentle wisdom]

Paul was teaching them something very important. Sometimes, being kind and forgiving is better than fighting to prove you're right. Sometimes, choosing to be nice even when someone is mean shows everyone what God's love looks like.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Paul told them, "You used to be mean to people before you knew Jesus. But God cleaned your heart! God made you new! Now you can choose to be kind even when others are not kind to you."

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

When someone takes your toy, you can choose to be kind. When someone says something mean, you can choose to forgive them. When someone is unfair, you can choose to show them what God's love looks like.

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what's amazing? When you choose to be kind instead of fighting, good things happen! People see how special you are. They want to know about the God who helps you be so loving.

[Pause dramatically]

God can help us be kind even when we don't feel like it. God can help us forgive even when someone hurt our feelings. God's love inside us makes us strong enough to choose kindness!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school, someone might cut in front of you in line. Sometimes your brother or sister might break your toy. Sometimes a friend might say something that hurts your feelings. When that happens, you can ask God to help you be kind anyway.

[Move closer to the children]

When you choose to forgive instead of being mean back, you show everyone how amazing God is. When you choose to share instead of fighting about what's fair, you show everyone God's love.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you so much, and He's always ready to help you choose kindness, even when it's really hard. You can do it because God is helping you!

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 a 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 people felt when they were fighting with their friends?
 2. When has someone been mean to you? How did that make you feel?
 3. Why do you think Paul wanted them to stop fighting?
 4. What would you do if someone took your favorite toy?
-

5. What happened when the people started being kind instead of fighting?

6. How do you think God feels when we choose to be kind?

7. What good things happen when we forgive someone?

8. When is it hard to be nice at school?

9. How can we be kind to our brothers and sisters at home?

10. Who helps you choose to be nice when you don't want to?

11. Why did Paul say it was better to be kind than to fight?

12. How can you show God's love to someone who's mean?

13. What does God do when we ask Him to help us be kind?

14. Is it easy or hard to forgive someone? Why?

15. What would happen if everyone chose to be kind instead of fighting?

16. How do you feel when someone forgives you?

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

18. How can we pray for help to be nice?

19. What would happen if we always fought when someone was mean?

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

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 songs that reinforce kindness and forgiveness. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "If You're Happy and You Know It" (with kind actions), or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: spread arms wide for "love," clap for happiness, hold up finger for "light."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down in rows for our prayer time. Fold your hands and close your eyes, 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 teaching us to be kind and forgiving like Jesus.

[Pause]

When someone is mean to us this week, help us remember to choose kindness. Help us forgive like You forgive us.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us so much and for always helping us do what's right. 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 share with my sister" or "Help me forgive when friends are mean."

Remember, God loves you so much and He's always ready to help you choose kindness! Have a wonderful week showing everyone what God's love looks like!

Quick to Listen

Priority Order Matters, Is all anger unrighteous?

James 1:16-27

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

James 1:16-27 (NIV)

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

26 Those who consider themselves religious but do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

Context

James writes to Jewish Christians scattered by persecution, facing trials that test their faith. He has just addressed how trials develop perseverance and how God gives wisdom generously to those who ask. The discussion of anger comes in the context of receiving God's gifts amid hardship. These believers are stressed, displaced, and likely frustrated with their circumstances and each other.

The immediate context shows James transitioning from discussing God's unchanging character and generous gifts to practical instructions about how believers should respond. He's about to address the relationship between hearing God's word and doing it. The listening-speaking-anger sequence isn't abstract wisdom, it's survival guidance for a community under pressure, showing how to receive truth rather than react defensively.

The Big Idea

God establishes a response hierarchy that produces righteousness: listening first, speaking second, anger last and slowly.

This isn't a simple call for niceness or emotional management. James recognizes that human anger, particularly the quick, defensive kind that emerges under stress, fundamentally fails to accomplish God's righteous purposes. The order matters: when we listen before we speak and speak before we get angry, we create space for God's word to work rather than our natural reactions to dominate.

Theological Core

- **Listening Priority.** Quick listening comes first because it positions us to receive rather than defend, opening space for God's perspective to reshape our understanding.
 - **Speech Restraint.** Slow speaking follows careful listening and prevents words that emerge from incomplete understanding or defensive reactions from damaging relationships and truth.
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- **Anger Delay.** Slow-arriving anger allows time for righteousness to work, preventing the destructive force of quick defensive reactions from overwhelming wisdom.
 - **Righteousness Production.** Human anger, especially the quick, self-protective kind, cannot and does not produce the righteousness God desires; only God's approach can accomplish God's purposes.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Human anger, especially quick defensive anger, fundamentally cannot produce the righteousness God desires
 - The listening-speaking-anger hierarchy isn't about emotional suppression but about creating space for God's perspective to work
 - In trials and conflicts, our natural reaction order (anger-speaking-listening) works backward from God's design
 - Learning to distinguish between righteous anger and self-protective anger requires wisdom and often community discernment
-

Grades 4, 6

- The order matters: listening first gives you information to make wise choices about what to say and whether to be angry
 - Quick anger usually makes problems worse, not better, even when the anger feels justified
 - Good listening means really trying to understand, not just waiting for your turn to talk
 - It's okay to feel angry, but acting on anger too quickly usually leads to saying things you wish you hadn't said
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to listen first before we talk
 - God helps us be good listeners and kind speakers
 - When we listen first, we can be helpers instead of hurters
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **All anger is sin.** James specifically mentions "human anger" and its failure to produce righteousness, this suggests some anger might be different. Focus on quick, defensive, self-protective anger rather than declaring all angry feelings sinful.
 - **Emotional suppression as spirituality.** The goal isn't to never feel angry but to reorder our responses so that listening and careful speech precede angry reactions, allowing space for wisdom to work.
 - **Individual anger management only.** This passage addresses community responses in trials, how believers interact with each other under stress. The context is relational and communal, not just personal emotional control.
 - **Ignoring the trial context.** These aren't general conversation tips but specific guidance for people under pressure. The quick anger James addresses emerges from stress, persecution, and hardship, acknowledge that difficult circumstances make this practice more challenging.
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Handling Hard Questions

"But what about righteous anger? Wasn't Jesus angry when he cleared the temple?"

Great question, James specifically talks about "human anger" not producing righteousness, which suggests there might be different kinds of anger. Jesus's anger was slow-building (he observed the temple corruption over time), focused on protecting others rather than defending himself, and aligned with God's purposes. The quick, defensive anger James addresses is the kind that emerges when we feel threatened or misunderstood, that's the anger that doesn't produce righteousness because it's about

protecting ourselves rather than pursuing God's justice.

"What if listening first means letting people walk all over you?"

Listening first doesn't mean agreeing with everything or never setting boundaries. It means gathering information before reacting. Actually, when you really understand what someone is saying and why they're saying it, you can respond more effectively, whether that's finding common ground, setting clear boundaries, or addressing the real issue instead of just the surface conflict. Quick anger often fights the wrong battle because we haven't listened enough to understand what's really happening.

"This seems impossible when someone is attacking you or being unfair."

You're right, it is incredibly difficult, especially under stress or when facing injustice. James is writing to people facing persecution, so he knows this isn't easy. The goal isn't perfection but progress toward God's pattern. Sometimes we'll fail and need to start over. The promise is that as we practice this order, listen, speak slowly, delay anger, we create more space for God's wisdom to work in us and through us, even in really hard situations.

The One Thing to Remember

Quick anger closes the door to righteousness, but the listening-speaking-waiting order opens it.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between feeling justified in quick anger and James's claim that human anger doesn't produce righteousness. Help them discover why the listening-first order matters for actually solving problems and building relationships.

The Tension to Frame

Is all anger unrighteous, or is James talking specifically about quick, defensive anger that speaks before it listens?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with anger, they've felt justifiably angry, and those feelings make sense
 - Honor the complexity, there's a difference between feeling angry and acting on anger quickly
 - Let them work through the distinction between righteous anger and self-protective anger through discussion rather than lecturing about it
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about the last time someone criticized you unfairly, maybe a teacher, parent, or friend accused you of something you didn't do or judged you based on incomplete information. Your immediate response was probably to defend yourself, explain why they were wrong, or push back against the unfairness. That reaction makes complete sense, when we feel misunderstood or attacked, our brain's job is to protect us.

But here's what's interesting: how often does that immediate defensive response actually solve the problem? Sometimes the person criticizing us has a point we can't see when we're focused on defending ourselves. Sometimes they're coming from a place of hurt or stress that has nothing to do with us. Sometimes we're both right and both wrong at the same time.

The challenge is that our natural response order, defend first, explain why we're right, get angry about the unfairness, might actually prevent us from getting to the truth or solving the real problem. Today we're looking at a passage where James suggests a completely different order of response, especially when we're under pressure.

As we read, notice how James talks about anger. He doesn't say anger is always wrong, but he does say something specific about the kind of anger that comes quickly and what it can and can't accomplish. Pay attention to the order he suggests, there's a sequence that matters.

Let's open to James 1 and start with verse 19. Read silently first, and think about whether James is talking about all anger or a specific type of anger.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage is short but dense, let them feel the weight of what James is claiming about human anger. Help students who struggle with words like "righteousness" by suggesting they think about "the good things God wants to happen."

As You Read, Think About:

- What does James say should happen first, second, and third?
- Why does James think human anger doesn't produce righteousness?
- What's the context, why is James giving this advice?
- How does this connect to the verses before and after?

James 1:16-27 (NIV)

16 Don't be deceived, my dear brothers and sisters. 17 Every good and perfect gift is from above, coming down from the Father of the heavenly lights, who does not change like shifting shadows. 18 He chose to give us birth through the word of truth, that we might be a kind of firstfruits of all he created.

19 My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, 20 because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires. 21 Therefore, get rid of all moral filth and the evil that is so prevalent and humbly accept the word planted in you, which can save you.

22 Do not merely listen to the word, and so deceive yourselves. Do what it says. 23 Anyone who listens to the word but does not do what it says is like someone who looks at his face in a mirror 24 and, after looking at himself, goes away and immediately forgets what he looks like. 25 But whoever looks intently into the perfect law that gives freedom, and continues in it, not forgetting what they have heard, but doing it, they will be blessed in what they do.

26 Those who consider themselves religious but do not keep a tight rein on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless. 27 Religion that God accepts as pure and faultless is this: to look after orphans and widows in their distress and to keep oneself from being polluted by the world.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Choose confident readers for the key verses. James 1:19-20 should be read with emphasis on the sequence and the strong statement about anger.

Reader 1: Verses 16-18 (God's unchanging character and gifts) **Reader 2:** Verses 19-21 (The listening-speaking-anger sequence) **Reader 3:** Verses 22-27 (Doing the word, not just hearing it)

Listen for the tone, James is giving urgent, practical advice to people who are probably frustrated and stressed. This isn't abstract theology.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for groups to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups and listen, if a group is stuck, prompt with "What surprised you?" or "What seems hard to actually do?"

Get into groups of 3 or 4. Your job is to come up with 1 or 2 real questions about what you just read, not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about. Maybe something James says seems impossible, or you disagree with it, or you want to know what it means in a specific situation. You have 3 minutes to come up with questions that matter to you.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Your job is to facilitate discovery, not lecture. Guide them to see patterns and connections through their own wrestling.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around anger, the sequence, and practical application. Start with questions that connect to their experience.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "James says 'human anger', what do you think he means by that specific phrase?"
 - "What's the connection between listening quickly and producing righteousness?"
 - "Why do you think the order matters, quick listening, slow speaking, slow anger?"
 - "What's the difference between feeling angry and becoming angry in James's terms?"
 - "How does this connect to the context of trials that James mentioned earlier in the chapter?"
 - "Can you think of a time when quick anger actually made a situation worse?"
 - "What would change if you listened first in a conflict before defending yourself?"
 - "Why does this matter for how we treat each other, especially when we're stressed?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what James is doing here? He's giving us a completely different response order than what feels natural. Our default is: get angry about unfairness, speak up to defend ourselves, maybe listen to understand later. James flips it: listen to understand first, speak carefully second, and if anger comes, let it be slow and thoughtful. He's not saying never be angry, he's saying quick human anger can't accomplish what God wants to accomplish.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this pattern playing out, the tension between wanting to defend yourself quickly and James's call to listen first? Think about school drama, family arguments, social media conflicts, group projects gone wrong.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When someone calls you out in class or questions your answer and your immediate instinct is to prove they're wrong
 - Family arguments where everyone's talking over each other and no one feels heard
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- Social media comments that make your blood boil and you want to respond immediately
- Friend conflicts where someone says you did something that hurt them and your first response is to explain why they're being too sensitive
- Group projects where someone criticizes your work and you get defensive instead of asking what they mean
- Current events discussions where people take sides quickly without really listening to different perspectives

Facilitation: Let students share examples from their own experience. Don't rush to fix or judge their responses. Help them think through what might change if they tried James's order in these situations.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone listen first and how did it change the situation?"
- "What makes it hard to listen when you feel attacked or misunderstood?"
- "How can you tell the difference between anger that might be righteous and anger that's just self-protective?"
- "What would help you remember to listen first when your instinct is to defend yourself?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: James isn't asking you to become a doormat or never stand up for yourself. He's recognizing that quick, defensive anger, even when it feels totally justified, usually doesn't solve the real problem or build the relationships God wants. The listening-first order creates space for understanding, wisdom, and actual solutions to emerge.

This week, pay attention to your response order in conflicts or stressful situations. Notice when your instinct is to defend or explain yourself immediately. Try the James approach: listen first to really understand what's happening, speak slowly and thoughtfully, and if anger comes, let it be slow enough that wisdom can work with it. This isn't about perfection, it's about creating more space for God's righteousness to actually happen.

You had really good discussions today about some complex issues. Keep wrestling with these questions, that's exactly what God wants. The goal isn't to have all the answers but to keep growing in wisdom about how to love each other well, especially when things get hard.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that order matters, listening first gives you information to make wise choices about what to say and whether to get angry.

If Kids Ask "But what if someone is being mean to me?"

Say: "Listening first doesn't mean letting people be mean to you. It means getting all the information before you decide how to respond, sometimes that helps you solve the real problem instead of just fighting about it."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in the middle of an argument and realized you were both talking about different things. Like, you thought your friend was mad about one thing, but they were actually upset about something totally different. And you spent all this time fighting about the wrong problem!

Now here's a harder question: raise your hand if you've ever gotten angry at someone and said something you wish you could take back. Maybe you found out later that you misunderstood what they meant, or they were having a bad day for reasons that had nothing to do with you, or your angry words made the problem bigger instead of smaller.

This happens to everyone, including adults. When something feels unfair or someone says something that hurts our feelings, our brain wants to protect us. So we get angry fast and say things fast. That's normal! But sometimes our quick anger makes us fight the wrong battle or say things that hurt people we care about.

You know how in movies like Inside Out or Frozen, characters have to learn that their first feeling isn't always the right guide for what to do? Like when Elsa feels scared so she runs away, but running away actually makes the problem worse? Sometimes our feelings are telling us something important, but we need more information before we act on them.

The tricky part is figuring out how to be brave and stand up for what's right without letting quick anger make choices for us that we'll regret later. How do you know when to speak up and when to listen more? How do you handle feeling angry without making things worse?

Today we're going to hear about some advice from a guy named James who wrote to people who were dealing with really hard times. They were angry and frustrated about unfair things happening to them, and James gave them a plan for handling their feelings in a way that actually helps instead of makes things worse. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to the misunderstanding scenarios. Acknowledge their stories briefly but keep momentum toward the Bible story. If someone shares a current conflict, validate their feelings but save problem-solving for later.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture this: you and your friends have been kicked out of your school and your neighborhood. Not because you did anything wrong, but because some powerful people decided they didn't like your family's beliefs.

Now you're living in a new place where you don't know anyone. You miss your old home. Money is tight. People look at you funny. Some days you feel angry about how unfair everything is. Other days you feel scared about what might happen next.

And here's the really hard part, you're not going through this alone. Your whole community is stressed out and worried. So sometimes you get angry at each other about things that normally wouldn't be a big deal. Someone says something the wrong way, or doesn't help when you need them to, or seems to be handling things better than you are, and suddenly you're fighting with the people who are supposed to be on your team.

Imagine how frustrating that would feel. Bad things are happening that aren't your fault, and now you're not even getting along with your friends and family who are trying to help you.

This is exactly what was happening to the people James was writing to. They were Jewish followers of Jesus who had been forced to leave their homes because people didn't like their faith. They were scattered all over different countries, trying to start over, and they were struggling.

James cared about these people, they were like his younger brothers and sisters. And he could see that they were so focused on being angry about all the unfair things happening to them that they were starting to hurt each other. They were speaking quickly, getting angry quickly, and not listening to each other well.

So James sat down and wrote them a letter. He wanted to help them handle their hard situation in a way that would actually make things better, not worse.

But before James gave them his advice, he reminded them of something important about God. He said, "Remember, every good and perfect gift comes from God, who never changes like shifting shadows. God chose to give you new life through his word of truth."

In other words: "I know everything feels crazy and unfair right now, but God is still good and God still cares about you. Don't forget that in the middle of all this mess."

And then James said something that probably surprised them:

James 1:19-20 (NIV)

"My dear brothers and sisters, take note of this: Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

Wait, what? These people had every right to be angry! Terrible, unfair things were happening to them. They'd been kicked out of their homes just for believing in Jesus. Of course they were mad!

But James wasn't saying, "Don't ever feel angry." He was saying something different: "The order matters. Listen first, speak second, and if you're going to get angry, let it happen slowly."

Why? Because James had noticed something: when people get angry fast and speak fast, they usually don't solve the real problem. They just create new problems.

Think about it this way: if your friend seems mad at you, and you immediately get defensive and say, "Well, you did this wrong thing yesterday!", you're not actually finding out why your friend is upset. You're just having an argument.

But if you listen first and ask, "What's wrong? What happened?" you might discover that your friend isn't even mad at you. Maybe they're worried about something at home, or someone else hurt their feelings, or they're frustrated about a problem you could actually help with.

James said that quick human anger doesn't produce "the righteousness that God desires." In kid language, that means: getting angry fast and reacting fast usually doesn't create the good things that God wants to happen, like friendship, and fairness, and problems actually getting solved.

So James gave them a different plan: "Be quick to listen", really try to understand what's happening and why. "Be slow to speak", think before you say words that might hurt someone or make things worse. "Be slow to become angry", if you're going to get mad, let it happen after you've listened and thought, not before.

Then James kept going and said, "Don't just listen to God's word and then ignore it. Actually do what it says. If you say you care about God but you can't control your tongue, you're fooling yourself."

James was basically saying: "I know you're going through hard times, but the way you treat each other matters. And if you want to get through this well, you have to be people who listen first, speak wisely, and let your anger be slow enough that wisdom can work with it."

What happened when people started following James's advice? They got better at solving actual problems instead of just fighting about them. They were able to support each other instead of hurting each other. They discovered that listening first often helped them understand what was really wrong, so they could actually help instead of just arguing.

Sometimes in our lives, we face hard situations too. Maybe not as big as being forced to leave our homes, but things that feel unfair or scary or frustrating. And just like those early Christians, we have a choice about how we respond.

We can get angry fast, speak fast, and maybe make the problem bigger. Or we can try James's way: listen first to really understand, speak carefully so our words help instead of hurt, and if we get angry, let it be slow enough that we can make wise choices about what to do with those feelings.

The cool thing is that when we follow James's order, we often discover things we never would have known if we'd just reacted quickly. We find out what's really wrong. We learn how to help. We build friendships instead of tearing them down.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Think about a time when someone said something that made you feel angry or hurt. Maybe they criticized something you made, or they didn't include you in something fun, or they said you did something wrong. How did you feel in your body when that happened? What did you want to do first, explain yourself, defend yourself, or walk away?

Listen For: "I wanted to tell them why they were wrong," "I felt mad in my stomach," "I wanted to say something mean back." Affirm: "That makes total sense. Your brain was trying to protect you."

Question 2: The Quick Response

Now imagine that instead of listening to find out what was really happening, you immediately said the first thing that came to your mind when you felt hurt or angry. What usually happens when people do that? Have you ever seen a situation get worse because someone responded too quickly?

If They Say: "People start fighting more" or "Everyone gets madder", respond "Exactly! Quick anger often creates more problems instead of solving the first problem."

Question 3: The Listen-First Approach

What do you think might change if you used James's order, listen first to really understand what's happening, then think about what to say? Can you think of a time when someone really listened to you when you were upset, and how did that feel different from times when people just argued back?

Connect: "This is exactly what made James's advice so smart, listening first helps you understand the real problem."

Question 4: The Real Problem

James said quick human anger doesn't produce the good things God wants to happen. What do you think are the good things God wants to happen when people have conflicts, between friends, in families, at school? What would change if people followed the listen-speak-slow anger order?

If They Say: "People would understand each other better", respond "Yes! And when people understand each other, they can solve real problems instead of just fighting."

You're noticing something really important: the order matters because it changes what you discover and how you can help. When we listen first, we often find out things that help us solve the actual problem instead of just defending ourselves.

4. Activity: The Communication Relay (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces James's sequence by having kids physically experience how listening first leads to better outcomes than reacting first. Success looks like kids discovering that when they slow down their response and really listen, they can solve problems that seemed impossible when they reacted quickly.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play the Communication Relay. You'll work in teams of three. One person will be the "Problem Presenter", they have a scenario they need help with. One person will be the "Quick Reactor", they respond immediately to try to help. And one person will be the "James Responder", they follow James's order of listen first, speak slowly.

Here's the challenge: the Problem Presenter will describe a situation that sounds like one thing but is actually about something else. The Quick Reactor gets to respond immediately with solutions. The James Responder has to ask listening questions first before offering any solutions.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what James was talking about, sometimes our quick responses miss the real issue because we haven't listened enough to understand what's actually happening. You'll get to see which approach actually helps more.

Everyone will get to try each role, and I'll give you different scenarios to work with.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round 1: Problem Presenters, describe your situation but don't reveal the deeper issue yet. Quick Reactors, give immediate advice. James Responders, ask "Tell me more" questions before suggesting anything. Let them discover how different approaches uncover different information.

Watch as Quick Reactors give solutions to the surface problem while James Responders discover the real issue through listening. Notice when the Problem Presenter feels more understood and when they reveal what they really need help with.

Coaching phrases: "Quick Reactors, trust your instinct and solve it fast." "James Responders, you can't give advice until you really understand what's happening." "Problem Presenters, notice which approach helps you feel heard."

The breakthrough comes when James Responders discover the real problem through listening, while Quick Reactors realize they were solving the wrong issue. Celebrate: "Look! The listening approach found the actual problem!"

After each round, have teams rotate roles so everyone experiences both approaches. Notice how it feels different to be heard versus to be given quick solutions to the wrong problem.

Watch For: The moment when a James Responder's listening reveals something the Problem Presenter hadn't initially shared, this is the physical representation of how James's order uncovers truth.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt to be really listened to versus getting quick advice? How often did the James Responder discover something different from what the Quick Reactor was trying to solve? This is exactly why James says listen first, when you really understand what's happening, you can actually help instead of just reacting to what you think you heard.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: James gave people a different order for handling conflicts and hard feelings. Instead of getting angry fast and speaking fast, he said listen first, speak second, and let anger be slow. When you listen first, you get information that helps you make wise choices about what to say and whether to get angry at all.

This doesn't mean never standing up for yourself or letting people be mean to you. It means getting all the information before you decide how to respond. Sometimes that helps you solve the real problem instead of just fighting about what you think the problem is.

The amazing result is that you actually help people and solve problems instead of just defending yourself. You build friendships instead of tearing them down. And you discover things you never would have known if you'd just reacted quickly.

This Week's Challenge

This week, try the James approach once: when someone says something that makes you want to defend yourself or get angry immediately, pause and ask a listening question first. "Can you help me understand what you mean?" or "What happened that made you feel that way?" See what you discover when you listen before you react.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for giving us James's wise advice about listening first. Help us remember to listen before we speak and speak before we get angry. When conflicts happen this week, help us be brave enough to really understand what's happening so we can help solve real problems. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to listen first before we talk, and listening first helps us be kind helpers.

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 listening first to using your ears before your mouth, like when you need to hear instructions before you can follow them correctly.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about listening or using kind words. Suggestions: "Be Careful Little Ears," "God Gave Me Ears," or "Listen and Obey." Use movements: point to ears during verses about listening, cover mouth gently during verses about speaking kindly, make calm gestures during verses about being patient.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our special story shape so I can tell you about someone named James who taught people something very important about listening. Find your spot in our horseshoe!

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 caring when you're James, sound confused when you're the people having arguments, sound wise when you share the solution.

Today we're going to meet a very smart man named James who cared about people very much!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

James had friends who were having a really hard time. Bad things were happening to them that weren't their fault. They had to leave their homes and move to new places where they didn't know anyone.

[Use a worried expression and concerned voice]

When people are scared and sad and everything feels hard, sometimes they start getting grumpy with each other. Have you ever noticed that? When you're having a bad day, it's easier to get mad at your brother or sister or friends.

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

That's exactly what was happening to James's friends. They were so upset about the hard things happening to them that they started arguing with each other! They would get angry fast and say words that hurt people's feelings.

[Move to center, speak with kind, caring tone]

James loved his friends and wanted to help them. So he wrote them a letter with very important advice. First, he reminded them that God loves them and gives them good gifts, even when everything feels hard.

[Move to side, sound like you're reading an important letter]

Then James said something that might surprise you. He said, "Listen with your ears quickly, but let your mouth speak slowly, and don't get angry too fast."

James 1:19-20 (NIV)

"Everyone should be quick to listen, slow to speak and slow to become angry, because human anger does not produce the righteousness that God desires."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think James's friends were confused? They probably thought, "But James, we have good reasons to be angry! Unfair things are happening to us!" And they were right to feel upset!

[Move to center, speak with gentle wisdom]

But James wasn't saying "Don't ever feel angry." He was saying "Use your ears first, then your mouth, and if you feel angry, slow down and think."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, using hand gestures]

Why did James want them to listen first? Because when you listen first, you find out what's really wrong! Maybe your friend isn't actually mad at you, maybe they're sad about something else and need a hug.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

James said that when people get angry too fast and say words too fast, it doesn't help anyone. It just makes more problems! But when people listen first, then speak kindly, good things happen.

[Speak with excitement]

So James's friends learned to try something new. When someone seemed upset, instead of getting mad right back, they would ask, "What's wrong? How can I help you?" And you know what? It worked!

[Pause dramatically]

The big truth is this: God wants us to be good listeners! When we use our ears before our mouth, we can understand people better and help them better.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, people might say things that make us feel mad or hurt. Maybe your brother takes your toy, or your friend doesn't want to play your game, or someone at school says something

mean.

[Move closer to the children]

When that happens, you can remember James's advice: listen first! Ask "What's wrong?" or "Why did you do that?" You might find out something that helps you be a kind helper instead of someone who makes the problem bigger.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God gave you ears to listen and God gave you a mouth to speak kind words. When you use your ears first, God helps you know what kind words to say!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing them! 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 James's friends felt when bad things happened to them?
 2. What happens when you get angry really fast and say the first thing you think of?
 3. Why do you think James wanted people to listen first?
 4. What would you do if your friend seemed mad at you?
 5. How does it feel when someone really listens to you?
 6. What's the difference between listening and just waiting to talk?
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7. How can you tell if someone needs help when they seem grumpy?

8. What kind words can you say when someone is upset?

9. How does God help us be good listeners?

10. When is it hard to listen instead of talking right away?

11. What good things happen when people listen to each other?

12. How can you be a helper instead of someone who makes problems bigger?

13. What does God want us to do with our ears?

14. Why is it important to use kind words?

15. How can listening help you understand people better?

16. What would you want someone to do if you were feeling sad or mad?

17. How can you show someone you're really listening to them?

18. What should you do before you speak when someone seems upset?

19. How does listening first help you know what to say?

20. What did you learn about being a good listener today?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose a song about kindness or helping others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God Wants Us to Be Kind." Include movements like pointing to ears for listening, gentle hand gestures for speaking kindly, and helping motions for being good helpers.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer. Cross your legs, fold your hands, and bow your heads.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for giving us ears to listen and mouths to speak kind words.

[Pause]

Help us remember James's advice to listen first before we talk. When someone seems upset or mad, help us ask "What's wrong?" so we can be good helpers.

[Pause]

Help us use our ears to really listen and our mouths to say words that help people feel better.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and teaching us how to love each other. 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 good listeners. Examples: "Help me listen to my sister" or "Thank you for my ears."

Remember, God wants you to be a good listener! This week, try using your ears before your mouth when someone seems upset. You might discover you can be a really good helper! Have a wonderful week!

Relationships First

Reconciliation Before Worship, When does relationship repair take priority over religious duty?

Matthew 5:21-26

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 5:21-26 (NIV)

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the supreme court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

Context

Jesus is delivering the Sermon on the Mount to a crowd of followers gathered on a hillside. He has just proclaimed the Beatitudes and declared himself the fulfillment of the Law and Prophets. Now he begins a series of "You have heard... but I tell you" teachings that radically reinterpret religious obligations. His audience includes both committed disciples and curious onlookers familiar with temple worship and sacrificial offerings.

This teaching comes immediately after Jesus's statement about not abolishing the Law but fulfilling it. The crowd expects reinforcement of existing religious practices. Instead, Jesus interrupts the most sacred religious act, offering gifts at the altar, with a startling requirement that relationships take priority over ritual. The temple altar was the center of Jewish religious life, where people brought offerings to connect with God and seek forgiveness.

The Big Idea

Relationship repair takes absolute priority over religious observance, even interrupting the most sacred moments of worship when we have caused harm to others.

This isn't about perfect relationships being required for spiritual life, it's about taking responsibility for damage we've caused. The text specifically addresses situations where "your brother or sister has something against you," focusing on our initiative to repair harm we've created, not on resolving every possible conflict or managing others' grievances against us.

Theological Core

- **Priority Ordering.** Reconciliation with people precedes acceptable worship with God, reversing common assumptions about spiritual versus relational obligations.
 - **Worship Integrity.** Vertical relationship with God cannot be maintained authentically while horizontal relationships remain broken through our fault or negligence.
 - **Sacred Interruption.** No religious moment, however important or inconvenient to interrupt, takes precedence over addressing relationship damage we have caused.
 - **Reconciliation Initiative.** When we have harmed others, we bear responsibility for making repair attempts, regardless of their response or the relationship's ultimate outcome.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Relationship repair sometimes requires interrupting religious activities, even when inconvenient or spiritually meaningful
 - The complexity of determining when we have caused harm and need to take initiative versus when others bear responsibility
 - How to navigate situations where reconciliation attempts may not be welcomed or successful
 - Developing discernment about when spiritual practices might be masking relationship avoidance
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Grades 4, 6

- Making things right with people we've hurt comes before church activities, prayer, or religious duties
 - Sometimes we need to stop what we're doing to say sorry and fix problems we've caused
 - God cares more about our relationships being healthy than about perfect religious behavior
 - It's okay to feel nervous about apologizing, but we should do the right thing anyway
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be friends again when we've been mean to someone
 - God loves it when we say sorry and try to make things better
 - Being kind to people is very important to God
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Universal Reconciliation Pressure.** The text specifies "has something against you," focusing on harm we've caused, not requiring resolution of every possible conflict or grievance we might hold against others.

- **Relationship Perfectionism.** This teaching addresses taking responsibility for damage we've created, not achieving perfect harmony in all relationships or managing others' unreasonable expectations.

- **Religious Activity Dismissal.** The point isn't that worship and spiritual practices are unimportant, but that they cannot substitute for relationship repair when we have caused harm.

- **Reconciliation Outcome Guarantee.** The teaching requires our initiative and genuine attempt at repair, not successful resolution or the other person's forgiveness, which remains beyond our control.

Handling Hard Questions

"What if the person won't forgive me or doesn't want to reconcile?"

Jesus requires our genuine attempt at reconciliation, not a successful outcome. We're responsible for acknowledging harm, offering sincere apology, and making what amends we can. Their response, whether forgiveness, continued anger, or refusal to engage, remains their choice. Our obligation is the honest attempt, not the result. Sometimes reconciliation isn't possible, but taking responsibility still matters.

"Does this apply when someone has hurt me but hasn't apologized?"

The text specifically addresses situations where someone "has something against you," focusing on harm we've caused rather than harm done to us. This doesn't mean ignoring injuries we've received, but this particular teaching emphasizes taking initiative for our own offenses. Other biblical passages address forgiveness and confronting those who hurt us.

"What if trying to reconcile would cause more harm or isn't safe?"

Reconciliation attempts should be wise and safe. If direct approach would cause additional damage to the other person or put anyone at risk, alternative approaches might include written apology,

intermediary communication, or professional mediation. The principle is taking responsibility for harm caused, which can sometimes be done indirectly when direct contact isn't wise or safe.

The One Thing to Remember

God values our relationships with people so highly that even sacred worship should be interrupted to repair harm we have caused to others.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between religious obligations and relationship responsibilities, helping them explore when spiritual activities might need interrupting for the sake of relationship repair. Help them discover Jesus's radical priority ordering rather than lecturing about it.

The Tension to Frame

When does relationship repair take precedence over religious duty, and how do we discern when our spiritual practices might be masking relationship avoidance?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with complicated relationship conflicts where responsibility isn't clear-cut
 - Honor the complexity of determining when we have caused harm versus when others bear responsibility
 - Let them wrestle with scenarios rather than providing quick answers to nuanced situations
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: You're at a youth group event you've been looking forward to for weeks. Maybe it's a retreat, or a special service, or a mission trip you've saved money for. You're in the middle of something meaningful, worship, prayer, serving others, when you suddenly remember a text you sent last week that really hurt someone. You realize you never apologized, and now they're avoiding you.

Your first instinct makes perfect sense: "I'm doing something good here. This is important spiritual work. I'll deal with that relationship thing later." Besides, interrupting would be awkward. People would notice. You'd lose this moment that feels significant. The right thing seems like staying focused on what you came to do.

But what if the most spiritual thing you could do in that moment would be to leave? What if God cares more about you texting an apology than about you finishing your prayer? That seems backward, until you hear what Jesus actually taught about moments exactly like this.

Today we're looking at Jesus's teaching about a person bringing an offering to the temple altar, the most sacred act in Jewish religious life, who suddenly remembers someone has something against them. Watch what Jesus says should happen next. Pay attention to his priority ordering and what he interrupts for what.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 5, verse 21. We'll start there and read through verse 26.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "Raca" or "adversary." Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread slowly. Let them feel the weight of Jesus interrupting worship for relationship repair.

As You Read, Think About:

- What progression do you notice from anger to words to actions in verses 21-22?
 - Why might someone be at the altar with a gift when they remember relationship damage?
 - What's surprising or difficult about Jesus's instructions in verses 23-24?
 - How would you feel if you had to leave your gift and go find someone who was angry with you?
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Matthew 5:21-26 (NIV)

21 "You have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'You shall not murder, and anyone who murders will be subject to judgment.' 22 But I tell you that anyone who is angry with a brother or sister will be subject to judgment. Again, anyone who says to a brother or sister, 'Raca,' is answerable to the supreme court. And anyone who says, 'You fool!' will be in danger of the fire of hell.

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift.

25 "Settle matters quickly with your adversary who is taking you to court. Do it while you are still together on the way, or your adversary may hand you over to the judge, and the judge may hand you over to the officer, and you may be thrown into prison. 26 Truly I tell you, you will not get out until you have paid the last penny."

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers and let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the dramatic sections where Jesus is redefining expectations.

Reader 1: Verses 21-22 (Jesus's progression from murder to anger) **Reader 2:** Verses 23-24 (The altar interruption) **Reader 3:** Verses 25-26 (The courtroom urgency)

Listen for the escalation Jesus describes and the urgency he emphasizes. This isn't casual advice, it's dramatic reordering of priorities.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen. Help stuck groups with "What confused you most?" or "What would be hardest to

actually do?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or find confusing. Good questions might start with "Why does Jesus..." or "What if..." or "How would you..." Don't worry about having answers; focus on asking what you're genuinely wondering about. You have three minutes starting now.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecturing. Write their questions on the board and look for themes.

Collecting Questions: Let's hear your questions. I'll write them down and we'll explore them together. What are you genuinely curious about?

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do you notice about the progression in verse 22, anger, 'Raca,' 'You fool'? What pattern is Jesus describing?"
- "Why do you think Jesus chooses the altar moment specifically? What's significant about interrupting worship?"
- "The text says 'your brother has something against you', what's the difference between that and you having something against them?"
- "How would you feel if you had to leave your gift at the altar and go find someone who was angry with you?"
- "What makes this difficult? When might religious activity feel easier than relationship repair?"
- "How do you know when you've caused harm that needs addressing versus when someone's anger isn't your responsibility?"
- "What would this look like in your life, leaving youth group to text an apology? Skipping church to have a difficult conversation?"
- "Why does Jesus seem to care more about relationships than religious activities here?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus is completely flipping normal religious priorities. Usually we think: do your spiritual duties first, then deal with people problems later. But Jesus says even the most sacred religious moment, offering gifts to God, should be interrupted to repair relationship damage you've caused. He's saying your relationship with God can't be right while relationships with people remain broken through your fault.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension playing out? When might you be tempted to focus on religious activities while avoiding relationship repair? Think about school, social media, family, friendships, where does this hit home?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Staying busy with church activities while avoiding a conversation with someone you've hurt
 - Posting inspirational content online while leaving harsh comments or hurtful posts unaddressed
 - Participating enthusiastically in family devotions while refusing to apologize to a sibling
 - Engaging in deep small group discussions while ghosting a friend you had conflict with
 - Volunteering for service projects while ignoring racist, sexist, or cruel comments you've made
 - Praying about relationships while refusing to take initiative to repair ones you've damaged
-

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone prioritize relationship repair even when it was inconvenient or embarrassing?"
 - "What would help you recognize when you're using spiritual activities to avoid relationship responsibilities?"
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- "How do you discern when someone's anger is your responsibility to address versus their issue to work through?"
- "What's the difference between genuine reconciliation and just trying to make people stop being mad at you?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God values your relationships with people so highly that even worship should be interrupted to repair harm you've caused. This isn't about achieving perfect relationships, it's about taking responsibility when you've damaged them. Sometimes the most spiritual thing you can do is leave church early to have a difficult conversation.

This week, pay attention to moments when you might be choosing religious activity over relationship responsibility. Notice if there are apologies you need to make, conversations you need to have, or damage you need to address. Consider what it would look like to interrupt something spiritually meaningful for the sake of relationship repair.

You've done excellent thinking today about genuinely hard questions. Keep wrestling with these tensions, that's exactly what Jesus wants you to do. I believe you have the wisdom to navigate these complex situations with both courage and discernment.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that making things right with people they've hurt comes before religious activities, even when it feels hard or inconvenient to stop what they're doing.

If Kids Ask "What if they won't forgive me?"

Say: "God wants you to try to make it right by saying sorry and asking what you can do. Whether they forgive you is their choice, but trying to fix it is yours."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in the middle of doing something really important, maybe a test, or a game, or watching a movie you've been waiting to see, when you suddenly remembered something you forgot to do. Keep your hands up if that forgotten thing was important enough that you had to stop what you were doing to take care of it.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever been enjoying something fun when you remembered that you hurt someone's feelings and probably should apologize. Most of us have been there. Part of you thinks, "I should go say sorry right now," but another part thinks, "I'm having a good time. I'll deal with this later. They're probably fine."

Those feelings make total sense. It's never fun to admit you messed up or hurt someone. It feels much easier to keep doing the fun thing and hope the problem goes away on its own. Plus, what if the person is still angry? What if the conversation goes badly? What if it's awkward?

This reminds me of Frozen 2, when Elsa realizes she needs to leave Anna and go fix the problem with the spirits, even though it means stopping their adventure together. Or in Toy Story, when Woody has to leave the other toys to help Forky, even though he wants to stay with his friends. Sometimes doing the right thing means stopping something good to deal with something important.

The tricky part is figuring out when something is important enough to interrupt what you're doing. When should you stop the fun thing or the important thing to deal with a relationship problem? How do you know if it can wait or if you need to handle it right now?

Today we're going to hear about someone who was doing the most important religious thing possible, bringing a gift to God at the temple, when they suddenly remembered they had hurt someone. Let's find out what Jesus said they should do.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to avoiding difficult conversations. Acknowledge their feelings briefly: "That makes sense, those conversations are hard!" then keep momentum toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Jesus was sitting on a mountainside teaching a huge crowd of people. They had come from all over to hear what he had to say about how to live the right way.

The people listening knew all about going to the temple to worship God. That's where you brought your very best gifts, maybe a lamb, or grain, or something else valuable, to give to God. It was the most important religious thing you could do.

Jesus had just been talking about anger and mean words, explaining that being cruel to someone with your words was almost as bad as hurting them physically. People were probably thinking, "Wow, I need to be more careful about what I say."

Then Jesus told them a story that completely surprised everyone. Imagine you're there, sitting on the grass, listening carefully to every word.

Jesus said, "Picture this: You're at the temple, which is the most special, holy place you know. You've brought your best gift to offer to God, maybe a lamb you've been saving, or the first grain from your harvest."

The crowd could picture this perfectly. This was something they did regularly. They knew how important and sacred this moment was.

"You're standing at the altar," Jesus continued, "holding your gift, ready to offer it to God. This is a big deal. This is your moment to connect with God, to show your love and respect."

People in the crowd were nodding. They understood exactly what Jesus was describing. This was the highlight of religious life.

"But then," Jesus said, "right there at the altar, with your gift in your hands, you suddenly remember something."

Everyone leaned in. What could be important enough to remember at such a sacred moment?

"You remember that your brother or sister, someone in your community, has something against you. Maybe you said something mean. Maybe you broke something of theirs. Maybe you spread a rumor or were unfair to them. And you realize you never made it right."

Now this was getting uncomfortable. People were thinking, "Well, sure, but I'm in the middle of worshipping God right now. Surely this can wait until after I'm done with this important religious thing."

But Jesus wasn't finished. He said something that shocked everyone:

Matthew 5:23-24 (NIV)

23 "Therefore, if you are offering your gift at the altar and there remember that your brother or sister has something against you, 24 leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

Can you imagine how this sounded to the people listening? Jesus was telling them to interrupt the most sacred moment of their religious life, giving a gift to God, to go apologize to someone.

Think about what this would feel like. You're in the middle of something really important and meaningful. People are watching. You've prepared for this. And Jesus says, "Stop. Right now. Leave your gift sitting there and go find the person you hurt."

"But Jesus," someone might have asked, "what if it's embarrassing? What if everyone notices me leaving? What if the person I hurt doesn't want to talk to me? What if this moment at the altar never comes again?"

Jesus's answer was clear: Go anyway. Making things right with people you've hurt is more important to God than any religious activity you could do. God doesn't want your gifts or your worship when you know you've damaged a relationship and haven't tried to fix it.

Jesus was teaching them that God cares deeply about how we treat each other. So deeply that even worshiping God should be interrupted to repair relationships we've damaged.

The people listening realized that Jesus was saying something revolutionary: Your relationship with God can't be healthy if your relationships with people are broken because of something you did wrong.

This meant that sometimes the most spiritual thing you could do would be to leave church early to apologize to someone. Or to stop praying and go make amends for something mean you said. Or to step away from a religious activity to have a difficult conversation about something you did wrong.

Jesus wanted them to understand that God values kindness and reconciliation more than perfect religious behavior. Sometimes in our lives, we need to stop what we're doing, even something good or important, to make things right with someone we've hurt.

What we learn from this story is that fixing damaged relationships isn't something we do if we have time left over from religious activities. It's so important that religious activities should be interrupted for it.

God loves it when we're brave enough to admit we've hurt someone and try to make it right, even when it's hard or embarrassing or inconvenient.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Uncomfortable Moment

Imagine you're at church camp or VBS, really enjoying worship time, singing your favorite songs and feeling close to God. Suddenly you remember the mean thing you said to your sister before you left, and you realize she's probably still really hurt about it. What would you be feeling in that moment? What would make it hard to stop what you're doing?

Listen For: "I wouldn't want to leave," "It would be embarrassing," "I'd want to finish first", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. It's hard to interrupt something meaningful."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Jesus says to leave your gift at the altar and go make things right first. That means stopping something really important and sacred to deal with a relationship problem you caused. Why do you think Jesus says the relationship repair can't wait? What might happen if you just finished your worship time first?

If They Say: "The person would get more hurt" or "You might forget", respond: "What does that tell you about how much God cares about people's feelings?"

Question 3: God's Priorities

What do you think this story teaches us about what matters most to God? If God says to interrupt worship time to apologize to someone, what does that tell you about how much God cares about our relationships with each other?

Connect: "This shows us that being kind to people isn't separate from loving God, it's one of the most important ways TO love God."

Question 4: In Your Life

Think about your own life. When might you need to stop something fun or important to make things right with someone? Maybe leave a sleepover to call and apologize? Maybe miss part of recess to talk to someone you were mean to? What would that look like for you?

If They Say: "That sounds really hard", respond: "It is hard! But Jesus promises that making things right with people makes our relationship with God better too."

You've shared some really thoughtful ideas about how hard but important it is to prioritize fixing relationships. Now let's do an activity that will help us feel what this looks like.

4. Activity: Priority Shuffle (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of interrupting important activities for relationship repair by having kids physically experience stopping meaningful tasks to help someone they've "hurt." Success looks like kids discovering that helping others feels better than completing tasks when relationships are damaged.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Priority Shuffle. I'll divide you into two groups: the Gift Givers and the Hurt Friends. Gift Givers will start on this side of the room with an important mission. Hurt Friends will be scattered around the room, sitting quietly and looking sad.

Gift Givers, your job is to walk slowly and carefully from this wall to that wall, carrying an imaginary precious gift to God. You need to focus, move reverently, and think about what you're offering. But here's the twist: as you walk, you'll pass by Hurt Friends, and you'll remember that you said something mean to them yesterday.

Hurt Friends, when a Gift Giver stops to apologize to you, you get to decide whether to accept the apology and walk with them to finish their gift-giving, or to stay hurt. Gift Givers, you have to choose: keep walking with your gift, or stop to apologize and help the Hurt Friend feel better.

We're doing this because it's exactly like the story Jesus told, you're in the middle of something really important to God when you remember you hurt someone. Let's see what happens when you have to choose.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start walking, Gift Givers. Remember, you're carrying something precious and important. Focus on your mission... but notice the Hurt Friends as you pass them.

Hurt Friends, look sad and lonely. Gift Givers, you're starting to remember... didn't you say something mean to these people? Don't you owe them an apology? What's more important right now?

I notice some of you are stopping to apologize. How does it feel to interrupt your important mission? I notice some of you are walking past. How does that feel when you see the sad faces?

Now let's switch roles. Hurt Friends become Gift Givers, and Gift Givers become Hurt Friends. New Gift Givers, you know what's coming. You'll have to choose between your important task and fixing relationships.

Look at what's happening! When Gift Givers stop to apologize, both people end up walking together toward the altar. The mission gets completed AND the relationship gets healed. But when they ignore the hurt people, everyone stays separated.

Watch For: The moment when kids choose to stop and apologize, this is the physical representation of prioritizing relationship repair over task completion.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when Gift Givers chose to apologize versus when they walked past? How did it feel to be the Hurt Friend when someone stopped to make things right? You just experienced exactly what Jesus was teaching, when you stop to repair relationships, everybody wins. The hurt gets healed AND God gets honored.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God cares so much about our relationships with each other that even worship should be interrupted to make things right with people we've hurt. When you remember you've

been mean to someone, the most important thing you can do is apologize and try to fix it.

This doesn't mean you have to be perfect friends with everyone or that everyone will always forgive you. It means that when you know you've hurt someone, making it right comes first, even before church activities, prayer time, or religious stuff.

The amazing result is that when you're brave enough to apologize and make amends, your relationships get stronger AND your relationship with God gets better. It's like our activity showed us, everyone wins when relationships get repaired.

This Week's Challenge

Think of one person you might have hurt recently, maybe with words, actions, or ignoring them. Before this week ends, find a way to apologize and ask what you can do to make it better. It might feel scary, but remember that God loves it when you're brave enough to fix damaged relationships.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us that you care deeply about how we treat each other. Help us be brave enough to say sorry when we've hurt someone, even when it's hard or embarrassing. Help us remember that making friends again is one of the most important things we can do. 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 sorry and be friends again when we've been mean to someone.

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 saying sorry to God to putting a bandage on a hurt, you fix the hurt first, then everything feels better.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about friendship, kindness, or saying sorry. Suggestions: "The B-I-B-L-E," "Jesus Loves Me," or "If You're Happy and You Know It." Use movements: clap hands during happy parts, hug yourself during love lyrics, reach out to neighbors during friendship verses.

Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit in our horseshoe on the floor because I have an amazing story to tell you about what Jesus said about being friends.

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 excited when talking about making friends, sound sad when talking about hurt feelings.

Today we're going to meet some people who learned something very important about being friends!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

A long time ago, people would go to a special place called the temple to talk to God and give God presents. They would bring their very best things, like food or flowers, to show God how much they

loved Him.

[Hold hands up like carrying something precious]

One day, a person was walking to give God a really special gift. They were so excited! They had been planning this gift for a long time, and they couldn't wait to give it to God.

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

But as they were walking to give their gift to God, they remembered something. Oh no! They remembered that yesterday they had said something really mean to their friend. Their friend was probably still sad and hurt.

[Move to center, speak with authority like Jesus]

Jesus saw what was happening, and He said something surprising. He said, "If you're bringing a gift to God and you remember that you hurt someone, stop! Leave your gift and go say sorry first!"

[Move to side, sound confused like the person]

The person might have thought, "But Jesus, I'm doing something important for God right now! Can't I say sorry later? This is my time to give God my special gift!"

Matthew 5:24 (NIV)

"Leave your gift there in front of the altar. First go and be reconciled to them; then come and offer your gift."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you know what this means? Jesus was saying that being kind to people is SO important to God that you should stop everything, even giving God presents, to say sorry when you've been mean!

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

Jesus taught them that God loves it when we make friends again. God thinks saying sorry and being kind is one of the most important things we can do!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

So the person put down their gift and went to find their friend. They said, "I'm sorry I was mean to you. I want to be friends again." And guess what? Their friend forgave them!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Then the person went back and gave their gift to God. But now they felt so much better because their friend wasn't hurt anymore!

[Speak with excitement]

God was so happy! The person had learned that being kind to friends is one of the best ways to show love to God!

[Pause dramatically]

The big truth Jesus taught is this: God wants us to be kind to each other. When we hurt someone's feelings, the most important thing is to say sorry and try to be friends again.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we might say something mean to our brother or sister, or be unfriendly to someone at school, or not share our toys. When that happens, God wants us to say sorry and be kind.

[Move closer to the children]

When you hurt someone's feelings, you can say, "I'm sorry. I want to be friends. What can I do to make you feel better?" That makes God so happy!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we're brave enough to say sorry. God helps us be kind and make friends again!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'm going to give each pair a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just 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 person felt when they remembered they hurt their friend?
2. Have you ever had to say sorry to someone? How did it feel?
3. Why do you think Jesus wanted the person to say sorry before giving God a gift?
4. What would you do if someone was mean to you and then said sorry?
5. How do you feel when someone says sorry to you?
6. What are some ways to say sorry besides just saying "I'm sorry"?
7. How do you think God feels when we say sorry to our friends?
8. What if someone you hurt doesn't want to be friends again?
9. How can you be extra kind to someone after you've hurt their feelings?
10. Who is someone you should say sorry to?
11. What makes it hard to say sorry sometimes?
12. How do you know when you've hurt someone's feelings?
13. What does it mean to forgive someone?
14. How does it feel when you and a friend make up after a fight?
15. What would happen if nobody ever said sorry?

16. How can you be more careful with people's feelings?

17. What are some mean things we might do without thinking?

18. How does being kind show love to God?

19. What's the best way to help someone feel better after you've been mean?

20. Why do you think God cares so much about us being kind to each other?

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 kindness, friendship, or love. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Love One Another." Use movements: hug yourself during love lyrics, reach out to neighbors during friendship verses, gentle swaying during peaceful parts.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for our prayer time. Cross your legs 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 teaching us to be kind to our friends.

[Pause]

Help us remember to say sorry when we hurt someone's feelings. Help us be brave and kind like Jesus.

[Pause]

Thank you that you love it when we make friends again. Help us be good friends to everyone.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us so much and helping us love each other. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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

Remember, God loves it when you say sorry and try to be friends again. Have a wonderful week being kind to everyone you meet!

Soft Answers

The Power of Gentle Response, How do we respond when anger comes our way?

Proverbs 15:1-4

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Proverbs 15:1-4 (NIV)

1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 2 The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. 3 The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. 4 The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse tongue crushes the spirit.

Context

This wisdom saying appears in the collection of Solomon's proverbs, part of Israel's extensive wisdom literature tradition. These were practical teachings passed down through generations, designed to help people navigate relationships and daily decisions with skill. The proverbs functioned as moral instruction for young people entering adulthood, teaching them how to live wisely in community.

Proverbs 15:1 stands at the beginning of a section focused on the power of words and their impact on relationships. The immediate context explores various aspects of speech, wise versus foolish talk, the connection between heart and mouth, and how our words affect both ourselves and others. This particular verse sets the tone by establishing that our response choices have direct consequences for conflict dynamics.

The Big Idea

Your response to another person's anger holds the power to either escalate the conflict or redirect it toward peace.

This isn't a magical formula that guarantees results, but rather a wisdom observation about patterns and tendencies. Sometimes gentle answers don't work, some people remain angry regardless of our response. The profound truth here is that we have agency in these moments, and our choice to respond with gentleness versus harshness significantly influences the trajectory of the conflict.

Theological Core

- **Response Agency.** We are not helpless victims when others direct anger toward us. Our response choice, gentle or harsh, actively shapes what happens next in the relationship.
 - **Gentle Power.** Gentleness is not weakness but rather a form of strength that can defuse volatile situations. It requires emotional regulation and intentional choice rather than automatic reaction.
 - **Escalation Dynamics.** Conflict has momentum that can be influenced. Harsh responses feed anger and create cycles of escalation; gentle responses interrupt these cycles and create space for de-escalation.
 - **Wisdom Through Observation.** This proverb reflects careful observation of human nature and relationship patterns. Wisdom comes from noticing what generally happens when we respond one way versus another.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Response choices in conflict situations have significant power to influence outcomes, though not absolute control
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- Gentle responses require emotional regulation and intentional choice rather than automatic reaction
- This wisdom describes general patterns rather than guaranteed results, some situations require different approaches
- Developing discernment about when to apply gentle responses versus when other actions might be needed

Grades 4, 6

- Our choice of words when someone is angry with us can make things better or worse
- Gentle responses often help calm situations down while harsh responses make anger grow
- We have the power to influence what happens next, even when we didn't start the conflict
- It's hard to choose gentle words when we feel hurt or defensive, but it's worth trying

Grades 1, 3

- When someone is mad at us, kind words help more than mean words
- God wants us to use words that help people feel better, not worse
- We can choose to be helpers with our words even when others are upset

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Promising Guaranteed Results.** This proverb describes wisdom patterns, not absolute promises. Sometimes gentle answers don't turn away wrath, and students need to understand that applying biblical wisdom doesn't always produce the desired outcome immediately.
- **Ignoring Power Dynamics.** Gentle responses work differently in different relationship contexts. A gentle answer to an abusive person might not be the appropriate response, and we shouldn't burden people with responsibility for others' anger when they're being mistreated.

- **Conflating Gentleness with Passivity.** Gentle answers require strength and emotional regulation. They're not about being a doormat or avoiding necessary confrontation, but about choosing our response thoughtfully rather than reactively.
 - **Oversimplifying Complex Conflicts.** Some conflicts involve systemic issues, deep-seated problems, or situations where gentle answers alone won't address the underlying issues. This proverb offers one tool for relationship navigation, not a complete conflict resolution strategy.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if being gentle doesn't work and the person stays angry?"

That's a really important question that shows you're thinking carefully about this. The proverb describes what usually happens, not what always happens. Sometimes people stay angry no matter how we respond, and that's not your fault. The wisdom here is that gentle responses give you the best chance of de-escalating conflict, but they don't guarantee the other person's reaction. When gentle answers don't work, it might be time to involve other people who can help, like parents, teachers, or counselors.

"Does this mean we should never stand up for ourselves?"

Great question. Being gentle doesn't mean being weak or letting people walk all over you. You can stand up for yourself while still choosing words that don't escalate the situation. Sometimes the gentlest thing is to set a clear boundary or say no firmly but kindly. The key is responding thoughtfully rather than just reacting with the first emotion you feel. Gentle answers are about choosing your response strategically, not about avoiding all conflict.

"What about when someone is doing something really wrong, shouldn't we be harsh then?"

This is where wisdom gets complex, and it's good that you're wrestling with it. There are times when gentle correction or even firm confrontation is necessary, especially when someone's actions are hurting people. But even in those situations, how we deliver the hard truth matters. The proverb isn't saying never be direct or strong; it's saying that how you package your words affects whether the person can actually hear what you're trying to communicate.

The One Thing to Remember

Your response to anger has power, not to control others, but to choose whether you add fuel to conflict or create space for peace.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to explore how their response choices in conflict situations have power to influence outcomes. Help them wrestle with when gentle responses work, when they don't, and how to develop discernment about their own response patterns.

The Tension to Frame

Does this wisdom describe universal truth or general tendency? How do we apply gentle responses wisely without becoming passive or naive about real conflict?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with conflict, many have faced situations where gentle responses seemed impossible or ineffective
 - Honor the complexity that some conflicts involve power imbalances, abuse, or systemic issues where gentle answers alone aren't sufficient
 - Let students wrestle with scenarios rather than giving quick answers, the process of thinking through application is more valuable than perfect solutions
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about the last time someone was genuinely angry with you, maybe a friend who felt betrayed, a parent who was frustrated, a teacher who was disappointed, or someone online who disagreed with something you posted. Picture that moment when you realized they were upset and you had to decide how to respond.

Your brain probably went into quick calculation mode: Do I defend myself? Do I attack back? Do I apologize immediately? Do I shut down and say nothing? In that split second, you had choices, and you probably went with your first instinct, whatever felt most natural or protective in that moment.

Here's what's fascinating: that choice you made in response to their anger had power. Not power to control their emotions, you can't do that, but power to influence what happened next. Your response either added fuel to the fire or gave it less to burn. It either escalated the tension or created space for something different.

Today we're looking at a piece of ancient wisdom that makes a bold claim about response choices in conflict. The writer says that gentle answers have the power to "turn away wrath," while harsh words "stir up anger." Notice the active language, your response does something; it has force and direction.

Open your Bibles to Proverbs 15:1-4. As you read, pay attention to the cause-and-effect language and think about whether this matches what you've observed in your own life and relationships.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly between students. This is a short passage so they'll finish quickly, let early finishers reread and think more deeply about the questions. Some may want to look at surrounding verses for additional context.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific claims does this passage make about the power of words?
- What's the difference between "gentle" and "harsh" responses in real situations?
- When have you seen these patterns play out in your own experience?
- What questions or doubts does this raise about conflict and responses?

Proverbs 15:1-4 (NIV)

1 A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger. 2 The tongue of the wise adorns knowledge, but the mouth of the fool gushes folly. 3 The eyes of the Lord are everywhere, keeping watch on the wicked and the good. 4 The soothing tongue is a tree of life, but a perverse

tongue crushes the spirit.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for four volunteers to read one verse each. Let students pass if they're not comfortable reading aloud. Choose confident readers for verse 1 since it's the central teaching.

Reader 1: Verse 1 (the central proverb about gentle vs. harsh responses) **Reader 2:** Verse 2 (wise vs. foolish speech) **Reader 3:** Verse 3 (God's awareness of our words and actions) **Reader 4:** Verse 4 (soothing vs. perverse tongues and their effects)

As you listen, notice how these verses build on each other, they're not just random sayings but a connected meditation on the power of words in relationships.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate questions. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What part of this seems unrealistic?" or "What would you want to ask the original author?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions might start with "What if..." or "Does this mean..." or "How do you..." Don't worry about having answers; focus on asking what you really want to know. You have three minutes starting now.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Your job is to facilitate discovery and probe deeper rather than lecture. Guide them toward insights through questioning.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes and patterns. Start with questions that connect to their lived experience rather than abstract theological ones.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see in the text that this is about patterns rather than promises?"
 - "How would you distinguish between a 'gentle' answer and a weak or passive response?"
 - "In your experience, when do gentle responses seem to work and when don't they?"
 - "What makes it hard to choose gentle responses when you're feeling attacked or defensive?"
 - "Does gentleness mean avoiding difficult conversations or can you be gentle while addressing hard topics?"
 - "How might power dynamics affect whether gentle answers work, like between students and teachers, or in family relationships?"
 - "What would change if everyone in your friend group or family took this approach to conflict?"
 - "Why do you think the passage connects our speech patterns to wisdom rather than just niceness?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? The passage isn't just giving us a technique for managing angry people, it's revealing that we have agency in conflict situations. Even when we didn't start the fight, our response choice becomes part of the story. The wisdom here is learning to use that power intentionally rather than just reacting automatically. It's about developing the emotional regulation to choose our response even under pressure.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where are you most likely to face anger, situations where someone's upset with you and you have to choose how to respond? Think about school tensions, family arguments, friend drama, social media conflicts, or even broader social and political disagreements where emotions run high.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a teacher is frustrated with your class and starts lecturing harshly, how do you respond without making things worse?
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- When parents are upset about grades, choices, or behavior, defending yourself versus acknowledging their concerns
- When friends feel betrayed or left out and direct their hurt at you, responding to their anger without escalating
- Online arguments where someone attacks your opinion, choosing between clapping back and responding thoughtfully
- Conflicts about social justice issues where both passion and gentleness matter for actual progress
- Dating relationships where jealousy, misunderstandings, or different expectations create tension

Facilitation: Let students share specific examples without rushing to fix them. Some situations are complex and don't have easy answers. Help them think through discernment rather than giving formulaic advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone defuse a tense situation through their response? What did they do?"
- "What internal resources do you need to choose gentle responses when you're feeling attacked?"
- "How do you discern when gentle responses are appropriate versus when more direct action is needed?"
- "What's the difference between wise gentleness and conflict avoidance?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: You have more power in conflict situations than you might realize, but it's not the power to control other people's emotions. It's the power to choose your response thoughtfully rather than just reacting automatically. Gentle answers don't guarantee that angry people will calm down, but they give you the best chance of creating space for real resolution rather than just more escalation.

This week, pay attention to your automatic responses when you face criticism, anger, or conflict. Notice the split second when you get to choose, defend, attack, withdraw, or try something more thoughtful.

Experiment with gentle responses and see what happens. Not as a magic formula, but as a way to use your response power more intentionally.

I'm impressed by the way you wrestled with these complex scenarios today. Keep asking hard questions about when and how to apply wisdom. The world needs people who can engage conflict without just adding fuel to the fire.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that their choice of words when someone is angry with them can make things better or worse, and that they have the power to help situations improve.

If Kids Ask "What if the gentle words don't work?"

Say: "That's a great question. Sometimes people stay angry even when we use kind words, and that's not your fault. Kind words usually help, but sometimes we need to ask a grown-up for help too."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone get really mad at you, maybe a friend who thought you took their thing, a sibling who felt like you weren't being fair, or a parent who was frustrated about something you did. Keep your hand up if that felt pretty scary or uncomfortable when it happened.

Now here's a harder question: In that moment when you realized someone was mad at you, what did you feel like doing? Part of you probably wanted to yell back and explain why they were wrong. Another part might have wanted to hide or run away. Maybe part of you felt like saying something mean because your feelings were hurt too.

All of those feelings make total sense. When someone is angry with us, our brain goes into protection mode and tries to figure out how to make the scary feeling stop. Sometimes we say the first thing that pops into our head, which might not be the most helpful thing.

This reminds me of the movie *Inside Out* where Riley's emotions are all scrambling to figure out how to handle difficult situations. Anger wants to fight back, Fear wants to escape, and Sadness feels overwhelmed. But sometimes what's needed is something different, a response that actually helps the situation instead of making it worse.

The tricky part is figuring out what to say when someone is mad at us. Do we fight back? Do we ignore them? Do we just say sorry even if we don't think we did anything wrong? It's one of the hardest things to navigate, and even adults struggle with it.

Today we're going to hear about some ancient wisdom that gives us a clue about how our words can either make angry situations worse or help them get better. It comes from someone who watched people very carefully and noticed patterns about what happens when we respond to anger in different ways. Let's find out what they discovered.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to feeling scared or defensive when adults are angry. Acknowledge these feelings as normal before moving toward solutions. Keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there was a very wise king named Solomon who loved watching people and figuring out how life really works.

King Solomon noticed something interesting about arguments and angry situations. He watched what happened when people chose different ways to respond to anger, and he started to see a pattern.

Imagine you're in the marketplace with King Solomon, just watching people. Over there, a customer is yelling at a merchant because he thinks the price is too high. The merchant yells back even louder, telling the customer he's wrong and ungrateful.

What do you think happened next? The customer got even angrier! Soon they were both shouting, other people stopped to stare, and the whole situation became a big mess. Nobody got what they wanted, and both people walked away feeling terrible.

But then King Solomon noticed something different happening across the marketplace. Another customer was upset about something, and her voice was getting loud and harsh. But this time, the merchant responded completely differently.

Instead of yelling back, the merchant spoke quietly and calmly. He listened to what she was saying and responded with gentle words. He didn't agree with everything she said, but he spoke kindly and tried to understand her frustration.

And you know what King Solomon noticed? The angry customer started to calm down! Her voice got quieter. Her shoulders relaxed. Instead of stomping away mad, she stayed and worked things out with the merchant.

This happened so many times that King Solomon realized there was a pattern. He noticed that when people responded to anger with more anger, the anger grew bigger and stronger. But when people responded to anger with gentle, kind words, the anger often started to cool down.

Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

King Solomon wrote down this wisdom because he realized something amazing: our words have power. Not magic power, but real power to change what happens next in a difficult situation.

When someone is angry and we respond with harsh words, words that are mean, loud, or defensive, it's like throwing wood on a fire. The anger gets bigger and hotter. Everyone ends up more upset than when they started.

But when someone is angry and we respond with gentle words, words that are kind, calm, and understanding, it's like pouring water on that fire. The anger starts to cool down and sometimes goes away completely.

Now, King Solomon wasn't saying that gentle words always work perfectly. Sometimes people stay angry no matter what we say. But he noticed that gentle words usually give us the best chance of helping the situation get better instead of worse.

The really cool part is that this gives us power in scary situations. When someone is mad at us, we might feel helpless and frightened. But King Solomon discovered that we're not helpless at all, we get to choose what happens next by choosing how we respond.

If we choose harsh words, we're choosing to make the anger bigger. If we choose gentle words, we're choosing to help the anger get smaller. Our choice of words actually changes what happens in the

situation.

This works in our lives too. When your little brother is mad because he thinks you broke his toy, you can choose words that make him madder or words that help him calm down. When your parent is frustrated because your room is messy, you can choose to argue and make them more upset, or you can use gentle words that help solve the problem.

Sometimes in our lives, we face anger and frustration from other people. Maybe a friend feels left out and gets mad at us. Maybe a teacher is having a bad day and speaks harshly to the class. Maybe our parents are stressed and their voices get sharp.

What King Solomon learned is that we have the power to help these situations. We can choose words that make everything worse, or we can choose words that help everyone feel better and work things out.

When we choose gentle words, we're being helpers. We're using our power to make things better instead of worse. We're being like that wise merchant who helped the angry customer calm down instead of making her madder.

God loves it when we use our words to help instead of hurt. When we choose gentle answers, we're showing love to people who are having a hard time. We're being peacemakers who help solve problems instead of making them bigger.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Think about a time when someone was angry with you and you felt really defensive, like you wanted to explain why they were wrong or say something back. Can you imagine what it would feel like to choose gentle words instead? What would be hard about that? What might feel good about it?

Listen For: "It would be hard," "I'd want to defend myself", affirm: "That makes sense. It takes courage to choose gentle words when we feel attacked."

Question 2: The Hard Choice

Let's say your friend accuses you of telling their secret when you didn't actually do it. You feel mad because they're being unfair to you. What would harsh words sound like in that situation? What would gentle words sound like? Which choice would be harder but might work better?

If They Say: If they say "I'd want to prove I didn't do it", respond "How could you do that with gentle words instead of angry words?"

Question 3: The Power

King Solomon discovered that our words have power to change what happens next in angry situations. When have you seen someone use their words to help calm things down instead of making them worse? What did they do that worked? How do you think they felt afterward?

Connect: "This is exactly what King Solomon noticed, words that help instead of hurt."

Question 4: The Results

What do you think would happen in your family or your friend group if everyone decided to try gentle words when people got upset? How would things be different? What would change about the way problems get solved?

If They Say: If they're skeptical about it working, acknowledge "Sometimes it takes time, and sometimes we need help from adults too, but it usually makes things better than worse."

You've shared some really thoughtful ideas about how hard but helpful it can be to choose gentle words when people are angry with us. Now let's do an activity that will help us feel what it's like when words help a situation versus when they make it worse.

4. Activity: Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity physically demonstrates how harsh words create distance and barriers while gentle words help people come together and solve problems. Success looks like kids discovering that cooperation and kindness create better outcomes than opposition and harshness.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play Bridge Builders. Everyone find a partner and stand facing each other from opposite sides of the room. You're going to try to meet in the middle and build a "bridge" together with your arms.

Here's the challenge: I'm going to give each side different instructions about how to do this. Some of you will get "harsh word" instructions, and some will get "gentle word" instructions. Your job is to follow your instructions and see what happens when you try to build your bridge.

The point isn't to win against your partner, it's to see how different approaches affect whether you can actually work together. This is exactly like what happens when someone is angry with us and we have to choose how to respond.

We're doing this because it's exactly like the marketplace King Solomon watched, we'll see how different responses create different outcomes when people are trying to work things out.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Round 1: Half of you will walk toward the middle with stiff, harsh movements, avoiding eye contact, and trying to force your way to where you want to go. The other half should try to meet them. Let's see what happens to your bridges when one person uses "harsh" approach.

What do you notice? Are you able to build good bridges together? How does it feel when your partner is being harsh and forceful? Does this remind you of anything from real life when someone responds to anger with more anger?

Round 2: Now everyone try the gentle approach. Walk slowly toward the middle, make eye contact, pay attention to what your partner needs, and work together to create a bridge that works for both of you. See how this feels different.

Look at your bridges now! What's different about how it feels to work together when both people are being gentle and cooperative? How did your communication change? What was possible this time that wasn't possible before?

Notice how much easier it was to actually accomplish the goal when you approached each other gently instead of harshly. Your bridges are stronger, you're both happier, and you figured out creative ways to connect that you couldn't discover when you were being forceful.

Watch For: The moment when kids start problem-solving together instead of working against each other, this is the physical representation of gentle words turning away wrath.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when your partner approached you harshly versus gently? The harsh approach made it almost impossible to work together, didn't it? But the gentle approach helped you be creative and solve the problem together. That's exactly what King Solomon observed about words, harsh responses make cooperation harder, while gentle responses make it possible to work things out.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when someone is angry with us, our choice of words has power to make things better or worse. Harsh words are like adding wood to a fire, they make the anger grow bigger. Gentle words are like water on the fire, they help the anger cool down.

This doesn't mean we let people be mean to us or that we can't stand up for ourselves. It means we choose words that help solve problems instead of making them bigger. Sometimes gentle words don't work perfectly, but they usually give us the best chance of working things out.

The amazing result is that we become helpers and peacemakers. Instead of making angry situations worse, we help them get better. We use our power to bring people together instead of pushing them apart.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone gets upset with you, take a deep breath and try gentle words instead of harsh ones. Notice what happens. You might be surprised at how much power your words have to help instead of hurt. If gentle words don't work, remember to ask a trusted grown-up for help.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us that our words have power. Help us choose gentle words when people are angry with us, even when it's hard. Help us be helpers and peacemakers with our words. 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 when someone is mad at us, kind words help more than mean words.

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 angry feelings to a fire, then ask "What makes fires bigger? What makes fires smaller?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness or helping others. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love One Another," or "Jesus Wants Me for a Sunbeam." Use movements: gentle hand gestures during verses about kindness, big hugs during verses about love, pointing to friends during verses about helping.

Great singing! You used such kind voices. Now let's sit in a horseshoe shape so I can tell you a story about words that help and words that hurt. We're going to learn about a very wise king who discovered something important about kind words.

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 when you're King Solomon, sound angry when people are mad, sound calm when demonstrating gentle words.

Today we're going to meet a very wise king named Solomon who loved to watch people and learn about life.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

King Solomon walked around his kingdom every day, watching and listening. He saw happy people and sad people, angry people and peaceful people.

[Change to angry voice and tense body]

One day, he watched two people having an argument. One person was very mad and yelling loudly. The other person yelled back even louder!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak louder]

Do you know what happened? Both people got madder and madder! Their voices got louder and louder! Soon they were so angry they couldn't even remember what they were fighting about!

[Move to center, speak with wonder]

But then King Solomon saw something different. He watched another person who was very mad at their friend. But this time, something different happened.

[Move to side, speak gently and calmly]

When the angry person yelled, their friend didn't yell back. Instead, the friend spoke very softly and kindly. They used gentle, caring words.

Proverbs 15:1 (NIV)

"A gentle answer turns away wrath, but a harsh word stirs up anger."

[Pause and look around at each child]

And guess what happened? The angry person started to calm down! Their voice got quieter! They stopped being so mad! King Solomon was amazed!

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

King Solomon watched this happen many times. When people used mean words back to angry people, everyone got madder. But when people used kind words to angry people, the anger went away!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

So King Solomon wrote down this important truth: Kind words help angry people feel better. Mean words make angry people feel worse.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

This means we have special power! When someone is mad at us, we can choose words that help or words that hurt. We can choose to make things better!

[Speak with excitement]

When our brother is mad because we took his toy, we can say kind words that help him feel better. When our parent is upset because we made a mess, we can use gentle words.

[Pause dramatically]

God loves it when we use kind words! God wants us to be helpers, not hurters. Our words can be like medicine that makes hurt feelings feel better.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school, someone might get mad at us. Sometimes at home, someone might feel upset. We can remember what King Solomon learned and choose words that help!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mad at you, you can take a deep breath and use your kindest voice. You can say "I'm sorry" or "Help me understand" or "Let's work this out."

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God gave you the power to help with your words. You can make angry feelings smaller instead of bigger. You can be a helper and a peacemaker!

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. Remember, 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 angry person felt when their friend used kind words?
 2. When someone is mad at you, how does it feel in your body?
 3. What do kind words sound like when someone is upset?
 4. What would you do if your friend was mad at you?
 5. What changed when people used gentle words instead of angry words?
 6. How do you think God feels when we use kind words?
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7. Why do you think kind words work better than mean words?

8. What would happen at school if everyone used kind words when people got mad?

9. What would happen at home if everyone used gentle words?

10. Who do you know who is really good at using kind words?

11. Why do you think some people use mean words when they're upset?

12. How can we remember to use kind words when someone is mad at us?

13. What does it mean that our words have power?

14. Do you think it's hard to use kind words when someone is mad at you?

15. How do you think King Solomon felt when he discovered this?

16. What should we remember about words and anger?

17. What do you want to remember about today's story?

18. How can we pray about using kind words?

19. What would happen if everyone forgot to use kind words?

20. How can we be like the person who helped their angry friend?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about being helpers or using kind words. Suggestions: "I Will Be a Helper," "Kind Words Are the Best," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: gentle hand motions during verses about kindness, helping gestures during verses about caring for others.

Beautiful singing about being helpers! Now let's sit down quietly for our prayer time. Cross your legs and fold your hands gently.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for King Solomon who taught us about kind words.

[Pause]

Help us remember to use gentle, kind words when someone is mad at us. Help us be helpers with our words instead of hurters.

[Pause]

Help us remember that our words have power to make people feel better or worse. We want to make people feel better.

[Pause]

Thank you for loving us and teaching us how to love others with our 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 using kind words. Examples: "Help me use kind words" or "Thank you for teaching us about gentle words."

Remember what King Solomon learned: kind words help angry people feel better! Have a wonderful week being helpers with your words. You have the power to make things better!

Chase the Peace

Active Peace Pursuit, Can we pursue peace while confronting evil?

Psalm 34:8-22

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 34:8-22 (NIV)

8 Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. 9 Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. 10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. 11 Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. 15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are attentive to their cry. 16 But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 The righteous may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers them from them all; 20 he protects all their bones, not one of them will be broken. 21 Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. 22 The Lord himself redeems his people; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

Context

Psalm 34 is a wisdom psalm written by David, according to the superscription, during his time of pretending to be insane before King Achish to escape danger. This psalm emerges from a place of

personal crisis where David had to navigate complex political realities while maintaining his integrity. It's structured as an acrostic poem in Hebrew, showing careful literary construction despite its practical, life-coaching tone.

Verse 14 sits at the heart of David's teaching section, where he shifts from personal testimony about God's faithfulness to instructional wisdom for the next generation. The immediate context includes keeping one's tongue from evil and speaking truthfully, setting up peace-making as both internal integrity and external relationship work. David speaks from experience about what it takes to survive and thrive while maintaining righteousness in a hostile environment.

The Big Idea

Peace is not a passive state we hope for but an active pursuit that requires turning from evil and chasing after what creates flourishing relationships.

This challenges our assumptions about peace as simply the absence of conflict or something that "just happens" when we avoid confrontation. David's doubled command, "seek peace and pursue it", suggests peace actually runs away from us and must be deliberately chased down through specific actions: turning from harmful behaviors and actively doing good.

Theological Core

- **Active Peace Pursuit.** Peace requires intentional seeking and pursuing, not passive waiting or hoping conflicts will resolve themselves naturally.
 - **Evil Turning.** Making peace begins with the negative work of turning away from harmful words, actions, and attitudes that destroy relationships and community flourishing.
 - **Good Doing.** Peace-making requires the positive work of actively doing good, building up, healing, restoring, and creating conditions for human flourishing.
 - **Persistent Chasing.** The doubled command (seek and pursue) implies peace is elusive and requires sustained effort, like hunting or tracking something that keeps moving away from us.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Peace-making sometimes requires confronting harmful behavior rather than avoiding all conflict
 - True peace involves both turning from evil and actively pursuing good, it's not neutral
 - Some situations demand persistent effort because peace "runs away" from lazy or half-hearted attempts
 - Wisdom involves discerning when to pursue peace through gentle restoration versus when justice requires firmer action
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Grades 4, 6

- Making peace requires both stopping bad behaviors and choosing good ones
 - Peace doesn't happen automatically, we have to work for it by making good choices
 - Sometimes making peace means having hard conversations or standing up to bullying
 - It's normal to feel nervous about peace-making, but we can be brave and do it anyway
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be peacemakers who help people get along
 - Being a peacemaker means stopping mean things and doing nice things
 - We can help people be friends again when they're fighting
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Peace as Conflict Avoidance.** Don't teach that pursuing peace means never confronting wrong or always keeping quiet. David's context suggests peace sometimes requires addressing evil directly rather than pretending it doesn't exist.
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- **Individual-Only Focus.** While personal integrity matters, avoid making this purely about individual moral improvement. Peace-seeking affects community relationships and social justice, not just private behavior.
- **Easy Formula Thinking.** The doubled command (seek and pursue) suggests this isn't simple. Don't present peace-making as following obvious steps that always work the same way in every situation.
- **Passive Spirituality.** Resist making this about praying for peace without taking action. David emphasizes active verbs, turning, doing, seeking, pursuing, that require engagement with real-world conflicts and relationships.

Handling Hard Questions

"What if pursuing peace doesn't work and people keep fighting?"

David's own life shows that peace-seeking doesn't guarantee immediate success, he wrote this while fleeing for his life. The doubled command (seek and pursue) suggests this is ongoing work, not a one-time fix. Sometimes pursuing peace means creating boundaries, seeking help from authorities, or accepting that we can only control our own choices while working for justice and protection for those being harmed.

"How can we turn from evil and pursue peace when the other person won't stop being mean?"

Turning from evil means we stop contributing to the problem through revenge, gossip, or escalation, even when others don't make the same choice. Pursuing peace might mean seeking help from teachers, parents, or other authorities rather than handling it alone. Sometimes peace requires protecting the vulnerable from those who choose to keep doing harm.

"Doesn't pursuing peace make us pushovers who let people walk all over us?"

David wrote this while actively resisting an unjust king who was trying to kill him. Peace-seeking isn't passive, it's strategic action that addresses root causes rather than just symptoms. True peace requires justice, which sometimes means standing up to bullies, speaking truth to power, or working to change systems that create conflict.

The One Thing to Remember

Peace isn't something we wait for, it's something we chase down by stopping harmful actions and actively doing good, even when it's difficult and requires persistent effort.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the central tension between pursuing peace and confronting evil, helping them discover that true peace-making often requires difficult choices and persistent effort rather than simple conflict avoidance.

The Tension to Frame

Can we pursue peace while confronting evil, or does peace-seeking require avoiding all confrontation?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with conflicts where "being nice" didn't work or made things worse
 - Honor the complexity of situations where peace and justice seem to conflict
 - Let students wrestle with scenarios rather than providing quick answers or simple formulas
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about the last time you tried to stay out of drama at school or in your friend group. Maybe there was gossip going around, or two people you cared about were fighting, or someone was being treated unfairly. You probably tried to keep your head down, not take sides, just hope it would blow over on its own.

How did that work out? My guess is that staying neutral didn't make the drama disappear. Maybe it got worse. Maybe people got hurt because no one spoke up. Maybe you felt frustrated because you wanted

things to be peaceful, but peace never actually happened.

Here's what's interesting: most of us think pursuing peace means avoiding conflict. But today we're looking at someone who learned that real peace requires the opposite, it requires active engagement with the messy, difficult work of confronting what's wrong while building what's right.

As you read this passage, notice the action words. Count how many times you see commands that require you to do something, not just avoid something. Pay attention to why the author gives two commands about peace instead of just one.

Open your Bibles to Psalm 34, and let's start reading from verse 8. Read silently and think about what kind of peace this is describing.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "brokenhearted" or "refuge." Watch for early finishers and let them reread verse 14 specifically. Let them feel the weight of David's life experience behind these words.

As You Read, Think About:

- What situation is David in when he writes this, and how might that affect his advice?
 - What does it mean that peace needs to be both "sought" and "pursued", why two commands?
 - How do "turning from evil" and "doing good" connect to peace-making?
 - What would it feel like to live this way in your actual conflicts and relationships?
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Psalm 34:8-22 (NIV)

8 Taste and see that the Lord is good; blessed is the one who takes refuge in him. 9 Fear the Lord, you his holy people, for those who fear him lack nothing. 10 The lions may grow weak and hungry, but those who seek the Lord lack no good thing. 11 Come, my children, listen to me; I will teach you the fear of the Lord. 12 Whoever of you loves life and desires to see many good days, 13 keep your tongue from evil and your lips from telling lies. 14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it. 15 The eyes of the Lord are on the righteous, and his ears are

attentive to their cry. 16 But the face of the Lord is against those who do evil, to blot out their name from the earth. 17 The righteous cry out, and the Lord hears them; he delivers them from all their troubles. 18 The Lord is close to the brokenhearted and saves those who are crushed in spirit. 19 The righteous may have many troubles, but the Lord delivers them from them all; 20 he protects all their bones, not one of them will be broken. 21 Evil will slay the wicked; the foes of the righteous will be condemned. 22 The Lord himself redeems his people; no one who takes refuge in him will be condemned.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read with expression. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the more intense sections about troubles and deliverance.

Reader 1: Verses 8-11 (David's personal testimony) **Reader 2:** Verses 12-16 (Instructions for living)
Reader 3: Verses 17-22 (God's faithfulness in trouble)

Listen for the tone shift from personal experience to teaching to assurance. This isn't theory, it's battlefield wisdom.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes. Walk between groups to listen. Help stuck groups with "What surprised you most about David's approach to conflict?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions you already know the answer to, but things you're actually curious about or confused by. What made you think "Wait, how does that work?" or "That seems really hard to do"? You have three minutes to discuss and come up with your best questions.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Write their questions on the board.

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

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence do you see that David is writing from experience with conflict, not just theory?"
- "Why do you think he gives two commands about peace, 'seek' and 'pursue', instead of just one?"
- "How might 'turning from evil' and 'doing good' both be necessary for peace-making?"
- "When might pursuing peace require confronting someone rather than avoiding conflict?"
- "What's the difference between pursuing peace and just keeping quiet to avoid drama?"
- "How do you pursue peace with someone who doesn't want peace?"
- "If peace requires this much effort, why don't more people pursue it?"
- "What would change in your school if people actually lived this way?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? David isn't talking about peace as the absence of problems, look at verses 17-19, he admits the righteous have "many troubles." But he's learned that real peace requires active engagement with those troubles. The doubled command, seek and pursue, suggests peace actually runs away from us if we're passive about it. We have to chase it down through specific choices about how we respond to evil and how we actively do good.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see conflicts that won't resolve themselves just by everyone staying quiet? Think about your family dynamics, friend groups, school situations, social media drama, or bigger issues in your community that make you angry or frustrated.

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a friend is spreading rumors about another friend and you know staying silent enables the harm
- Family conflicts where avoiding the issue makes tension worse instead of better
- Bullying situations where "just ignore them" doesn't actually stop the bullying
- Social media conflicts where not engaging feels like abandoning someone who's being attacked
- Witnessing injustice or discrimination where silence feels complicit but speaking up feels risky
- Relationship conflicts where you keep avoiding difficult conversations that need to happen

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Different situations call for different approaches. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about what they "should" do.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone successfully pursue peace by addressing conflict directly rather than avoiding it?"
- "What would help you distinguish between pursuing peace and just avoiding confrontation?"
- "How do you decide when peace requires gentle conversation versus when it requires stronger action?"
- "What's the difference between pursuing peace and being a people-pleaser?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Peace isn't something you wait for, it's something you chase down. And sometimes chasing peace means having difficult conversations, standing up to wrong, or working to change situations that create ongoing conflict. It's not easy or simple, and it doesn't always work immediately.

This week, pay attention to one situation in your life where you've been hoping peace will just happen on its own. Consider what it might look like to actively pursue peace there, both by turning away from any ways you're contributing to the problem and by actively doing something good to build relationships.

You all did some really thoughtful wrestling with hard questions today. Don't stop asking them. The world needs people who understand that true peace requires courage, not just niceness.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that peace requires both stopping harmful behaviors and actively choosing kind, helpful actions, it doesn't happen automatically.

If Kids Ask "What if someone won't stop being mean even when I try to make peace?"

Say: "That's really hard. You can only control your choices, not theirs. Sometimes making peace means getting help from a teacher or parent to protect yourself and others."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in the middle of two friends who were fighting with each other. Keep your hand up if you tried to stay out of it and hoped they would just work it out on their own.

Now here's a harder question: How many of you have been in a situation where staying out of it actually made things worse? Maybe the fighting got bigger, or someone got hurt, or you felt terrible for not helping when you could have done something.

That frustrating feeling makes total sense. Part of you thinks "It's not my problem, I should stay out of it." But another part of you thinks "My friends are hurting each other and I care about them." Part of you wants peace, but you don't know how to help make it happen.

This reminds me of a movie like "Inside Out" where Riley's emotions are all confused about how to handle her parents' stress and her own feelings. She tries ignoring the problem, but that doesn't make anyone feel better. Or think about "Frozen" when Anna has to choose between staying safe in the castle or going out into the dangerous storm to help her sister.

The tricky part is figuring out when you should step in to help make peace and when you should let other people work things out. Sometimes doing nothing actually makes conflict worse, even when you're trying to be nice.

Today we're going to hear about someone who learned that making peace isn't just about staying out of fights, it's about actively working to help people get along better. He discovered that peace requires both stopping bad things and doing good things. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to friend conflicts and family tension. Acknowledge their experiences briefly but keep momentum moving toward David's story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Our story today is about King David, but not when he was famous and powerful. This is from when David was running for his life, hiding from King Saul who was trying to kill him.

Picture David sitting by a campfire at night, looking up at the stars, thinking about everything he'd learned from years of conflict and danger. He'd made mistakes. He'd seen what happened when people chose revenge instead of peace. He'd learned some hard lessons about what actually works and what doesn't when people are fighting.

David decided to write down his advice for his children and anyone else who wanted to learn how to live well in a world full of conflict. These weren't just nice ideas, this was survival wisdom from someone who had to figure out how to stay alive while staying good.

Imagine how it would feel to know that someone wanted to hurt you, but you had to find a way to live without becoming bitter or mean yourself. David had to learn how to make peace in situations where peace seemed impossible.

So David started writing a poem, a song, really, to teach others what he'd learned. He wrote about how God had protected him and how important it was to choose the right way to live, even when other people chose wrong.

When David got to the most important part of his advice, he wrote about keeping your words good, not lying or saying mean things about people. That was step one in making peace.

But then David realized that not saying bad things wasn't enough. You had to do more than just avoid being mean. You had to actively work for peace.

David thought about how peace wasn't something that just happened when people got tired of fighting. Peace was something you had to work for, something you had to chase after like you were hunting for treasure that kept trying to hide from you.

So David wrote some of the most important words about peace-making that anyone has ever written. He said people needed to do four things, and he put them in a specific order for a reason.

First, he said, you have to turn away from evil. Stop doing the things that hurt people or make conflicts worse. Don't get revenge. Don't spread rumors. Don't choose actions that make problems bigger.

Psalm 34:14 (NIV)

14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

Notice that David didn't stop with just "don't do bad things." That was only the first step. The second step was to actively do good, to choose actions that help people and build relationships and solve problems.

But David still wasn't finished. He said you also have to "seek peace", which means you have to go looking for it. You have to pay attention to opportunities to help people get along better.

And then David added one more command: "pursue it." That means chase after peace like it's running away from you. Don't give up if your first attempt doesn't work. Keep trying different ways to help people resolve their conflicts.

David knew from experience that peace was like a shy animal that runs away if you're not careful and deliberate about how you approach it. You can't just hope it will show up on its own.

What happened when David lived this way? Well, he managed to survive years of conflict without becoming a bitter, angry person. He kept his heart good even in bad situations.

Even more amazingly, when David finally became king, he was able to unite the tribes of Israel who had been fighting each other for years. He knew how to make peace because he'd practiced it during the hardest times of his life.

David discovered that when you actively work for peace, both by stopping harmful things and by doing helpful things, you create a kind of ripple effect. Other people start wanting peace too.

Sometimes in our lives, we think making peace means just staying out of fights or avoiding conflict. But David learned that real peace requires actively working to help people get along and solve their problems.

We learn that peace doesn't happen by accident. It happens when people choose to turn away from harmful actions and turn toward helpful ones. It happens when people seek opportunities to build bridges instead of walls.

The core truth David discovered is that God wants us to be active peace-makers, not just peace-wishers. Peace takes work, but it's the kind of work that makes life better for everyone.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Imagine you're David, hiding in caves because someone wants to hurt you. You're scared, angry, and frustrated. You could choose to get revenge or spread rumors about King Saul to make him look bad. Instead, David chose to "turn from evil." What do you think it felt like to make that choice when you really wanted to fight back?

Listen For: "Hard," "angry," "unfair", affirm: "You're right. Choosing peace when you want revenge takes real strength."

Question 2: The Active Part

David didn't just say "don't do evil", he also said "do good." Think about a time when two of your friends were fighting. What's the difference between staying out of it and actively trying to help them make peace? What might "doing good" look like in that situation?

If They Say: "I'd want to stay out of it", respond: "That makes sense. What might you be afraid would happen if you tried to help?"

Question 3: The Chasing

David said to "seek peace and pursue it", that's two commands about peace instead of just one. Why do you think peace needs to be chased like it's running away from us? Have you ever noticed that peace doesn't just happen automatically when people stop fighting?

Connect: "This is exactly what made David's approach so different from just hoping conflicts would go away."

Question 4: The Results

When David became king, he was able to help tribes that had been fighting each other for years learn to get along. How do you think his practice during the hard times helped him become a good peacemaker later? What might happen if more people in your school actively pursued peace this way?

If They Say: "People might think you're weird", acknowledge while connecting to lesson: "Sometimes peace-making does feel risky. David had to be brave to choose this path."

You're picking up on something really important, peace requires courage, not just niceness. David learned that avoiding conflict doesn't create peace, but actively working for it does. Now let's try an activity that will help us experience what this kind of peace-making feels like.

4. Activity: The Peace Bridge Challenge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the four-step peace process by having kids physically experience the difference between avoiding conflict and actively building bridges. Success looks like kids discovering that peace requires both stopping harmful actions and actively creating helpful connections between people who are separated.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do the "Peace Bridge Challenge." I need you to split into three groups. Groups 1 and 2, go to opposite sides of the room and turn your backs to each other, you're "in conflict." Group 3, you're the peace-makers, and you start in the middle.

Here's the challenge: Groups 1 and 2 cannot directly talk to each other or look at each other, they're in a fight. Peace-makers, your job is to help them connect, but here's the catch: you have to follow David's four-step process.

First, you have to get everyone to stop doing harmful things, that means no turning away, no ignoring, no mean faces. Then you have to get everyone to do something actively good for the other group. Then you have to seek a way to bring them together. Finally, you have to pursue peace by helping them stay connected.

We're doing this because it's exactly like David's situation, peace required him to stop harmful actions, actively do good, seek opportunities, and pursue connections even when it felt risky or awkward.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First phase: Let the peace-makers try for about a minute. They'll probably start with "just talk to each other" or "just stop being mean." Observe how this doesn't actually create connection.

The struggle: As they realize that getting people to stop negative behavior isn't enough, watch for frustration. This is the key learning moment, avoiding bad things doesn't automatically create good relationships.

Coaching phrases: "I notice you got them to stop turning away, but are they connected yet? I wonder if there's something actively good they could do for each other. What would help them see each other as friends instead of enemies?"

The breakthrough: Celebrate when someone suggests specific kind actions, compliments, sharing, helping, apologizing, or finding common ground. This is the physical representation of "do good" leading to "seek peace."

Completion: Once groups are facing each other and interacting positively, have them notice how different this feels from the beginning when they were just avoiding each other.

Watch For: The moment when peace-makers realize that stopping negative behavior isn't enough, they have to actively create positive connections. This is the physical representation of David's "turn from evil AND do good" pattern.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when groups were just avoiding each other versus when they were actively connecting? Peace-makers, what worked better, just telling people to stop being mean, or helping them do something actively good for each other? You just experienced what David learned: peace requires both turning from evil AND doing good, then seeking and pursuing opportunities to build relationships.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Peace isn't something that just happens when people get tired of fighting. It's something we have to work for by choosing to turn away from harmful actions and actively do good things that help people get along better.

This doesn't mean you have to fix every problem or that it's your fault when other people choose to keep fighting. But it does mean you have the power to help create peace by making good choices about your own words and actions.

The amazing result is that when you actively work for peace, like David did, you become someone other people can trust, and you help create the kind of community where everyone feels safer and happier.

This Week's Challenge

Pay attention to one conflict in your life, maybe with siblings, friends, or classmates. Instead of just staying out of it or hoping it goes away, try David's approach: first stop any way you might be making it worse, then actively do something good to help the people involved feel better about each other.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us through David that we can be peace-makers. Help us be brave enough to turn away from things that hurt people and wise enough to actively do good

things that bring people together. When conflicts seem scary or hard, remind us that you're with us. 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 peacemakers by stopping mean things and doing nice things to help people get along.

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 making peace to building a bridge between two islands, then ask "What would help the people on both islands become friends?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about peace, kindness, or helping others. Suggestions: "Make Me a Servant," "Love One Another," or "If You're Happy and You Know It" (modified for kind actions). Use movements: gentle hand motions for peace, helping gestures for service, hugs for love during appropriate lyrics.

Great singing, friends! I heard you singing about being kind and helping others. Today we're going to learn about someone who discovered how to be a special kind of helper, a peacemaker! Find a spot on the floor in our story horseshoe so we can hear about David and the amazing way he learned to help people get along.

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 worried when David is scared, sound wise when he gives advice, sound happy when peace happens.

Today we're going to meet David when he was having a really hard time. Someone was trying to hurt him!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, look worried]

David had to run away and hide in caves. He was scared and sad. He didn't know what to do. Should he fight back? Should he be mean to the person who was trying to hurt him?

[Move to other side, change to thoughtful voice]

But David was smart. He decided to ask God what to do. God helped David learn something very important about how to live when people are being mean.

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

God taught David that he could be a peacemaker! A peacemaker is someone who helps people stop fighting and start being friends again. But being a peacemaker wasn't just about being nice.

[Hold up one finger, then two, then three, then four as you list each step]

David learned that peacemaking had four parts. First, stop doing mean things. Second, do good things instead. Third, look for ways to help people get along. Fourth, keep trying even when it's hard!

Psalm 34:14 (NIV)

14 Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and pursue it.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think it was hard for David to choose to be nice when someone was being mean to him? Yes! It's always hard to choose to do good when others are doing bad.

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

But guess what happened when David chose to be a peacemaker? God helped him! David stayed safe, and his heart stayed happy instead of angry.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Even better, David learned how to help other people stop fighting too! When people saw David being a peacemaker, they wanted to be peacemakers too.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

David wrote down what he learned so other people could be peacemakers too. He said: "Stop being mean, and start being kind. Look for ways to help people get along. Keep trying to make peace!"

[Speak with excitement]

When David became a king later, he was so good at helping people get along that everyone in his kingdom lived peacefully together!

[Pause dramatically]

David learned that God can help us be peacemakers too. God wants us to help people stop fighting and start being friends.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we see people fighting, maybe our friends, or kids at school, or people in our family. We can choose to be peacemakers like David!

[Move closer to the children]

When people are fighting, you can help by doing kind things, saying nice words, and asking grown-ups to help when the fighting is too big for you to fix.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we help people get along. He gives us wisdom and courage to be peacemakers just like David was!

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 special question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, and you'll have about one minute to share your ideas 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 someone was being mean to him?
 2. What's something mean that you could choose to stop doing?
 3. What's something nice that you could do to help people get along?
 4. When have you seen two people fighting? How did it make you feel?
 5. What would you do if two of your friends were mad at each other?
 6. How do you think God helps us be peacemakers?
 7. What happened when David chose to do good instead of being mean?
 8. When is it hard to choose to be kind?
 9. What nice thing could you do for someone who was sad?
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10. Who helps you when you're having a fight with someone?

11. Why do you think God wants us to help people get along?

12. What would happen if everyone in your class tried to be peacemakers?

13. How can you ask God to help you be a peacemaker?

14. What's the difference between being a troublemaker and being a peacemaker?

15. When someone is mean to you, what could you do instead of being mean back?

16. How do you know when to get a grown-up to help with a fight?

17. What did you learn about making peace from David's story?

18. How do peacemakers help make people happy?

19. What would you tell a friend who wanted to learn to be a peacemaker?

20. How can you remember to choose kind words when you're angry?

Great discussions, friends! Let's come back together in our circle. Who wants to share one thing you talked about with your partner?

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song that reinforces kindness and helping. Suggestions: "Love Your Neighbor," "Be Kind to One Another," or "This Little Light of Mine" (emphasizing sharing God's love). Include movements: pointing to neighbors, gentle hand motions for kindness, pretending to shine lights for sharing love.

Beautiful singing! I love how you sang about being kind and helping others. Now let's sit quietly so we can talk to God about being peacemakers like David. Sit cross-legged in your rows with your hands folded.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about David and how he learned to be a peacemaker.

[Pause]

Please help us stop doing mean things and choose to do kind things instead. Help us when it's hard to be nice to people who aren't nice to us.

[Pause]

When we see people fighting or being sad, help us know how to help them feel better and get along again.

[Pause]

Thank you that you love us and want to help us be peacemakers. Help us remember to ask for your help when we need it. 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 peacemakers. Examples: "Help me be kind to my sister" or "Thank you for helping people get along."

Remember, friends, God wants to help you be peacemakers like David! This week, look for ways to help people get along by being kind and doing good things. Have a wonderful week!

Gentle to All

Universal Kindness, How do we show gentleness to difficult people?

Titus 3:1-11

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Titus 3:1-11 (NIV)

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward all people.

3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them

*a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. **11** You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.*

Context

Paul writes to Titus, his apostolic representative on the island of Crete, giving instructions for how Christians should live within the broader Roman society. Crete was known for lawlessness and conflict, and the early church needed clear guidance on navigating relationships with governing authorities and hostile neighbors. Paul has been addressing church leadership and internal community life, but now turns to external relationships.

This instruction comes at a crucial moment in the letter where Paul transitions from describing God's grace toward us to how that grace should transform our treatment of others. The emphasis on "all people" is striking, this isn't just about fellow believers but extends to everyone, including those in authority over them and those who might oppose them.

The Big Idea

God's grace toward us transforms how we treat every person we encounter, extending gentleness, peace, and consideration universally, even to those in authority over us and those who oppose us.

This teaching holds together submission to authority with prophetic integrity, acknowledging that the application requires wisdom and discernment. The command extends beyond mere tolerance to proactive gentleness, while recognizing that relationships with divisive people have appropriate boundaries.

Theological Core

- **Universal scope of gentleness.** The phrase "toward all people" leaves no exceptions, every human being deserves peaceable, considerate treatment regardless of their behavior toward us or their position of power.
 - **Authority relationships require submission and readiness for good.** Even when authorities are difficult or potentially unjust, Christians are called to obedience and proactive orientation toward doing good within those structures.
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- **Grace received transforms grace given.** Our own experience of undeserved mercy from God becomes the foundation for extending mercy to others, even when they don't deserve it from our perspective.
 - **Slander prohibition protects human dignity.** Verbal attacks against anyone, including powerful people we disagree with, are explicitly forbidden because they violate the dignity inherent in all people.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Gentleness, peaceableness, and consideration are owed to every person without exception, including those who oppose us or have authority over us
 - Submission to authority must be held in tension with prophetic integrity, requiring wisdom and discernment
 - Our own experience of undeserved grace from God transforms how we treat others who may not deserve our kindness
 - There are appropriate boundaries with divisive people while still maintaining their basic human dignity
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Grades 4, 6

- Kindness and gentleness apply to every person, not just our friends or people we like
 - We can disagree with people in authority while still being respectful and obedient
 - Bad-mouthing or gossiping about people hurts them and damages relationships
 - Sometimes doing the right thing feels hard, but we can choose kindness even when our feelings suggest otherwise
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Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind to everyone, including people who are hard to like
 - God is kind to us even when we mess up, so we can be kind to others when they mess up
 - We can choose to use gentle words and kind actions even when someone is mean to us
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying authority relationships.** Don't suggest that Christians should never question or challenge authority. The text calls for submission while the broader biblical witness includes prophetic confrontation, help students think through when and how to navigate this tension rather than offering simplistic answers.
 - **Ignoring the grace foundation.** The command to be gentle flows from our experience of God's grace (verses 3-7). Without this foundation, the instructions become mere moralism or people-pleasing rather than gospel transformation.
 - **Universalizing submission inappropriately.** The text specifically addresses submission to "rulers and authorities," not universal submission to every person in every context. Be careful not to extend this to inappropriate situations like abuse or exploitation.
 - **Conflating gentleness with passivity.** Being gentle, peaceable, and considerate doesn't mean being a doormat or avoiding necessary confrontation. Help students understand that gentleness is about manner and motive, not avoiding difficult conversations or standing up for truth.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if the government or authorities tell us to do something wrong?"

This is where Christian wisdom and discernment come in. Paul himself disobeyed authorities when they forbade him from preaching the gospel. The text calls us to submission and readiness for good, but when authorities command evil, our higher allegiance to God takes precedence. Even then, we can maintain a peaceable, considerate manner while refusing to comply. Think Daniel in the lion's den,

respectful defiance.

"Does this mean we can never criticize leaders or people in power?"

The text specifically prohibits slander, verbal attacks that damage reputation unfairly. But there's a difference between slander and legitimate critique or accountability. Biblical prophets confronted powerful leaders directly and publicly, but they did so truthfully and without personal malice. The key is motive and manner: are we seeking justice and truth, or are we attacking the person? We can oppose actions and policies while still treating people with basic dignity.

"What about people who are genuinely dangerous or harmful, do we really have to be gentle with them?"

Notice that Paul addresses this in verses 10-11 about divisive people. There are appropriate boundaries, and sometimes love requires saying "no" or creating distance. But even when we must protect ourselves or others from harmful people, we can do so without dehumanizing them or speaking slanderously about them. Gentleness and wisdom can coexist.

The One Thing to Remember

Every person deserves gentle treatment not because they've earned it, but because God showed us gentle mercy when we hadn't earned it either.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between universal gentleness and appropriate boundaries, helping them discover how their own experience of grace transforms their treatment of difficult people.

The Tension to Frame

How do we show gentleness to everyone, including authorities we disagree with and people who oppose us, while still maintaining integrity and appropriate boundaries?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with difficult authority figures and challenging relationships
 - Help them see the complexity rather than offering simple answers
 - Let them discover connections between God's grace toward them and their treatment of others
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about that teacher, coach, or parent who drives you crazy. You know the one, they have authority over you, they make decisions you disagree with, and sometimes you think they're just plain wrong. Maybe they embarrass you in front of others or enforce rules that seem unfair. Your friends probably share your frustration, and it feels good to vent about how ridiculous this person is.

Now imagine someone told you that you need to be "gentle" and "peaceable" toward this person. Not just tolerate them or stay out of trouble, actually be gentle. Your first reaction might be, "You don't understand how unreasonable they are!" And honestly, that response makes sense. When someone has power over you and uses it in ways that feel wrong or unfair, gentleness seems naive.

Today we're looking at someone who wrote instructions to a community dealing with something similar, except the authorities in question could imprison, exile, or execute people for their faith. Paul is writing to Christians living under Roman rule on the island of Crete, telling them how to navigate relationships with governing authorities and hostile neighbors.

What's fascinating is that Paul doesn't say "just survive" or "stay under the radar." He gives very specific instructions about how to treat all people, including those in authority, and his reasoning goes deeper than just avoiding conflict. Pay attention to the connection he makes between how God has treated us and how we should treat others.

Open your Bibles to Titus 3:1-11. We're going to read this silently first, then discuss what stands out to you.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with pronunciation if needed. Some students may finish early, encourage them to read it again and think about the questions. Let the weight of "all people" and the grace passage sink in.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors does Paul command, and who do they apply to?
- What reason does Paul give for why Christians should act this way?
- What seems difficult or surprising about these instructions?
- How would you have felt receiving these commands if you were living under hostile authorities?

Titus 3:1-11 (NIV)

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward all people.

3 At one time we too were foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved by all kinds of passions and pleasures. We lived in malice and envy, being hated and hating one another. 4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit, 6 whom he poured out on us generously through Jesus Christ our Savior, 7 so that, having been justified by his grace, we might become heirs according to the hope of eternal life. 8 This is a trustworthy saying. And I want you to stress these things, so that those who have trusted in God may be careful to devote themselves to doing what is good. These things are excellent and profitable for everyone.

9 But avoid foolish controversies and genealogies and arguments and quarrels about the law, because these are unprofitable and useless. 10 Warn a divisive person once, and then warn them a second time. After that, have nothing to do with them. 11 You may be sure that such people are warped and sinful; they are self-condemned.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the grace section (verses 3-7) since it's theologically dense.

Reader 1: Verses 1-2 (The commands for relating to authorities and all people) **Reader 2:** Verses 3-8 (The grace foundation, why we act this way) **Reader 3:** Verses 9-11 (Boundaries with divisive people)

Listen for the emotional tone of each section. Paul isn't just giving rules, he's painting a picture of transformation and relationships.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you most?" or "What would be hardest to actually do?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. You have exactly 3 minutes to come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read. Not questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually curious or confused about. Maybe something seems unrealistic, or you're wondering how it would work in real life, or you want to know why Paul says something specific. Focus on what genuinely makes you think "Wait, how does that work?" or "Why would he say that?" I'll be walking around to listen, and then we'll use your questions to drive our discussion.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive the discussion with their questions. Your job is to facilitate and probe deeper, not to lecture. Guide them to discover insights rather than telling them what to think.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes and patterns. Start with questions that most students can relate to or that address the practical tensions.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the scope of 'all people'? Are there any exceptions mentioned?"

- "Why does Paul connect submission to authorities with being gentle to everyone? What's the larger principle here?"

- "Look at verses 3-7. What's Paul's reasoning for why Christians should act this way?"

- "How do you hold together 'be subject to rulers' with the reality that some authorities are unjust or corrupt?"

- "What's the difference between 'gentle toward all people' and the boundaries Paul sets with divisive people in verses 10-11?"

- "Think about your own experience, how does receiving mercy change how you treat people who don't necessarily deserve your kindness?"

- "What would it look like to disagree with an authority figure while still being 'peaceable and considerate'?"

- "Why might Paul specifically mention not slandering anyone? What's the big deal about talking negatively about people?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul is saying that our treatment of every person, including difficult authorities and hostile neighbors, flows from our own experience of God's grace. When we remember that God showed us kindness when we were "foolish, disobedient, deceived," it changes how we view others who might be acting foolishly toward us. The gentleness isn't earned by their behavior; it's grounded in the fact that God's gentleness toward us wasn't earned by ours either.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you encounter the tension between universal gentleness and dealing with difficult people? Think about school administration, coaches, teachers, employers, political leaders, family authority figures, or even peers who consistently frustrate you. When is it hardest to be "peaceable and considerate"?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Dealing with teachers or administrators who enforce rules you think are unfair
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- Navigating family dynamics when parents make decisions you disagree with
- Responding to coaches or employers who treat you disrespectfully
- Social media interactions, the temptation to mock or attack public figures
- Political discussions where you strongly disagree with people in authority
- Friendship conflicts where someone has hurt you but you still have to interact with them

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone disagree with authority while still maintaining respect and peace?"
- "What would help you remember your own need for grace when dealing with someone who's being difficult?"
- "How do you tell the difference between appropriate boundaries and just avoiding people you don't like?"
- "What's the difference between calling out wrong behavior and slandering someone's character?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: every person you encounter, including those in authority over you and those who oppose you, deserves gentle treatment not because they've earned it, but because God showed you gentle mercy when you hadn't earned it either. This doesn't make you a pushover or require you to agree with everyone. But it does change your motive and your manner.

This week, pay attention to how you talk about people in authority or people who frustrate you. Notice when you're tempted to slander, to tear down someone's character rather than address their behavior. Experiment with disagreeing respectfully or setting boundaries while still treating people as image-bearers of God.

The thinking you did today was excellent. You wrestled with real tensions instead of settling for easy answers. Keep asking hard questions and looking for wisdom. I'm confident that as you grow in experiencing God's grace, you'll find yourself naturally extending that grace to others, even the difficult ones.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that kindness and gentleness apply to everyone, including people in authority and people who are hard to like, because God is kind to us even when we mess up.

If Kids Ask "What if someone in charge tells us to do something wrong?"

Say: "There are times when we have to say no if someone asks us to hurt others or disobey God. But even then, we can use respectful words and kind actions."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had a teacher who gave you a consequence that felt unfair. Keep your hand up if you've ever had a coach or parent make a rule that you thought was silly. Now raise your hand if you've ever been tempted to complain about these people to your friends or say mean things about them behind their backs.

Here's a harder question, raise your hand if you've ever had someone in charge who you actually liked most of the time, but sometimes they made decisions that frustrated you. Part of you wanted to respect them because they're usually fair, but another part of you wanted to complain because this particular thing seemed wrong. That's a confusing feeling, isn't it?

It's totally normal to feel frustrated when people in authority make decisions we don't understand or like. Sometimes our first instinct is to get together with our friends and talk about how annoying or unfair that person is. It feels good to have people agree with us that we were treated badly.

This reminds me of movies like Matilda, where a student has to deal with a really unfair principal, or any story where kids have to navigate adults who don't listen to them or seem to care about their feelings. The heroes in those stories have to figure out how to respond when people with power over them aren't treating them well.

The tricky part is figuring out how to disagree with someone respectfully, or how to be kind to someone who's being unkind to you. How do you stay true to what's right while also treating people well, even when they're not treating you well?

Today we're going to hear about some instructions that Paul gave to a group of Christians who were dealing with leaders and neighbors who sometimes treated them unfairly. These Christians had to figure out how to be followers of Jesus while living under rulers who didn't always care about justice or kindness. Let's find out what Paul told them to do.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to unfair authority figures. Acknowledge their experiences briefly with phrases like "That does sound frustrating" but keep momentum moving toward the story. Some may want to share specific examples, save those for the discussion section.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Picture a beautiful island in the Mediterranean Sea called Crete. This wasn't just a vacation spot, it was a place where people lived and worked, but it had a reputation for being rough and lawless. People on Crete were known for fighting, lying, and being selfish.

A man named Titus was living there, helping start churches and teach people about Jesus. But the Christians on Crete faced a big challenge. They lived under Roman governors who had the power to make laws, collect taxes, and even punish people. Some of these rulers were fair, but others were harsh or greedy.

The Christians also had to live alongside neighbors who didn't understand their faith and sometimes made fun of them or treated them badly. Some people in the community thought Christians were strange for the way they shared their money and cared for poor people.

Imagine being a kid in that situation. You're trying to follow Jesus, but the principal at your school makes rules that seem unfair, and some of your classmates tease you for being kind to the unpopular kids. What would you do? How would you treat those people?

Paul, who was like a spiritual dad to Titus, wrote him a letter with very specific instructions about how Christians should live in this difficult situation. Paul had been in prison because of his faith, so he knew what it was like to deal with unfair authorities.

Paul didn't say, "Fight back against unfair people" or "Just avoid everyone who's difficult." Instead, he gave Titus a list of specific ways that Christians should act toward all people, including those in authority and those who opposed them.

First, Paul said Christians should respect the rulers and authorities, even when they disagreed with their decisions. They should obey the laws and be ready to do good things whenever they had the chance. This wasn't because the rulers deserved it, but because this is how followers of Jesus live.

Then Paul said something even more challenging. He told them not to say mean things about anyone, not the strict governors, not the rude neighbors, not the people who made fun of their faith. Instead, they should be peaceful, considerate, and gentle toward everyone.

Think about what that would be like. If someone at school was spreading rumors about you, Paul would say, "Don't spread rumors back about them. Be gentle instead."

Titus 3:1-2 (NIV)

1 Remind the people to be subject to rulers and authorities, to be obedient, to be ready to do whatever is good, 2 to slander no one, to be peaceable and considerate, and always to be gentle toward all people.

Can you imagine getting these instructions? Titus might have thought, "Paul, you don't understand how difficult these people are! The rulers are unfair and the neighbors are mean. Why should we be gentle toward people who aren't gentle toward us?"

But Paul wasn't done. He reminded Titus about something important. He said, "Remember what you used to be like before you knew Jesus?"

Paul reminded them that they used to be foolish sometimes, disobedient, deceived by wrong ideas, and controlled by their selfish desires. They used to be mean to people and hate others, and other people hated them back. They weren't perfect people who had earned God's kindness.

Titus 3:4-5 (NIV)

4 But when the kindness and love of God our Savior appeared, 5 he saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy.

This was Paul's big point: God showed them incredible kindness when they didn't deserve it. God didn't wait for them to become perfect people before He loved them. He rescued them from their selfishness and meanness, not because they had earned it, but simply because He is merciful.

So Paul was saying, "Since God was gentle and kind to you when you were being difficult, you can be gentle and kind to others when they're being difficult. You know what it's like to receive kindness you didn't earn, now you can give kindness that others haven't earned either."

Paul told Titus to make sure everyone understood this connection. When you remember how patient God has been with your mistakes, it changes how you treat people who make mistakes toward you. When you remember how God showed you mercy when you were being selfish, it becomes easier to show mercy to others who are being selfish.

Paul also gave practical advice. He said to avoid pointless arguments and quarrels that don't help anyone. If someone is being really divisive and won't stop causing problems even after you've tried to help them, it's okay to create some distance. Being gentle doesn't mean letting people hurt you or others.

But the main message was clear: Because God treats us with kindness we don't deserve, we can treat others with kindness they don't deserve. This includes people in authority over us, people who disagree with us, and even people who are unkind to us.

The Christians in Crete learned that this way of living actually changed their communities. When they responded to unfairness with gentleness, when they spoke respectfully even about difficult leaders, and when they chose kindness over revenge, people noticed. Some people who had been hostile became curious about this God who could transform people so dramatically.

Sometimes in our lives, we face similar situations. Maybe a teacher seems unfair, or a coach is too strict, or a family member makes decisions we don't understand. We have a choice: we can respond with the same unkindness we're receiving, or we can remember how God has been kind to us and choose to be kind in return.

This doesn't mean we never speak up about wrong things or that we let people walk all over us. But it does mean that even when we disagree or even when we need to protect ourselves, we can do it with

gentle words and kind actions.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Feelings

Think about a time when someone in charge, a teacher, parent, or coach, made a decision that seemed unfair to you. Maybe they gave you a consequence you didn't think you deserved, or they said no to something that seemed reasonable. How did you feel in that moment? What did you want to say or do?

Listen For: Responses like "angry," "wanted to argue," "thought they were being mean." Affirm: "Those feelings make total sense. When something seems unfair, it's natural to feel frustrated or angry."

Question 2: The Tempting Response

When you're frustrated with someone in authority, what's the most tempting thing to do? Maybe complain to your friends, say mean things about that person, or just avoid them completely? Why do those responses feel good in the moment?

If They Say: "Complaining feels good because others agree with you", respond: "Yes, it does feel good to have people on your side. Why do you think Paul said not to slander people even when they're being unfair?"

Question 3: The God Connection

Paul reminded the Christians that God had been kind to them when they were making mistakes or being difficult. Think about your own life, when has God been patient with you when you messed up or made a bad choice? How does remembering that change how you think about being patient with others?

Connect: "This is exactly what Paul meant when he said our treatment of others should flow from remembering how God has treated us."

Question 4: The Better Way

What do you think it would look like to disagree with someone in authority while still being "gentle and considerate"? How could you express that you think something is unfair without being disrespectful or mean?

If They Say: "Use respectful words" or "explain your feelings calmly", respond: "Those are great examples. Even when we disagree, we can choose our words and tone carefully."

It sounds like you understand that our feelings about unfair treatment are normal, but God calls us to respond differently than the world expects. When we remember how God has been patient and kind with us, it helps us be patient and kind with others, even when they're being difficult.

4. Activity: Kindness Circle Challenge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces universal kindness by having kids experience how treating everyone well creates stronger community, even when some people are initially difficult. Success looks like kids discovering that including and being gentle with "difficult" people actually transforms the whole group dynamic.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play the Kindness Circle Challenge. Everyone stand in a large circle. I'm going to give some of you secret roles, some of you will be "Easy People" who are naturally friendly and cooperative, and some of you will be "Difficult People" who are grumpy, argumentative, or standoffish. Don't tell others what role you have.

Your challenge as a group is to work together to complete simple tasks I'll give you, like organizing yourselves by height, or forming smaller circles by birth month. The Easy People should just be themselves. The Difficult People should be resistant, complain about the instructions, or separate themselves from the group.

Here's the twist: Everyone must try to treat each person with kindness and gentleness, no matter how difficult they're being. You can't ignore the Difficult People or get frustrated with them, you have to find

ways to include them and speak kindly to them.

We're doing this because it's exactly like the situation Paul was describing. Some people are easy to be kind to, and others challenge our patience. But God calls us to be gentle toward all people.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First challenge: Organize yourselves by height from shortest to tallest. Remember, be kind to everyone. I'll watch how you include the people who are being difficult or resistant.

Notice what's happening. Some people are making this harder than it needs to be, but watch how the group responds. Are you getting frustrated or are you finding ways to be patient? How do you include someone who doesn't want to participate?

I'm seeing some great kindness here. When someone complains, I hear people saying "That's okay" or "Here, let me help." When someone stands apart, I see others going to invite them in gently. This is exactly what Paul meant by being gentle toward all people.

Next challenge: Form groups of four, but make sure every person is included. Continue being kind to everyone, even if they're being difficult about it.

Look what's happening! The people who were being difficult are starting to participate more because they're being treated with kindness instead of frustration. Some of the "Difficult People" are actually becoming more cooperative because they feel included and valued.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to invite in a resistant person or responds to complaints with patience, this is the physical representation of choosing gentleness over natural frustration.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when someone was being difficult versus when everyone was working together? How did treating the difficult people with kindness change the whole group? This is exactly what Paul was teaching, when we choose gentleness toward all people, even the challenging ones, it transforms relationships and communities in ways we don't expect.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to be kind and gentle to everyone, not just our friends or people who are easy to like, but even people in authority who make decisions we don't understand, and even people who are sometimes mean or difficult.

This doesn't mean we let people hurt us or that we never speak up when something is wrong. We can still disagree respectfully and protect ourselves when needed. But we choose our words and actions carefully, remembering that God has been patient and kind with us when we were being difficult.

The amazing result is that when we treat difficult people with unexpected kindness, it often changes them. Just like in our activity, people who feel included and treated gently often become more cooperative and kind themselves.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone in authority (teacher, parent, coach) makes a decision you don't like, try responding with respectful words instead of complaining. When you're tempted to say something mean about someone, choose to either say something kind or say nothing at all. Notice how treating everyone with gentleness changes your relationships.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, thank you for being patient and kind to us when we make mistakes. Help us remember your gentleness toward us when we're feeling frustrated with others. Give us the strength to choose kind words and actions even when people are being difficult. Help us be peacemakers in our families, schools, and friendships. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind to everyone, even people who are hard to like, because God is kind to us.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare God's kindness to us to how parents love their children even when they misbehave, then ask how we can love others like that.

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's Love is So Wonderful," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: point to yourself during "loves me," spread arms wide during "wonderful," and give hugs during "be kind."

Great singing! Now let's sit in our special horseshoe shape where everyone can see me. We're going to hear a story about being kind to everyone, even people who are hard to like. Are you ready to listen with your ears and your hearts?

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 frustrated when talking about difficult people, sound hopeful when talking about being kind.

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who had something very important to tell people about being kind!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Paul had a friend named Titus who lived on an island where some people were very mean. Some people were bosses who made unfair rules, and some neighbors who said unkind things about people who loved Jesus.

[Make a sad face and use a disappointed voice]

Titus felt sad because it was hard to be kind to people who were mean to him. Have you ever felt that way? When someone is mean to you, do you want to be mean back?

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

But Paul had great news for Titus! Paul wrote him a letter with God's instructions about how to treat everyone, even the mean people!

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Paul said, "Tell everyone to be kind and gentle to ALL people. Don't say mean things about anyone. Choose to be peaceful and helpful instead."

[Move to side, sound confused like Titus might have been]

Titus might have thought, "But Paul, these people are really mean! Why should I be nice to someone who's not nice to me?"

Titus 3:2 (NIV)

Be gentle toward all people.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think Titus was right to feel confused? Yes! It's hard to be kind to people who are mean to us!

[Move to center, speak with warmth]

But then Paul reminded Titus about something very important. He said, "Remember how God treats you?"

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Paul said, "Before you knew Jesus, you sometimes made bad choices and were mean to people. But did God wait for you to be perfect before He loved you? No! God loved you and was kind to you even when you were making mistakes."

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So Titus learned that he could be kind to mean people because God had been kind to him when he was being mean!

[Speak with excitement]

When Titus and his friends started being gentle and kind to everyone, even the mean people, something amazing happened! Some of the mean people became nicer because they saw how different God's love made Titus and his friends!

[Pause dramatically]

God can help us be kind to everyone too! Even when someone is mean to us, we can choose gentle words and kind actions because God is gentle and kind to us.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who are hard to like. Maybe they're grumpy, or they say mean things, or they don't want to play with us. But God wants us to be kind to them anyway.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can choose to use kind words instead of mean words. When someone doesn't include you, you can choose to include others instead of being mean back.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you so much, and He helps you love others! Even when it's hard, God gives you the power to be gentle and kind just like Jesus!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll give each pair one question to talk about for about one minute. Remember, 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 feel when someone is mean to you?
2. Who is someone you know who is always kind?
3. Why do you think Titus felt confused about being kind to mean people?
4. What would you do if someone said something mean about you?
5. How did the mean people change when Titus was kind to them?
6. How does God treat us when we make mistakes?
7. What happened when people saw how kind Titus was?
8. Who at school is sometimes hard to be kind to?
9. How can you be kind to someone in your family when they're grumpy?
10. Who in your class needs more friends?
11. Why does God want us to be kind to everyone?
12. How can you use kind words when someone uses mean words?
13. How does it feel when God is patient with you?

14. When is it hardest to be kind?

15. How can you be brave enough to be kind when others are being mean?

16. What did you learn about God's kindness today?

17. How can you remember to be kind this week?

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

19. What would happen if everyone was kind to everyone?

20. How can you be like Jesus by being gentle?

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 love. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Kindness is a Choice," or "Be Like Jesus." Use gentle hand motions like spreading arms for love, gentle touches to heart for kindness, and pointing up for Jesus.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit in rows for our prayer time. Fold your hands and bow your heads as we thank God and ask for His help.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for being so kind and patient with us when we make mistakes...

[Pause]

Help us remember your love for us when it's hard to be kind to others. Give us gentle words and kind actions even when people are mean to us...

[Pause]

Help us be like Jesus by showing your love to everyone we meet. Thank you that you love us and help us love others. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind. Examples: "God, help me be kind to my sister" or "Thank you for loving me when I'm grumpy."

Remember this week that God wants us to be gentle and kind to everyone, even people who are hard to like. You can choose kind words and actions because God gives you His love to share. Have a wonderful week!
