

Managing Anger and Conflict

Volume 19

Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series

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Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

Managing Anger and Conflict

Volume 19

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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

Light and Hatred

When Darkness Masquerades as Light, Can you hate and still claim to follow Jesus?

1 John 2:7-14

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 John 2:7-14 (NIV)

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had since the beginning. This old command is the word you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 11 But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

12 I am writing to you, dear children, because your sins have been forgiven on account of his name. 13 I am writing to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I am writing to you, young men, because you have overcome the evil one. 14 I write to you, dear children, because you know the Father. I write to you, fathers, because you know him who is from the beginning. I write to you, young men, because you are strong, and the word of God lives in you, and you have overcome the evil one.

Context

John is writing to churches facing internal division and false teaching. Some members are claiming superior spiritual knowledge while displaying hatred toward fellow believers. These false teachers likely viewed themselves as enlightened, above ordinary moral obligations, and more spiritually advanced than others in the community.

This passage comes after John's warnings about sin and his emphasis on obedience to God's commands. He's now addressing the specific issue of claimed spiritual status versus actual spiritual condition. The immediate context involves the tension between old and new commands, love isn't new, but its manifestation in Christ gives it fresh urgency and clarity.

The Big Idea

Hatred and spiritual light are absolutely incompatible, anyone who claims to be in God's light while harboring hatred against others is still walking in complete darkness.

This isn't about temporary anger or justified opposition to harmful behavior, but about settled hatred that blinds us to our true spiritual condition. The passage reveals that hatred doesn't just harm relationships, it fundamentally deceives us about ourselves, creating a spiritual blindness that prevents self-knowledge and authentic growth.

Theological Core

- **Light-hatred incompatibility.** Claiming to follow Jesus while maintaining hatred creates a contradiction that exposes false spirituality.
 - **Hatred as blindness.** Hatred doesn't just affect relationships, it distorts our ability to see clearly, especially about our own spiritual condition.
 - **Love as clarity.** Those who genuinely love others experience spiritual clarity and sure footing on their spiritual journey.
 - **Self-harm of hatred.** The primary victim of our hatred is ourselves, it disorients us, blinds us, and causes us to lose our way spiritually.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Hatred and genuine faith are mutually exclusive, we cannot claim spiritual light while harboring hatred
 - Hatred creates spiritual blindness that prevents honest self-assessment and growth
 - Self-examination for hidden hatred reveals whether our claimed faith is authentic or self-deceptive
 - The primary damage of hatred is to the hater, disorientation, blindness, and lost direction in life
-

Grades 4, 6

- You can't truly follow Jesus while hating other people, it doesn't work that way
 - Hatred makes bad choices easier and good choices harder to see
 - When we hate someone, we're the ones who get confused and make mistakes
 - Even when we're angry, we can choose not to let it turn into hatred
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to love people, not hate them
 - When we love others, God helps us see what's right and good
 - Hating people makes us feel bad and do bad things
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Equating all anger with hatred.** Don't suggest that any negative emotion toward others disqualifies someone from faith. Help students distinguish between appropriate anger at harmful behavior and settled hatred toward persons.

- **Limiting "brother and sister" only to believers.** While John likely had fellow Christians in mind, avoid creating a double standard where hatred of non-Christians is acceptable while hatred of Christians isn't.

- **Ignoring the self-examination purpose.** This passage is meant to help people honestly assess their own spiritual condition, not to judge others. Focus on personal reflection rather than identifying hatred in others.

- **Missing the blindness dynamic.** The most important insight is that hatred prevents self-knowledge, people who hate often can't see that they're spiritually lost because hatred blinds them to their own condition.

Handling Hard Questions

"What about hating evil or standing up to bullies?"

Great question. John is talking about hatred toward people, not opposition to harmful behavior. You can firmly oppose someone's actions, set boundaries, or even seek justice while still hoping for their good. The test is this: do you want harm to come to the person themselves, or do you want the harmful behavior to stop? Hatred wants the person to suffer; love wants the person to change and flourish.

"Does this mean I can't be a Christian if I hate someone?"

This passage is designed for honest self-examination, not to create despair. If you recognize hatred in your heart, that's actually good news, it means you're not spiritually blind yet. The fact that you're concerned about it shows you're still in the light enough to see the problem. Ask God to help you release that hatred, and consider whether there are steps toward forgiveness you can take.

"How can I tell the difference between righteous anger and sinful hatred?"

Righteous anger wants justice and restoration; hatred wants revenge and destruction. Righteous anger energizes you to address problems; hatred consumes you and makes you obsessed. Righteous anger can

lead to forgiveness when wrongs are addressed; hatred refuses forgiveness even when someone changes. Time is also a factor, righteous anger moves you toward resolution, while hatred settles in and becomes part of your identity.

The One Thing to Remember

Hatred doesn't just damage relationships, it blinds us to our own spiritual condition, making us think we're in the light when we're actually stumbling in darkness.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to honestly examine whether any hatred in their hearts reveals they're not in the spiritual light they claim to possess. Help them discover that hatred's primary damage is to the hater, blindness and disorientation.

The Tension to Frame

How can someone be completely wrong about their own spiritual condition, and how does hatred prevent us from seeing ourselves clearly?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Create space for honest self-examination without shame, this passage is meant for personal reflection, not judgment of others
 - Acknowledge the difficulty of distinguishing between righteous anger and sinful hatred, honor the complexity
 - Let students wrestle with their own examples rather than providing easy answers about what they should or shouldn't feel
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about someone at school who really gets under your skin. Maybe they're fake, saying one thing to your face and something completely different behind your back. Maybe they act like they're better than everyone else while treating people terribly. Maybe they claim to care about justice but only when it benefits them personally.

Here's what's frustrating: they genuinely seem to believe their own story. They don't think they're being hypocritical. They honestly see themselves as good people, victims, or heroes in their own narrative. Meanwhile, everyone else can see exactly what they're doing wrong, everyone except them.

It raises an unsettling question: if they can be that blind to their own behavior, could you be blind to yours? Is it possible to be completely wrong about your own character, your own spiritual condition, your own relationship with God? And if so, what causes that kind of blindness?

Today we're looking at a passage that suggests hatred, not just dislike or anger, but settled hatred, creates exactly this kind of spiritual blindness. John claims that people can think they're walking in God's light while actually stumbling around in complete darkness, and they can't tell the difference.

As we read this together, pay attention to what hatred does to the person who hates. Notice how it affects their ability to see clearly, especially about themselves.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Let them feel the weight of John's absolute statements. This is heavy material about self-knowledge and spiritual authenticity. Don't rush the processing time.

As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly does John say about people who claim to be in the light while hating others?
 - How does hatred affect the person who hates, what does it do to their perception and judgment?
 - What's surprising or challenging about John's absolute statements here?
 - When have you seen hatred blind someone to their own behavior or condition?
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1 John 2:7-14 (NIV)

7 Dear friends, I am not writing you a new command but an old command that you have had since the beginning. This old command is the word you have heard. 8 Yet I am writing you a new command; its truth is seen in him and in you, because the darkness is passing and the true light is already shining.

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble. 11 But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

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3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Choose confident readers for the contrast between light and dark. Let the stark language hit with full impact.

Reader 1: Verses 7-8 (Setting up the command about love) **Reader 2:** Verses 9-11 (The core passage about hatred and blindness) **Reader 3:** Verses 12-14 (Affirmation of their identity in Christ)

Listen for the contrast John creates, how different it sounds to live in light versus darkness, and especially how hatred affects the hater.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Let them generate questions they're genuinely curious about. This passage raises deep questions about self-knowledge and spiritual authenticity.

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two real questions, things you're actually curious about after reading this passage. Not questions you think you should ask, but questions you find yourself wondering about. What confuses you? What challenges you? What makes you want to dig deeper? You have three minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with their questions. Guide discovery about hatred's blinding effect rather than lecturing about what they should believe.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board. Look for themes around self-knowledge, hatred versus anger, and spiritual authenticity.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What specific effects does John say hatred has on the person who hates?"
- "Why would hatred make someone unable to see where they're going in life?"
- "How might someone be completely sincere about following God while still being 'in darkness'?"
- "What's the difference between anger and the kind of hatred John's talking about?"
- "How could you tell if you were spiritually blind to your own condition?"
- "When have you seen hatred change how someone sees everything else in their life?"
- "What would it look like for hatred to make someone stumble spiritually?"
- "Why does John seem so absolute about this, no middle ground between light and darkness?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you see what John is exposing here? He's not just saying hatred is wrong, he's saying it creates a kind of spiritual blindness that prevents self-knowledge. People who hate can't accurately assess their own spiritual condition because hatred distorts everything they see, especially about themselves. This

explains how someone can be sincere about their faith while missing the mark entirely.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this pattern playing out? John is giving us a tool for honest self-examination, not to judge others, but to check our own hearts for the kind of settled hatred that blinds us to reality.

Real Issues This Connects To

- That person at school you can't stand, when does justified irritation become blinding hatred?
 - Family members who've hurt you, how do you know when you're holding onto hatred versus working through legitimate pain?
 - Political or social opponents, when does disagreement cross into hatred that distorts everything you see about them?
 - Online interactions, how does social media hatred change how you view yourself and others?
 - People who've excluded or betrayed you, when does the desire for justice become a desire for their harm?
 - Former friends or romantic relationships, how might ongoing resentment be blinding you to your own role in conflicts?
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Help them think through the difference between appropriate boundaries and sinful hatred.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen hatred make someone unable to see clearly about their own life?"
 - "How would you know if your anger toward someone had crossed into the kind of hatred John warns about?"
 - "What would it look like to oppose someone's harmful behavior without hating them as a person?"
-

- "How might hidden hatred be affecting your ability to see your own spiritual condition accurately?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: hatred doesn't just damage relationships, it fundamentally damages your ability to see clearly, especially about yourself. John's warning isn't meant to create paranoia but to encourage honest self-examination. If you can see hatred in your heart, that's actually good news, it means you're not completely blind yet.

This week, pay attention to the people you find yourself resenting or despising. Ask yourself: is this righteous anger that motivates me to address problems, or is it settled hatred that consumes my thoughts and distorts my perspective? Notice how hatred affects your ability to see clearly about other areas of your life.

The fact that you're wrestling with these questions shows maturity and spiritual awareness. Keep asking hard questions about your own heart. That's exactly what John wanted his readers to do, and it's exactly what leads to authentic spiritual growth.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that hatred and following Jesus don't go together, and that hatred hurts the person who hates more than anyone else.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is really mean to me?"

Say: "It's okay to be angry when someone hurts you, and it's okay to stay away from people who are mean. But hatred is different, it's when you want bad things to happen to them, and that hurts your heart more than theirs."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever met someone who seemed really nice on the outside but was actually mean on the inside. Maybe they smiled and said nice things to adults, but when adults weren't looking, they were cruel to other kids. Maybe they talked about being good people, but they were secretly bullying someone or spreading rumors.

Now here's a harder question: have you ever felt two different ways about the same person? Part of you wants to be good and forgive them, but another part of you wants something bad to happen to them. Part of you knows you should love people like Jesus does, but another part of you just wants to hate them and never think about them again.

It's confusing, isn't it? You want to be a good person who follows Jesus, but sometimes there are people who make you so mad that you wish they would just disappear. And then you feel guilty for thinking that way, but you also can't seem to stop feeling angry at them.

It's kind of like in movies when someone looks like a hero but is actually the villain, or when someone thinks they're the good guy but they're actually making everything worse. Sometimes in real life, people think they're following the light but they're actually walking around in the dark.

The tricky part is figuring out: how can you tell if you're actually following Jesus or just pretending to follow Jesus? And what happens to your heart when you hate someone instead of love them?

Today we're going to hear about what God says happens when people claim to love God but hate other people. Let's find out what the Bible teaches about light, darkness, and what goes on inside our hearts.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to feeling conflicted about mean people. Acknowledge their experiences briefly, then move toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

A long time ago, there was a man named John who loved Jesus very much. John had lived with Jesus, eaten meals with Jesus, and learned from Jesus for three years. John knew Jesus better than almost anyone in the whole world.

After Jesus went back to heaven, John helped start churches where people could learn about Jesus and worship God together. But John noticed something troubling happening in some of these churches.

Some people were claiming to be followers of Jesus, but they were treating other people terribly.

These people would say, "I love God! I'm walking in God's light! I'm a good Christian!" But then they would hate other people in the church. They would spread rumors, exclude people, say mean things, and try to hurt people they didn't like. They acted like they were better than everyone else.

Imagine how confusing this was for everyone else. These people seemed to really believe they were good Christians. They weren't lying or pretending, they honestly thought they were following Jesus. But their hearts were full of hatred toward other people.

John realized he needed to write them a letter to help them understand something very important about what it means to follow Jesus. He needed to help them see what was really happening in their hearts.

So John sat down and wrote these words to the churches. He wanted to help them understand the difference between really following Jesus and just thinking you're following Jesus.

1 John 2:9-10 (NIV)

9 Anyone who claims to be in the light but hates a brother or sister is still in the darkness. 10 Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

John was saying something really important here. He was saying that you can't love God and hate people at the same time. It doesn't work that way. If you hate someone, you're not really walking in God's light, even if you think you are.

But John didn't stop there. He explained what happens to people who hate others, and it's not what you might expect. He said the hatred doesn't hurt the other person the most, it hurts the person who's doing the hating.

1 John 2:11 (NIV)

11 But anyone who hates a brother or sister is in the darkness and walks around in the darkness. They do not know where they are going, because the darkness has blinded them.

Do you see what John discovered? When you hate someone, it's like walking around in a dark room with no lights on. You can't see where you're going. You bump into things. You make mistakes. You think you're going the right way, but you're actually lost.

The hatred in your heart makes it hard to see clearly about everything else in your life. It makes it hard to know what's right and wrong. It makes it hard to make good choices. The person you hate might be living a happy life somewhere else, but you're the one stumbling around in the dark.

John wanted people to understand that when you choose to hate someone, you're choosing to hurt yourself. You're choosing to walk in darkness instead of light. You're choosing to be confused instead of clear about what God wants you to do.

But here's the good news: when you choose to love people, even people who are hard to love, you get to walk in God's light. Your path becomes clear. You can see where you're going. You make better choices because you can see what's really important.

This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with everyone or that you can't stay away from people who are mean to you. It means that in your heart, you hope good things happen to them instead of bad things. You want God to help them become better people instead of wanting them to get in trouble.

Sometimes in our lives, we meet people who hurt us or make us really angry. It's tempting to start hating them and wanting bad things to happen to them. But God teaches us a different way, a way that keeps our hearts clean and our paths bright.

When we choose love instead of hatred, we're choosing to follow Jesus for real, not just pretend. We're choosing to let God's light shine through us instead of walking around in darkness. And that makes all the difference in how we see everything else in our lives.

The amazing thing is that when we love people instead of hate them, we become more like Jesus. Our hearts stay soft and kind. We can see clearly what God wants us to do. And we don't stumble around making bad choices because we're walking in the light.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Confused People

Think about those people in John's churches who thought they loved God but hated other people. They weren't pretending, they really believed they were good Christians. But John said they were wrong about themselves. How could someone be so confused about their own heart? What do you think was happening inside them that made them think they were following Jesus when they really weren't?

Listen For: "They were lying to themselves," "They only thought about the good stuff they did," "Hatred made them confused", affirm: "Yes, hatred can make it really hard to see clearly about ourselves."

Question 2: The Darkness

John said that people who hate others are "walking around in the darkness" and "don't know where they're going." If someone at school hated another student and thought about them all the time in mean ways, how do you think that hatred might affect the rest of their life? How might it change the way they treat other people or make other decisions?

If They Say: "They'd be mean to everyone" or "They'd make bad choices", respond: "How do you think the hatred would make those bad choices easier to make?"

Question 3: The Difference

There's a difference between being angry when someone hurts you and hating them. Being angry is normal and okay, even Jesus got angry sometimes. But hatred is different. How do you think you could tell the difference in your own heart? What would hatred feel like compared to just being angry or hurt?

Connect: "This is exactly why John wanted to help people check their hearts, so they could see the difference between normal anger and harmful hatred."

Question 4: The Choice

John says people who love others "live in the light" and "there is nothing in them to make them stumble." Think about someone you know who is really good at loving difficult people. What do you notice about them? How do they seem different from people who hold onto hatred and resentment?

If They Say: "They're happier" or "They don't get in trouble as much", respond: "Yes, love seems to help people see clearly and make better choices."

John discovered something really important: hatred hurts the person who hates more than anyone else. When we choose love instead of hatred, we're not just being nice to other people, we're being kind to ourselves and keeping our hearts clean and clear.

4. Activity: Light Walkers and Shadow Stumblers (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that hatred creates confusion and stumbling while love creates clarity and sure footing. Success looks like kids discovering that those carrying "hatred" can't navigate effectively, while those practicing "love" help everyone move forward clearly.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Light Walkers and Shadow Stumblers." Half of you will be Light Walkers and half will be Shadow Stumblers. Everyone's goal is to get from one side of the room to the other, but there are different rules for each group.

Light Walkers: You can see clearly, walk in straight lines, and you're supposed to help anyone who's struggling to get across. You represent people who choose love instead of hatred. Shadow Stumblers: You have to close your eyes, you can only take sideways steps, and you're not allowed to ask for help, you have to figure it out yourself. You represent people whose hatred has made them spiritually blind.

The twist is that Shadow Stumblers don't know they're supposed to be having trouble. You think you're doing great, even when you're going in circles or bumping into things. Light Walkers, your job is to notice who needs help and gently guide them without being pushy.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what John was teaching, hatred makes people think they're doing fine when they're actually lost, and love helps people see clearly enough to help others.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Watch how the Shadow Stumblers start out confident but quickly become disoriented. Let them struggle for about a minute before encouraging Light Walkers to start helping. Notice how some Shadow Stumblers resist help because they think they're doing fine.

As the Light Walkers start helping, notice how the whole room becomes more organized and peaceful. Coach by saying things like: "Light Walkers, I notice some people are going in circles, how could you help?" and "Shadow Stumblers, you're doing your best, but it looks like some people can see better than you."

Look for the moment when Shadow Stumblers realize they need help and start accepting guidance from Light Walkers. When Light Walkers are gently guiding others, say: "Look how much easier this is when people help each other instead of everyone trying to figure it out alone."

The breakthrough happens when everyone realizes that having clear vision helps the whole group, not just the person who can see. Celebrate when Shadow Stumblers start trusting the Light Walkers to guide them safely.

Once everyone reaches the other side, have them notice how different the journey was for Light Walkers versus Shadow Stumblers, and how much better everything worked when people with clear vision helped people who were struggling.

Watch For: The moment when a Shadow Stumbler accepts help from a Light Walker, this is the physical representation of humility overcoming the blindness of hatred.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt to be a Shadow Stumbler versus a Light Walker? Shadow Stumblers, was it frustrating to feel lost when you thought you should be doing fine? Light Walkers, how did it feel to be able to see clearly and help others? This is exactly what John was teaching, hatred makes us stumble around confused, but love helps us see clearly and help others too.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: you can't love God and hate people at the same time. When you hate someone, you're choosing to walk in darkness, and that hurts you more than it hurts them. When you choose love, you get to walk in God's light where you can see clearly.

This doesn't mean you have to be best friends with people who are mean to you. It means that in your heart, you hope good things happen to them instead of bad things. You want God to help them become better people instead of wanting them to get in trouble.

The amazing result is that when you choose love instead of hatred, your own heart stays clean and clear. You make better choices because you can see what's right. And you become more like Jesus, who loves everyone, even people who are hard to love.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone makes you really angry, notice what's happening in your heart. Are you just angry (which is normal), or are you starting to hate them and want bad things to happen to them? If you notice hatred creeping in, ask God to help you choose love instead, even if that person was mean to you.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for teaching us the difference between walking in light and stumbling in darkness. Help us choose love instead of hatred, even when people are mean to us. When we're angry, help our hearts stay clean and clear so we can see what you want us to 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 love people, not hate them, and that loving people helps us see clearly what God wants us to do.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare hatred to having something yucky in your eyes that makes it hard to see clearly, then ask "What happens when you can't see where you're going?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love helping us love others. Suggestions: "This Little Light of Mine," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "Love One Another." Use movements: point up to God during "God loves," hug yourself during "loves me," point to others during "love others."

Great singing! Let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about light and darkness, and about what God wants our hearts to be like.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Use a bright, clear voice for "light" and a confused, stumbling voice for "darkness."

Today we're going to meet a man named John who loved Jesus very much!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe, smile big]

John had friends who loved Jesus too. They had churches where they would sing songs to God, learn about Jesus, and be kind to each other. It was wonderful!

[Face change to concerned, move to other side]

But John noticed something that made him sad. Some people at the churches said they loved God, but they were being really mean to other people. They would say mean things and be hateful.

[Walk to center, speak with gentle authority]

God showed John something very important to tell these people. God said you can't love God and hate people at the same time. It doesn't work!

[Move to side, sound excited]

John learned that when people choose to love others, it's like walking in bright sunshine. They can see everything clearly!

1 John 2:10 (NIV)

Anyone who loves their brother and sister lives in the light, and there is nothing in them to make them stumble.

[Pause and look around at each child with a big smile]

When you love people, God helps you see what's good and right! You don't trip and fall. You don't make big mistakes. It's like having the best flashlight in the world!

[Move to center, speak seriously but kindly]

But John also learned what happens when people choose to hate others. It's very different and very sad.

[Walk slowly, pretending to stumble a little]

When people hate others, it's like trying to walk in a dark room with no lights on. They can't see where they're going. They bump into things. They get lost.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

The people who hate others think they're doing fine, but they're actually making lots of mistakes. The hate in their hearts makes it hard to see what God wants them to do.

[Speak with excitement and hope]

But here's the good news! God wants to help us choose love instead of hate. God wants our hearts to be full of love so we can see clearly and make good choices!

[Pause dramatically, then smile]

When we love people, even people who are sometimes mean to us, God helps us walk in the light. We can see what's right. We can be kind. We can be happy!

[Speak directly to the children with warmth]

Sometimes at school or at home, people might make us really mad. It's okay to feel angry. But God wants us to choose love in our hearts instead of hate. Love makes everything better!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can pray for them. You can hope good things happen to them. You can ask God to help them be nicer. That's what love looks like!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you so much, and God wants to help you love others too. When you choose love, you get to walk in God's bright light every day!

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

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 it feels to walk in the dark versus walk in the light?

2. What do you think happens when someone has hate in their heart?

3. Who is someone you know who is really good at loving others?

4. What would you do if someone at school was mean to you?

5. How does it feel in your tummy when you're angry versus when you're happy?

6. What does it mean to hope good things happen to someone?

7. How do you think God feels when we love other people?

8. What's something nice you could do for someone who was mean to you?

9. How can you tell if your heart is full of love or full of anger?

10. What do you think "walking in God's light" looks like?

11. Who helps you when you can't see clearly in the dark?

12. How does God help us love people who are hard to love?

13. What happens when you try to walk somewhere but you can't see?

14. How do you feel when someone is kind to you after you've been grumpy?

15. What's the difference between feeling angry and choosing to hate?

16. How can we ask God to help us love others?

17. What good things could you hope happen to someone you don't like?

18. How does loving others help us make good choices?

19. What would happen if everyone chose love instead of hate?

20. How can we be like Jesus in the way we treat others?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about loving others or walking in God's light. Suggestions: "If You're Happy and You Know It" (adapted with actions for loving others), "This Little Light of Mine," or "Jesus Loves Me." Include movements: arms wide for "love everyone," marching in place for "walking with Jesus," hands shading eyes then pointing ahead for "seeing clearly."

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for 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 loving us so much and teaching us how to love others too.

[Pause]

Help us choose love instead of hate when people make us angry. Help our hearts stay clean and happy so we can see what you want us to do.

[Pause]

Thank you for helping us walk in your bright light every day. Thank you for being with us and helping us love people just like Jesus does. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about loving others. Examples: "Help me love my sister when she's annoying" or "Thank you for helping me be

kind to everyone."

Remember, God wants you to love people, not hate them. When you choose love, God helps you see clearly and make good choices. Have a wonderful week loving others like Jesus!

Love That Covers

Supreme Love, When does love require exposing wrong rather than covering it?

1 Peter 4:7-11

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 Peter 4:7-11 (NIV)

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

Context

Peter writes to scattered Christian communities facing increasing persecution throughout Asia Minor. These believers are experiencing social rejection, economic hardship, and the constant threat of suffering for their faith. As external pressures mount, Peter addresses the critical need for internal unity and mutual care within the Christian community.

In the immediate context, Peter has just finished teaching about suffering for righteousness' sake and the judgment that is coming. Now he turns to practical instructions for community life under pressure. The phrase "the end of all things is near" creates urgency, these aren't just nice suggestions but essential

practices for a community that needs to stand together when the world stands against them.

The Big Idea

Love is supreme among Christian virtues and must be practiced deeply because its unique function is to cover over the multitude of sins that threaten community unity.

This isn't about enabling sin or avoiding accountability, but about recognizing that in a fallen world, even committed believers will fail each other regularly. Love's covering work creates the safe space necessary for confession, forgiveness, and restoration, especially when external pressures make internal unity a matter of survival.

Theological Core

- **Supreme Priority of Love.** Peter uses "above all" to establish love's preeminence over other Christian practices, echoing Jesus's command that love for one another validates our discipleship.
 - **Deep Love's Character.** The Greek word for "deeply" (ektenos) means "stretched out" or "strained", love that requires effort, intentionality, and persistence beyond natural inclination.
 - **Sin-Covering Function.** Drawing from Proverbs 10:12, love chooses to cover rather than expose others' failures, creating space for repentance and restoration rather than shame and division.
 - **Multitude Coverage.** Love's covering capacity is extensive, not just occasional slip-ups but the ongoing reality of human failure that could fracture community if constantly exposed and prosecuted.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Deep love requires intentional effort to protect others' dignity even when they fail us
-

- Covering sin doesn't mean ignoring it, it means creating safe space for accountability and restoration
- The tension between covering and exposing requires wisdom about timing, relationship, and consequences
- Christian community's survival under pressure depends on choosing unity over being right about others' failures

Grades 4, 6

- Real love chooses to protect people's feelings and reputations when they mess up
- We can address problems with people directly instead of telling everyone else about their mistakes
- How we respond to others' failures affects whether they feel safe to be honest and change
- Sometimes we feel like exposing someone's mistake, but love makes the harder choice to handle it privately

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to love others by helping them when they make mistakes
- Love means not telling on people when we could help them instead
- God covers our mistakes with love, so we can cover others' mistakes too

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Enabling vs. Covering.** Don't suggest that love never addresses wrongdoing, covering creates safe space for correction rather than avoiding it. The goal is restoration, not ignoring problems.
- **Unlimited Application.** This principle applies within Christian community relationships, not to situations requiring legal intervention, protection of the vulnerable, or addressing systemic injustice.

- **Weakness vs. Strength.** Covering sin requires tremendous strength and maturity, it's not the easy way out but often the harder path that prioritizes the other person's good over our own vindication.

- **Cultural Misunderstanding.** Modern "call-out culture" makes this teaching seem foreign, but Peter addresses communities under persecution where internal division could be literally life-threatening.

Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't covering sin just enable people to keep doing wrong things?"

Love's covering isn't the same as ignoring or enabling. Think of it like this: when someone falls into a pit, love throws them a rope rather than broadcasting their location to everyone walking by. Covering means creating safe space for confession, accountability, and change, but it still involves helping them out of the pit. The difference is whether we're seeking their restoration or their humiliation.

"What about situations where someone needs to be exposed for others' safety?"

Peter is addressing relationships within Christian community, not situations involving abuse, violence, or danger to others. Love sometimes requires protection, which can mean exposure. The key question is: are we exposing to protect and restore, or to punish and shame? Love that covers doesn't trump love that protects, wisdom helps us discern which is needed.

"How is this different from just being fake or pretending everything is okay?"

Covering isn't pretending, it's choosing the right time, place, and manner for addressing issues. It means going directly to the person rather than to others, speaking truth in private before exposing publicly, and always aiming for restoration rather than destruction. It's actually more honest because it deals with problems constructively rather than gossiping or avoiding them.

The One Thing to Remember

Love's greatest strength isn't in exposing what's wrong with people, but in covering their failures long enough for healing and restoration to take root.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the real tension of when love covers versus when it must expose. Help them develop discernment about protecting people while still addressing problems, especially in an age of social media exposure and call-out culture.

The Tension to Frame

When does genuine love require us to expose someone's wrong choices, and when does it require us to cover them? How do we know the difference?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experience with both being exposed and wanting to expose others, these feelings are normal and understandable
 - Honor the genuine complexity, there aren't simple formulas for every situation, and sometimes people disagree about what love requires
 - Let them work through scenarios rather than giving quick answers, the wrestling is where wisdom develops
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine you see one of your friends post something really offensive on social media, something that would definitely get them in trouble if the wrong people saw it. Maybe it's insulting to a teacher, or contains language that would shock their parents, or shares an embarrassing photo of someone else without permission.

Your first instinct might be to screenshot it and share with your group chat, or comment calling them out, or tell someone in authority. After all, they made a bad choice and put it out there publicly. They should face the consequences, right? Plus, other people probably deserve to know what this person is

really like.

But then you pause and think about this person as someone you actually care about. You know they're going through a hard time. You know they often post things they regret later. You know that having this blow up publicly could really damage their relationships and reputation in ways that might follow them for years.

So now you're stuck between two different ideas about what it means to care about people. Do you care enough to let them face the natural consequences of their public choice? Or do you care enough to quietly message them and suggest they delete it before anyone else notices?

Today we're looking at a Bible passage that claims love has a specific job to do when people mess up, and it might surprise you. Open your Bibles to 1 Peter 4, and as you read, notice what Peter says love's main function is.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students as they read. Help with difficult vocabulary like "stewards" or "sober mind." Watch for early finishers and encourage them to reread looking for the specific role Peter assigns to love. Let the tension of the passage's counter-cultural message create curiosity.

As You Read, Think About:

- What does Peter say should be the top priority for Christians?
 - What specific job does Peter give to love, what does love do?
 - Why might this advice be surprising or even uncomfortable?
 - How does this connect to the other instructions Peter gives in these verses?
-

1 Peter 4:7-11 (NIV)

7 The end of all things is near. Therefore be alert and of sober mind so that you may pray. 8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins. 9 Offer hospitality to one another without grumbling. 10 Each of you should use whatever gift you have to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms. 11 If anyone speaks, they

should do so as one who speaks the very words of God. If anyone serves, they should do so with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ. To him be the glory and the power for ever and ever. Amen.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they're uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the more complex theological language in verses 10-11.

Reader 1: Verses 7-8 (Setting priorities under pressure) **Reader 2:** Verse 9 (Practical hospitality)
Reader 3: Verses 10-11 (Using gifts to serve)

Listen for the urgency in Peter's voice, these aren't casual suggestions but essential instructions for a community under pressure. Notice how practical and specific these commands get.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for each group to develop 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 doesn't make sense?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How can..." or "What's the difference between..." Don't ask questions you already know the answer to. Ask about what genuinely puzzles you. You have exactly 3 minutes starting now.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the tensions rather than rushing to neat answers.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board, look for themes, start with questions most students will connect with personally or emotionally.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What specific words does Peter use to describe how we should love? What does 'deeply' suggest about the effort required?"
 - "Why do you think Peter chooses 'covers over' rather than 'fixes' or 'ignores' when describing love's function with sin?"
 - "What's the difference between covering someone's sin and enabling their bad behavior?"
 - "Peter says love covers 'a multitude of sins', what does that suggest about how often people in community fail each other?"
 - "When might love actually require exposing someone's wrong choices rather than covering them?"
 - "How does the context of persecution and pressure affect how Christians should treat each other's failures?"
 - "What would happen to a group of people under stress if they constantly exposed each other's mistakes instead of covering them?"
 - "Why might this teaching feel uncomfortable or even wrong to people today?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Peter isn't saying love is blind to problems or pretends everything is okay. He's saying love is strategic, it knows that constantly exposing each other's failures will destroy the community when it most needs to stick together. Love covers because it's thinking long-term about restoration, not short-term about being right. The goal isn't to hide problems but to create safe space for people to face them and change.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. You live in a world where everything gets screenshot, every mistake gets posted, and every failure becomes content for someone else's entertainment. But you also live in communities, families, friend groups, teams, classes, where you need each other. Where do you see this

same tension playing out?

Real Issues This Connects To

- When a friend cheats on a test and you could report it or address it privately with them
 - When your sibling breaks something and your parents ask what happened
 - When someone in your group says something hurtful and you could call them out publicly or talk to them later
 - When you discover someone's secret struggle with depression, self-harm, or addiction
 - When you witness injustice or harmful behavior that affects other people's safety
 - When someone spreads false information or harmful rumors
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to answers. Acknowledge that some situations are complex and different people might choose different responses. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone choose to cover for someone else in a way that actually helped them grow?"
 - "What would help you choose covering over exposing when someone wrongs you personally?"
 - "How do you discern whether a situation calls for covering or for speaking up?"
 - "What's the difference between love that protects and fear that avoids conflict?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Love's greatest power isn't in being right about people's failures, it's in creating space for people to be wrong and still find their way back. That doesn't mean ignoring problems or enabling harm. It means being strategic about restoration instead of just reactive about justice.

This week, pay attention to your instincts when people around you mess up. Notice whether your first thought is to expose or to cover. Ask yourself: what would actually help this person and this relationship in the long run? Sometimes love will require speaking up, but more often than you think, it might require holding back and handling things more privately.

I'm proud of the way you wrestled with hard questions today. Keep asking them. The world needs people who can think deeply about what love actually requires, not just what it feels like doing in the moment. You're developing that kind of wisdom.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that real love chooses to protect people's feelings and reputations when they mess up, rather than embarrassing them or getting them in trouble unnecessarily.

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

Say: "Sometimes love means getting help from adults to keep people safe. We're talking about everyday mistakes, not things that could hurt someone. When someone might get hurt, love tells a trusted adult."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever done something embarrassing at school, maybe tripped and fell, said something silly in front of the class, or forgot something important for a presentation. Keep your hands up if you remember exactly how that felt in your stomach and your face.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever seen someone else do something embarrassing, and part of you wanted to tell other people about it or make fun of them for it. But maybe another part of you felt sorry for them and wanted to help them instead.

Those feelings make total sense. When someone messes up in front of us, we sometimes get this urge to tell everyone else about it, especially if it's someone we don't like very much. But then we also know

how terrible it feels when people talk about our mistakes or make fun of us for them.

It's like in the movie "Inside Out" when Riley is struggling at her new school and everything goes wrong. Some of the other kids could have made fun of her for crying in front of everyone, but the good friends are the ones who help her feel better instead of making her feel worse.

The tricky part is figuring out how to choose kindness when someone messes up, especially if they weren't very kind to you before. How do you choose to help someone instead of getting them in trouble when you totally could?

Today we're going to hear about what God says real love does when people make mistakes or hurt us. We're going to find out that love has a very specific job to do, and it might surprise you. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids may share personal examples of embarrassment. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep momentum moving toward the story to avoid dwelling on painful memories.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Our story today comes from a letter that Peter wrote to Christians who were having a really hard time.

These Christians lived in places where other people didn't like them very much. Sometimes their neighbors were mean to them. Sometimes they lost their jobs because they believed in Jesus. Sometimes they had to move to new places because it wasn't safe to stay where they were.

Can you imagine how scared and worried they must have felt? When you're already stressed out and afraid, it's really easy to get angry at each other for little things. When everything feels hard, even small problems with your friends can seem huge.

Think about what that would be like. Maybe it's like when your family is stressed about money, and suddenly everyone gets snappy about things that usually wouldn't matter. Or when you're having a terrible day at school, and then your little brother does something annoying, and you want to yell at him even though he didn't really do anything that bad.

Peter knew that these Christians needed to stick together and help each other, especially when times were tough. But he also knew they were normal people who would definitely do things wrong and hurt each other's feelings sometimes.

So Peter wrote them a letter to remind them how to treat each other when someone messes up. He wanted them to know what love is supposed to do when people disappoint us or hurt us or make mistakes.

Peter had learned this lesson the hard way. Remember, Peter was the disciple who got so scared when Jesus was arrested that he told people he didn't even know Jesus. He lied about being Jesus's friend because he was afraid of getting in trouble too.

Peter knew what it felt like to mess up really badly and feel terrible about it. He also knew what it felt like when Jesus didn't embarrass him or punish him, but instead forgave him and still trusted him to do important things.

So when Peter wrote this letter, he was thinking about all the times he had messed up, and all the times other people had messed up, and what actually helped people feel better and do better.

This is what Peter wrote to the Christians:

1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

Peter said "above all", that means this is the most important thing. More important than being right. More important than winning. More important than getting even when someone hurts you.

Love each other deeply. That means love that tries really hard, not just when it's easy. Love that works at it even when you don't feel like it. Love that cares about what happens to the other person, not just about your own feelings.

But then Peter said something really interesting. He said love "covers over" sins. What do you think that means?

When you cover something up, you're hiding it so other people can't see it. Like when you put a blanket over a messy room, or when you put a band-aid over a cut so it doesn't look scary.

Peter said love covers over a "multitude" of sins. Multitude means "a whole lot." Not just one or two mistakes, but lots and lots of them. Because the truth is, we all mess up lots and lots of times.

So what Peter was saying is: "When someone you love does something wrong, love's job is to cover it up, to protect them from being embarrassed or getting in unnecessary trouble, so they have a chance to make it right."

This doesn't mean pretending nothing happened. It means choosing to help the person instead of hurting them more. It means going to them privately instead of telling everyone else about their mistake. It means giving them a chance to fix things before announcing to the world what they did wrong.

This is exactly what Jesus did for Peter when Peter messed up so badly. Jesus didn't announce to everyone "Hey, look what Peter did!" Instead, Jesus covered Peter's mistake with love and gave him chances to make it right.

And because Jesus covered Peter's mistake instead of exposing it, Peter was able to become brave again and help lots of other people. If Jesus had embarrassed Peter in front of everyone, Peter might never have had the courage to be a leader.

So when Peter wrote this letter, he was saying: "Do for each other what Jesus did for me. When someone messes up, cover their mistake with love so they can learn and grow, instead of exposing it and making them feel ashamed."

Sometimes in our lives, we have the choice between getting someone in trouble or helping them out of trouble. We can choose to embarrass them or protect them. We can choose to make their mistake bigger or help them make it smaller.

Peter learned that real love always chooses to cover and protect, because that's what helps people actually get better. When we feel safe and loved, we're much more likely to admit we were wrong and try to do better next time.

God covers our mistakes with His love every single day. He doesn't announce all our failures to everyone we know. He forgives us and helps us try again. And Peter says we should do the same thing for other people.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Choice

Imagine your friend accidentally drops their lunch tray in the cafeteria and food goes everywhere. A bunch of kids start laughing and pointing. You could join in the laughing, or you could walk over and help them clean up. Which choice would be covering their embarrassment with love?

Listen For: "Help clean up", affirm: "Yes! That's exactly what covering with love looks like. You're choosing to help instead of making it worse."

Question 2: The Tattling Temptation

Your little brother breaks something of Mom's while he's playing, and he's really scared about getting in trouble. Mom asks what happened. How could you cover his mistake with love while still being honest?

If They Say: "Lie for him", respond: "What if you helped him tell Mom himself? Sometimes covering means helping someone be brave enough to tell the truth."

Question 3: The Gossip Choice

You overhear someone say something really mean about another kid in your class. Your friends want you to tell them all about it. What would love choose to do, spread the story or cover it?

Connect: "This is exactly what Peter meant about love covering a multitude of sins. Love chooses not to spread the hurt around."

Question 4: The Result

When someone covers your mistake with love instead of embarrassing you, how does that make you feel about them? How does it make you want to treat other people when they mess up?

If They Say: "It makes me want to be nice to them", connect: "That's how love spreads! When someone covers for us, we learn how to cover for others."

You're getting the idea! Love doesn't ignore problems, but it chooses to help people fix their problems instead of making the problems worse. Let's do an activity that shows how this works.

4. Activity: The Covering Circle (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces love's covering function by having kids physically experience how covering protects and how exposing hurts. Success looks like kids discovering that when they choose to cover and protect each other, everyone feels safer and more willing to participate.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "The Covering Circle." Everyone stand in a big circle. I'm going to pick one person to stand in the middle, they're going to do something a little embarrassing on purpose, like a silly dance or funny voice.

But here's the thing: the person in the middle might feel nervous about looking silly in front of everyone. So the rest of us have a choice. We can either point and laugh, which would be "exposing." Or we can join in and do the silly thing with them, which would be "covering."

If we choose to point and laugh, the person in the middle has to do their silly thing all alone. But if we choose to cover by joining in, then we're all being silly together, and nobody feels alone or embarrassed.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Peter was talking about, love chooses to cover and protect instead of expose and embarrass.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start with a confident volunteer in the middle. Let them begin their silly action. Wait a few seconds to see if anyone naturally joins in. If not, model joining in yourself and encourage others to follow.

Watch how the person in the middle feels when people join them versus when they're alone. Celebrate the moment when everyone chooses to cover by participating together.

Coach the group: "I notice [name] looks much more comfortable now that we're all joining in. I wonder what would happen if we choose to cover for each other instead of leaving people alone in their embarrassing moments."

Let 2-3 different kids have a turn in the middle. Each time, emphasize the choice between exposing (watching and laughing) and covering (joining in and making them feel safe).

Highlight the transformation: "Did you see how [name's] face changed when we all started doing it with them? That's what covering with love looks like, nobody has to be embarrassed alone."

Watch For: The moment when kids choose to join in rather than just watch, this is the physical representation of love choosing to cover rather than expose. Celebrate this choice enthusiastically.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when everyone joined in the silly action versus when you had to do it alone? That's exactly what Peter meant about love covering! When we choose to join people in their embarrassing moments instead of leaving them alone, we're covering them with love. We're making them feel safe instead of exposed.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to love people so much that when they mess up or do something embarrassing, our first thought is "How can I help them?" instead of "How can I tell everyone about this?"

This doesn't mean we ignore it when people do really wrong things that could hurt someone. It means we choose to help people fix their mistakes instead of making their mistakes bigger by telling everyone about them.

When we cover people's mistakes with love, amazing things happen. They feel safe enough to admit when they're wrong. They want to do better next time. And they learn how to cover other people's mistakes with love too.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you see someone mess up or do something embarrassing, try to be a "coverer" instead of an "exposer." Look for one chance to help someone instead of getting them in trouble, or to protect someone's feelings instead of laughing at them.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for covering our mistakes with your love instead of telling everyone about them. Help us to cover other people's mistakes with love too. When someone messes up, help us think about how to help them instead of how to embarrass them. 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 love others by helping them when they make mistakes instead of getting them in trouble.

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 love covering mistakes to a mommy putting a bandage on a hurt knee, it protects and helps it get better. Ask: "What helps you feel better when you mess up?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about love or kindness. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Jesus Loves Me," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: put hands over heart during "love," reach out to friends during "one

another," and make gentle covering motions during any lyrics about caring or helping.

Great singing! You know so much about love already. Now let's sit in our story circle because I have a special story about love to tell you. God has something amazing to teach us about what love does when people make mistakes.

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 love covering, sound worried when talking about people being mean to Christians.

Today we're going to meet a man named Peter who learned something very important about love!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Peter knew lots of people who loved Jesus, but some other people were being very mean to them. They were sad and scared because mean people were saying bad things about them.

[Make a worried face and speak gently]

When people are scared and sad, sometimes they get grumpy with each other. Have you ever felt grumpy when you were worried about something? It's easy to get mad at our friends when we're already upset.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak with concern]

Peter knew that his friends needed to be kind to each other, especially when things were hard. But people make mistakes sometimes, don't they? Sometimes we say mean things or break things or don't share nicely.

[Move to center, speak like a wise teacher]

So Peter wrote his friends a letter to tell them what God says about love. He wanted them to know what to do when someone makes a mistake or does something wrong.

[Hold up hands like reading a letter]

Peter wrote: "Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins." That's a big word, multitude means "lots and lots."

1 Peter 4:8 (NIV)

8 Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers over a multitude of sins.

[Pause and look around at each child]

What do you think it means that love "covers" mistakes? If you put a warm blanket over someone who is cold, you're covering them to help them feel better, right?

[Make covering motions with your arms]

That's what love does! When someone makes a mistake, love covers them like a warm blanket. Love says, "I'm going to help you instead of making you feel worse."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Love doesn't tell everyone about the mistake. Love doesn't point and laugh. Love doesn't try to get the person in trouble. Instead, love covers the mistake and helps fix it!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

Peter remembered when he made a really big mistake. He was so scared that he told people he didn't know Jesus, even though Jesus was his best friend! Peter felt terrible about that.

[Speak with excitement and love]

But do you know what Jesus did? Jesus didn't tell everyone about Peter's mistake. Jesus didn't make Peter feel ashamed. Instead, Jesus covered Peter's mistake with love and forgave him!

[Pause dramatically]

Because Jesus covered Peter's mistake, Peter felt safe to say "I'm sorry" and try again. And Peter became brave and helped lots of people learn about God's love!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes at school or at home, someone might spill something or say something mean or forget to do what they're supposed to do. When that happens, you get to choose: Will you tell on them, or will you help them?

[Move closer to the children]

Love always chooses to help! When your little brother spills his juice, love helps clean it up. When your friend forgets their homework, love might help them remember next time instead of telling the teacher.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God covers our mistakes with His love every day. He helps us instead of making us feel bad. And He wants us to cover other people's mistakes with love too!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand somewhere you have room to talk. I'll give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think Peter felt when he made his big mistake?
 2. How did Peter feel when Jesus covered his mistake with love?
 3. What does it feel like when someone helps you instead of getting you in trouble?
 4. What would you do if you saw someone drop their lunch tray?
-

5. How can you help someone who forgot their backpack?

6. What does love choose to do when someone makes a mess?

7. How does it feel when someone tells on you versus when they help you?

8. What would love do if someone said something mean?

9. How does God cover our mistakes?

10. Who has covered one of your mistakes with love?

11. What does covering someone with love look like?

12. When someone breaks something, what would love do?

13. What makes you feel better when you mess up?

14. How can you be like Jesus and cover mistakes with love?

15. What happens when we help people instead of telling on them?

16. How do you want people to treat you when you make mistakes?

17. What did Peter learn about love?

18. How can you show covering love to your family?

19. What would happen if everyone covered mistakes with love?

20. How does covering love help people feel safe?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about helping or kindness. Suggestions: "Love Is Something If You Give It Away," "Help Somebody Today," or "I Want to Be a Helper." Use movements: reach out arms during "help," point to friends during "somebody," and make gentle covering motions during lyrics about caring.

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit quietly for prayer time. Remember how love covers mistakes? We're going to thank God for covering our mistakes and ask Him to help us cover others' mistakes too.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for covering our mistakes with your love...

[Pause]

Help us to be helpers when our friends mess up. When someone spills or breaks something, help us choose to help them instead of telling on them...

[Pause]

Help us remember that love covers mistakes. When we make mistakes, we want people to help us. Help us help other people too...

[Pause]

Thank you that you always help us and never stop loving us. Help us love others the same way. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping others. Examples: "God, help me be kind when someone makes mistakes" or "Thank you for loving us when we mess up."

This week, remember that love covers mistakes! When you see someone who needs help, you can choose to help them instead of making them feel bad. God loves you so much, and He wants you to love others that same way.

Gentle Strength

Captives Need Rescue, Not Defeat, How Do We Treat Those Who Oppose Us?

2 Timothy 2:20-26

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

2 Timothy 2:20-26 (NIV)

20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. 21 Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work.

22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Context

Paul is writing his final letter to Timothy, his spiritual son and pastoral protégé, from prison in Rome. The church in Ephesus where Timothy serves is facing internal conflicts, false teaching, and division.

Some leaders have abandoned the faith, others are promoting destructive arguments, and the community is fracturing. Paul knows his execution is imminent, making this letter his last pastoral guidance to a young leader facing enormous challenges.

The immediate context deals with how God's servants should conduct themselves in controversy. Paul has just warned against "foolish and stupid arguments" that produce quarrels, and now he addresses the inevitable reality: opposition will come. But the question isn't whether Timothy will face opponents, it's how he'll respond to them. Paul's instructions here aren't theoretical but urgently practical for a church leader dealing with real conflict daily.

The Big Idea

God's servants respond to opposition with gentle instruction because opponents are viewed as captives needing rescue, not enemies needing defeat.

This radical reframing transforms everything. When someone opposes truth, our natural instinct is to fight back, defend, and defeat. But Paul locates the real enemy elsewhere, the devil who has taken people captive. This doesn't minimize the seriousness of false teaching or excuse harmful behavior, but it fundamentally reshapes our approach to those who oppose us.

Theological Core

- **Gentle Instruction over Quarreling.** The Lord's servant is called to a different posture entirely, kind, teachable, non-resentful. This isn't weakness but strength under control.
 - **Opponents as Captives.** Those who oppose truth are understood as trapped, not evil. They need liberation, not defeat. This theological framework completely changes tactical approach.
 - **Hope for Repentance.** The goal isn't winning arguments but seeing opponents "come to their senses" and escape their captivity. This hope sustains gentle response even when opposition is fierce.
 - **God's Role in Transformation.** Only God can "grant repentance leading to knowledge of truth." Human effort focuses on gentle instruction; divine power accomplishes the transformation.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Opposition requires gentle instruction rather than combative response, which demands spiritual maturity and self-control
 - Viewing opponents as captives rather than enemies fundamentally changes engagement strategy and emotional posture
 - Hope for opponents' transformation sustains gentle response even when they remain hostile or unreasonable
 - Discerning between maintaining truth claims and treating people gently requires wisdom that comes from understanding the real spiritual battle
-

Grades 4, 6

- Being kind to people who disagree with you is often harder but stronger than fighting back
 - Mean or opposing behavior often comes from people being trapped by wrong thinking, not from being evil
 - When we respond with gentleness instead of anger, sometimes God can change the other person's heart
 - It's okay to feel frustrated when people oppose you, but you can still choose to be kind anyway
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to be kind even to people who are mean to us
 - God has special power to change mean people's hearts and make them nice
 - We can ask God to help the mean person and help us be kind
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **False Tolerance.** Teaching gentleness doesn't mean all ideas are equally valid or that truth doesn't matter. Paul maintains that opponents need to come to "knowledge of the truth", there is still truth and error, but the approach to those in error is gentle.

- **Victimhood Denial.** Framing opponents as "captives" doesn't excuse harmful behavior or eliminate the need for boundaries. Gentle instruction can include firm consequences and protective measures.

- **Weak Gentleness.** Biblical gentleness isn't weakness or acquiescence but strength under control. It takes tremendous courage and spiritual maturity to respond gently to fierce opposition.

- **Quick-Fix Expectations.** The hope for repentance doesn't guarantee immediate results. Gentle instruction may continue for years without visible change, sustained by hope in God's power, not human technique.

Handling Hard Questions

"Doesn't calling opponents 'captives' make them seem not responsible for their harmful beliefs?"

Paul's framework actually recognizes a both/and reality, people can be both trapped and responsible. Someone caught in deception is still making choices, but their ability to see clearly is compromised. Think of addiction: we hold people accountable while recognizing they're trapped. This perspective enables both truth-telling and compassion, both boundaries and hope for transformation. It doesn't minimize responsibility but locates the ultimate enemy correctly.

"What if gentle instruction doesn't work and opponents become more hostile?"

Paul acknowledges this reality by saying God "will grant" repentance, implying it might not happen. Gentle instruction isn't guaranteed to succeed in human terms, but it's still the right approach because it aligns with God's character and leaves room for His work. Effectiveness isn't the primary measure; faithfulness is. Sometimes protection and boundaries are necessary, but even then the heart posture remains hopeful rather than vengeful.

"How do we maintain truth while being gentle to those spreading harmful ideas?"

Paul models this balance throughout his letters, he clearly identifies false teaching while treating false teachers as people who can be restored. Gentleness affects method, not message. You can say "That teaching is dangerous" while also saying "I hope you'll reconsider" rather than "You're a terrible person." Truth-telling and people-loving aren't opposites; they work together when we understand opponents as captives rather than enemies.

The One Thing to Remember

When we see opponents as captives needing rescue rather than enemies needing defeat, we can hold both truth and hope while responding with gentle strength.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the radical difference between viewing opponents as enemies versus captives, and explore how this theological reframe changes everything about how we engage disagreement and opposition in their world.

The Tension to Frame

Does treating opponents as captives diminish their responsibility for harmful beliefs, and how do we maintain truth while hoping for their transformation?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with conflict, acknowledge that gentle response often feels unfair or weak
 - Honor the complexity of maintaining both truth and compassion without collapsing into relativism or harshness
 - Let them wrestle with scenarios where this approach feels impossible rather than lecturing about what they should do
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Picture this: Someone you know shares something on social media that you think is completely wrong, maybe even harmful. Your gut reaction kicks in. You want to correct them, maybe call them out, show everyone how wrong they are. Part of you feels like it's your job to set the record straight and protect others from this bad idea. Sound familiar?

Now imagine your best friend sees your reaction and says, "Yeah, but think about why they posted that. Maybe they're not trying to be evil, maybe they're just trapped by some really convincing lies. What if they need help seeing clearly rather than someone proving they're stupid?" Suddenly the situation feels different, but also more complicated.

Today we're looking at Paul writing to Timothy about exactly this situation, how to respond when people oppose truth. Except Paul's dealing with actual false teachers in the church, people whose wrong ideas are tearing the community apart. The stakes couldn't be higher.

As we read, notice how Paul frames the opponents and what he says should happen to them. Pay attention to what he forbids and what he requires instead. This isn't just advice about being nice, it's a completely different way of understanding opposition.

Open your Bibles to 2 Timothy 2, verses 20 through 26. Start reading silently from verse 20 to get the full context.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "quarrelsome" or "repentance." Watch for students who finish early, some may need the full five minutes to process this dense passage.

As You Read, Think About:

- What specific behaviors does Paul prohibit and require for God's servants?
 - How does Paul describe the opponents and their situation?
 - What's the goal of engaging with opponents according to Paul?
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- What role does God play versus human effort in changing opponents?
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2 Timothy 2:20-26 (NIV)

20 In a large house there are articles not only of gold and silver, but also of wood and clay; some are for special purposes and some for common use. 21 Those who cleanse themselves from the latter will be instruments for special purposes, made holy, useful to the Master and prepared to do any good work. 22 Flee the evil desires of youth and pursue righteousness, faith, love and peace, along with those who call on the Lord out of a pure heart. 23 Don't have anything to do with foolish and stupid arguments, because you know they produce quarrels. 24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth, 26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers for each section. Let students pass if they're not confident. Choose strong readers for the dense theological language.

Reader 1: Verses 20, 22 (Setting up the challenge of being useful to God) **Reader 2:** Verses 23, 24 (The forbidden and required responses) **Reader 3:** Verses 25, 26 (The goal and theological framework)

Listen for the contrast Paul creates, the way God's servants should NOT respond versus how they SHOULD respond. This isn't just behavior modification; it's based on a completely different understanding of what's really happening.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or confused by. Good questions might start with "Why does Paul..." or "What does it mean when..." or "How do you actually..." Don't worry about having the right questions; ask what genuinely makes you curious. You have three minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive the conversation with their questions. Facilitate discovery rather than lecture. Guide them to see the pattern Paul is establishing.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board. Look for themes around the difficulty of gentle response, the "captive" metaphor, or practical application. Start with questions most will relate to.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between 'quarrelsome' and standing up for truth?"
 - "Why do you think Paul frames opponents as 'captives' rather than 'enemies'?"
 - "What would 'gentle instruction' actually look like in real conflict?"
 - "How does hoping for someone's repentance change how you treat them?"
 - "What's the hardest part about responding gently when someone opposes something you care about?"
 - "When have you seen someone's mind actually change through gentle approach versus argument?"
 - "What if the opponent is causing real harm while you're being gentle?"
 - "Why does Paul put the responsibility for change on God rather than human persuasion?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what Paul is doing here? He's completely reframing the conflict. Instead of "us versus them," it's "us helping them escape from their real captor." The devil is the enemy, not the person. That changes everything about strategy and emotional posture. When you see someone as trapped rather than evil, you can maintain truth while still hoping for their freedom.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you encounter opposition to things you believe or value? Think about school debates, family arguments, social media disagreements, friend group conflicts. What does it feel like when someone opposes something that matters to you? And honestly, what's your normal response?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Social media debates about politics, social issues, or values where you feel compelled to correct misinformation
 - Family members who hold views you find harmful or backwards, creating tension at holidays and gatherings
 - Friends who make choices you disagree with and seem defensive when you try to help
 - Online trolls or bullies who attack things you care about, making you want to fight back
 - Classmates who promote ideas you think are wrong or harmful to others in the school community
 - Authority figures whose decisions you believe are unjust or harmful to people you care about
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Acknowledge that some situations require boundaries or protection. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen gentle approach actually work to change someone's mind?"
 - "What would help you respond gently when you're feeling attacked or frustrated?"
 - "How do you tell the difference between someone who's genuinely trapped by bad ideas versus someone who's choosing to be harmful?"
 - "What's the difference between gentle instruction and just giving up on truth?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Paul is teaching us to see conflict differently. When someone opposes truth, the natural human response is to fight back, defend yourself, win the argument. But what if the real battle isn't with that person but for that person? What if they're trapped by deception and need rescue more than defeat? This doesn't make you weak or mean you give up on truth, it means you fight smarter.

This week, pay attention to your gut reactions when someone disagrees with you about something important. Notice the difference between wanting to defeat them and wanting to see them free. Try asking yourself: "What if they're trapped rather than evil?" and see if that changes how you respond. It's an experiment, not an obligation.

I'm really impressed with how thoughtfully you wrestled with these hard questions today. Keep asking them. The world needs people who can hold both truth and hope, who can be strong enough to be gentle. I believe you can become those people.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids discover that kindness is often stronger than fighting when people disagree, and that mean behavior sometimes comes from people being trapped by wrong ideas rather than being evil.

If Kids Ask "What if someone keeps being mean even when we're nice?"

Say: "Sometimes it takes a long time for God to change someone's heart. Being kind doesn't mean letting people hurt you, you can still get help from adults and stay safe. But inside your heart, you can still hope God will help them."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone be really mean to you or say something that hurt your feelings. *[Wait for hands, acknowledge their experiences]* Yeah, that happens to all of us. Now keep your hand up if your first feeling was wanting to be mean right back to them. *[Many hands will stay up]*

That makes total sense, when someone hurts us, our feelings want to hurt them back.

Now here's a harder question: Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where someone was being mean, but then you found out later they were having a really bad day or something sad was happening in their family. *[Some hands]* Suddenly it felt different, right? You realized they weren't just trying to be evil, they were probably feeling hurt or confused themselves.

That's the tricky thing about dealing with mean people. Sometimes our first instinct is to fight back or prove they're wrong. But what if there's a different way? What if being kind isn't the same thing as being weak? What if sometimes the strongest thing you can do is choose kindness when someone else chooses meanness?

This reminds me of stories like "Beauty and the Beast", remember how Belle could have been mean to the Beast because he was scary and rude? But instead she was kind, and it turned out he was trapped by a curse, not actually evil. Her kindness helped break the spell. Sometimes real life works like that too.

The tricky part is figuring out how to be kind to people who are mean to you without being a doormat. How do you stay strong but also stay kind? How do you know when someone is just having a bad day versus when they're really trying to hurt you?

Today we're going to hear about Paul writing to his friend Timothy about exactly this problem. Timothy was a leader in a church where some people were being mean and saying wrong things about God. Paul had some really wise advice about how to respond. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate strongly to the mean behavior scenarios. Keep momentum moving toward the story, validate briefly but don't get stuck in their examples.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Timothy was a young man who loved God and was trying to lead a church. But he had a big problem. Some people in his church were saying wrong things about God and being mean to other people. They were starting arguments and causing fights. Timothy probably felt frustrated and didn't know what to do.

Imagine how Timothy felt. He cared about his church family, and he wanted everyone to know the truth about God's love. But these people were spreading lies and being cruel. Part of Timothy probably

wanted to argue with them, maybe even yell at them and tell everyone how wrong they were.

Then Timothy got a letter from Paul, his wise friend and teacher. Paul was actually in prison for telling people about Jesus, so he knew a lot about dealing with opposition. Paul had some very important advice for Timothy about how to handle these difficult people.

Think about what that would be like. When someone is being mean to you and saying wrong things, what do you want to do? Your heart might be beating fast, your face might feel hot, and you might want to prove that you're right and they're wrong. That's exactly how Timothy was feeling.

But Paul wrote something that probably surprised Timothy. He said the most important thing was not to argue or fight back. Instead, Paul said Timothy should be kind to everyone, even the mean people. He should teach them gently, not be angry or try to get revenge.

Paul explained that when people are being mean or saying wrong things, they might be trapped. They might have wrong ideas stuck in their heads that make them confused and angry. Just like someone could be trapped in a cage, their minds could be trapped by lies. And Paul said something very important about who was behind those traps.

Paul said that when people are mean and spread lies, they might be trapped by the devil. The devil loves to trick people into believing things that aren't true and then make them mean to other people. So the real enemy isn't the mean person, it's the devil who trapped them!

Think about that for a minute. If someone was trapped in a cage and couldn't get out, and they were yelling at you because they were scared and frustrated, would you yell back at them? Or would you try to help them escape? Paul was telling Timothy that mean people might need help escaping, not more fighting.

Paul wrote some very specific instructions to Timothy about how to treat these difficult people:

2 Timothy 2:24-25 (NIV)

24 And the Lord's servant must not be quarrelsome but must be kind to everyone, able to teach, not resentful. 25 Opponents must be gently instructed, in the hope that God will grant them repentance leading them to a knowledge of the truth.

Paul was saying: "Don't fight with them. Don't be mean back. Instead, be kind to everyone. Teach them gently about what's true. Don't hold grudges or try to get them back." That sounds pretty hard, doesn't it? Especially when someone is being really mean to you.

But Paul had a secret reason why this works better than fighting. He said that when we're kind and gentle instead of mean and fighty, God can do something amazing. God can change the other person's heart and help them see the truth.

Paul explained what the goal was. He wanted these mean people to realize they were wrong and ask God to forgive them. He wanted them to understand the truth about God's love. And here's the really cool part, Paul wanted them to escape from the trap that was making them mean in the first place.

2 Timothy 2:26 (NIV)

26 and that they will come to their senses and escape from the trap of the devil, who has taken them captive to do his will.

Paul believed that when people "come to their senses," they can escape from whatever was making them mean. Just like waking up from a bad dream, they could realize that being mean wasn't making them happy and that God's way was better.

So instead of fighting fire with fire, Paul told Timothy to fight meanness with kindness. Instead of fighting lies with anger, he should fight lies with gentle truth. It's like being a rescuer instead of a warrior, your job isn't to defeat the person, but to help them get free.

This doesn't mean Timothy should let people hurt him or others. Sometimes you need to get help from adults or create boundaries to stay safe. But in his heart, Timothy could choose to hope that even the meanest person could change instead of writing them off as hopeless.

Timothy learned that sometimes the strongest thing you can do is stay kind when everyone else is being mean. Sometimes the bravest thing is to hope that your enemy could become your friend. Sometimes being gentle is actually more powerful than fighting.

When we respond to meanness with kindness and lies with gentle truth, we give God space to work in people's hearts. We become part of helping people escape their traps instead of pushing them deeper into them. That's what Paul wanted Timothy to understand, and it's what God wants us to understand

too.

The coolest part is that God has special power to change people's hearts when we respond His way instead of the world's way. When we choose kindness over revenge, God can do things we never thought possible. Even the meanest person can be set free and become kind themselves.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Choice

Imagine someone at school is being really mean to you, maybe they're making fun of something you care about or spreading rumors. Your friends are saying "You should get them back" or "Don't let them treat you like that." But you remember what Paul told Timothy. What would be the hardest part about choosing to be kind instead of fighting back?

Listen For: "It feels unfair," "They might think you're weak," "Your friends might be mad", affirm: "Those feelings make perfect sense. Choosing kindness when you're hurt takes real courage."

Question 2: The Trapped Person

Paul said that mean people might be "trapped" by lies or bad ideas that make them confused and angry. Think about someone you know who's often mean or makes bad choices. If they really were trapped and couldn't see clearly, how would that change the way you think about them? What would they need from you?

If They Say: "They'd need help, not more fighting", respond: "Exactly! What kind of help do you think trapped people need most?"

Question 3: The God Factor

Paul said that when we're kind and gentle, God can change people's hearts in ways we can't. Have you ever seen this happen? Maybe someone who used to be mean became nice, or someone who always made bad choices started making good ones? What do you think God can do that we can't do by

ourselves?

Connect: "This is exactly why Paul told Timothy to trust God's power instead of trying to force people to change through fighting."

Question 4: The Strength Question

Some people think being kind when others are mean makes you weak or a doormat. But Paul said it takes a really strong person to choose kindness over fighting. Why do you think kindness might actually be stronger than meanness? What's the difference between being kind and being a pushover?

If They Say: "You still stand up for what's right", respond: "Yes! How do you stand up for what's right while still being kind to the person who's wrong?"

You guys are really thinking deeply about this! Paul's advice to Timothy wasn't easy, but it was powerful. When we choose kindness over fighting and hope over giving up, we partner with God to help people escape whatever traps are making them mean. Let's try an activity that shows how this works.

4. Activity: Trapped and Free (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the difference between fighting trapped people versus helping them escape by having kids physically experience how kindness and cooperation accomplish what force cannot. Success looks like kids discovering that gentle help works better than aggressive force for freeing trapped people.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Trapped and Free." I need three volunteers to be "trapped people", you'll sit in the middle and curl up in a tight ball with your arms wrapped around your knees. Everyone else, you're "helpers" and you'll stand in a circle around the trapped people.

Here's the challenge: the trapped people are going to resist any help at first. When helpers try to get them to uncurl and stand up, the trapped people should stay curled up tight and maybe even push away gently, you're trapped and don't trust anyone yet. Helpers, your job is to get the trapped people to stand up and join your circle.

But here's the important rule: helpers cannot use force. You cannot pull or push hard. You can only use gentle touch, kind words, and patience. If you use force or get frustrated and angry, you have to step back and let someone else try. The trapped person will only uncurl if they feel safe and cared for.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul told Timothy. When people are trapped by meanness or wrong ideas, fighting with them just makes them curl up tighter. But kindness and gentleness can help them feel safe enough to come out of their trap.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Let's start! Trapped people, curl up tight and resist. Helpers, try to help them uncurl and join you, but remember, only kindness works. *[Let them try for about 30 seconds]* Notice what's happening. Are the trapped people opening up or curling tighter?

I'm noticing that when helpers get frustrated or try to force it, the trapped people curl up tighter. What does that tell us? *[Let them respond briefly]* Right! Force makes trapped people more trapped, not less.

Now try a different approach. What if you spoke gently to them? What if you showed them you cared? What if you were patient and didn't give up? What if you invited them instead of demanding they change? *[Give them time to discover gentler approaches]*

Watch for the moment when a trapped person starts to uncurl, what caused that change? *[Celebrate when someone responds to gentleness]* Look at that! Kindness is working where force failed.

Keep going until all the trapped people feel safe enough to uncurl and join the circle. Notice how it feels different to be welcomed gently versus being forced to change. *[Continue until everyone is standing together]*

Watch For: The moment when trapped kids begin to uncurl in response to genuine gentleness, this is the physical representation of what Paul meant about gentle instruction leading to freedom.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when someone tried to force you to change versus when they were patient and kind? Trapped people, did force make you want to open up or curl tighter? Helpers, which approach actually worked to help people get free? This is exactly what Paul was teaching Timothy, gentle help sets people free, but fighting makes them more trapped.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when people are mean to us or believe wrong things, God wants us to be kind and gentle instead of fighting back. This doesn't mean letting people hurt us, sometimes we need to get help or stay safe. But in our hearts, we can choose to hope that even mean people can change instead of writing them off as hopeless.

This doesn't mean we pretend wrong is right or that everyone's ideas are the same. But it does mean we treat people with kindness even when they're wrong, because they might be trapped by lies and need help getting free. Kindness isn't weakness, it's strength that chooses love over revenge.

The amazing result is that when we respond to meanness with kindness, we give God space to work in people's hearts. Sometimes people who were our enemies can become our friends. Sometimes people who were trapped can be set free. That's the power of choosing God's way instead of the world's way.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when someone is mean to you or disagrees with you about something important, try Paul's approach instead of your first instinct. Before you respond, ask yourself: "What if this person is trapped instead of evil? How can I be kind while still standing up for what's right?" Pay attention to what happens when you choose gentleness over fighting.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for showing us that kindness is stronger than meanness and that love is more powerful than fighting. Help us remember that when people are mean, they might be trapped and need help getting free. Give us courage to choose kindness even when our feelings want to fight back. Help us trust your power to change hearts. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants us to be kind even to people who are mean to us because God can change their hearts.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare mean people to sad animals who bite when they're hurt, then ask "How do you help a scared animal feel safe?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

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

Great singing! I can see God's love in your voices. Let's sit in our special horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about someone who learned something very important about being kind to mean people.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound confused when describing Timothy's problem, sound wise and loving when you're Paul giving advice.

Today we're going to meet a young man named Timothy who loved God very much and wanted to help other people love God too.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

But Timothy had a big problem. Some people in his church were being very mean. They were saying wrong things about God and being mean to other people. They made Timothy feel sad and confused.

[Use sad facial expression, put hand to your heart]

Timothy didn't know what to do. Part of him wanted to be mean right back to them. When someone is mean to you, don't you sometimes want to be mean back? *[Let them respond]* Yes! That's exactly how Timothy felt.

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

Then Timothy got a special letter from his friend Paul. Paul was very wise and loved God a lot. Paul had been in jail for telling people about Jesus, so he knew all about dealing with mean people.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Paul wrote Timothy a very important message about how to treat mean people. Paul said, "Timothy, don't be mean back to them. Instead, be kind to everyone. Teach them gently about God's love. Don't stay angry."

[Move to side, sound curious]

Timothy probably thought, "But Paul, that sounds really hard! Why should I be nice to people who are mean to me?" And Paul had a very good answer.

2 Timothy 2:24 (NIV)

The Lord's servant must not fight with people but must be kind to everyone. Help people learn gently, and don't stay mad at them.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think Paul was right to tell Timothy to be kind even to mean people? It does sound pretty hard, doesn't it? But Paul had a secret reason why this works better than being mean.

[Move to center, speak with wonder]

Paul told Timothy that when people are mean, they might be trapped. Trapped by what? By wrong ideas that make them confused and angry. Just like if someone was stuck in a cage and couldn't get out.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe, use gentle voice]

Paul said that sometimes the devil tricks people into believing things that aren't true, and then they become mean. So the real bad guy isn't the mean person, it's the devil who tricked them!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

And here's the most amazing part: Paul told Timothy that when we're kind to mean people instead of mean back, God can do something incredible. God can change their hearts and help them stop being mean!

[Speak with excitement, raise hands]

Paul said that God could help the mean people "come to their senses" and escape from whatever was making them mean. Just like waking up from a bad dream and realizing everything is okay!

[Pause dramatically, then smile]

So Timothy learned that being kind isn't weak, it's actually very strong! When we choose kindness instead of meanness, we're helping God do His work in people's hearts. We're like God's special helpers!

[Speak directly to the children with warmth]

Sometimes in our lives, people might be mean to us at school or at home. When that happens, we can remember what Paul taught Timothy. We can choose to be kind even when others are mean, because God has special power to change people's hearts.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone is mean to you, you can think: "Maybe they're trapped by sad feelings or wrong ideas. Maybe God wants me to be kind so He can help them." And you can ask God to help the mean person and to help you be brave enough to stay kind.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves you so much, and He loves mean people too. He wants everyone to be happy and kind. When you choose kindness, you're helping God show His love to the world!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Great job listening! Now find a partner and stand face to face. 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 Timothy felt when people were mean to him?
 2. When someone is mean to you, what do you want to do?
 3. Why do you think Paul told Timothy to be kind instead of mean?
 4. What do you think it means that mean people might be "trapped"?
 5. Have you ever seen someone change from mean to nice?
-

6. What do you think God can do that we can't do by ourselves?

7. How can you be kind to someone who's mean to you?

8. What would you say to Timothy if he was feeling scared?

9. What's the difference between being kind and being weak?

10. Who helps you when someone is mean to you?

11. What makes it hard to be kind when someone is mean?

12. How do you think God feels about mean people?

13. What would happen if everyone chose kindness?

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

15. What's the best thing about being kind?

16. When is a time you were kind to someone who was sad?

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

18. What would you tell someone who says kindness is weak?

19. How do you think it feels when someone is kind to you?

20. What can we learn from Timothy's story?

Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines. Who wants to share something interesting they talked about with their partner? *[Take 2-3 brief responses]*

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about kindness or God's power to change hearts. Suggestions: "Kindness" or "God is So Good" or "This Little Light of Mine." Include movements: gentle hand gestures during kindness songs, strong motions during power songs, pointing outward during "light" songs.

Beautiful! I can see God's kindness shining through your voices. Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time so we can talk to God about what we learned today.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for Timothy's story and for teaching us about kindness.

[Pause]

Help us remember to be kind even when other people are mean to us. Help us remember that you can change people's hearts when we choose kindness instead of fighting.

[Pause]

When someone is mean to us, help us think about Timothy and remember that you want us to be kind. Help us be brave enough to choose love instead of meanness.

[Pause]

Thank you that you love us so much and that you love everyone, even people who are mean. Thank you for your power to change hearts and make sad people happy. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about kindness. Examples: "Help me be kind to my brother" or "Thank you for changing mean people's hearts."

You did such a good job thinking about kindness today! Remember, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose to be kind like Timothy learned to do. God will help you be strong and loving. Have a wonderful week!

Pursuing Peace

Active Peace-Making, When is peace-making your responsibility versus someone else's?

Hebrews 12:14-17

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

Hebrews 12:14-17 (NIV)

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

Context

The author of Hebrews has just finished describing the discipline of God as loving parental correction that produces righteousness in those who are trained by it. Now he shifts from receiving discipline to actively pursuing peace and holiness within community. This passage sits within the larger context of encouraging Jewish Christians who were facing persecution and considering abandoning their faith to return to Judaism.

The community is under stress, and the author recognizes that stress fractures relationships. He's addressing a church that needs practical wisdom about maintaining unity when external pressures could easily create internal division. The reference to Esau serves as a warning about making irreversible

choices when emotions run high, choices that later bring only tears and regret.

The Big Idea

Peace with everyone requires "every effort", it's not a passive hope but an active pursuit that demands intentional work, especially when relationships are strained.

However, the pursuit of peace doesn't mean avoiding all conflict or accepting harmful behavior. The warning about "bitter roots" reveals that some forms of unforgiveness and resentment, if left unchecked, don't just hurt individuals, they spread like infection through entire communities. The tension lies in knowing when to pursue peace actively and when to address toxicity before it defiles many.

Theological Core

- **Active Peace Pursuit.** Peace is something we "make every effort" toward, it requires intentional work, not just good intentions or passive waiting.
 - **Communal Responsibility.** Individual choices about forgiveness and bitterness affect entire communities; what seems personal has corporate consequences.
 - **Bitter Root Contagion.** Unresolved resentment grows upward and outward, causing trouble and defiling many beyond the person harboring it.
 - **Early Intervention Necessity.** The call to "see to it" suggests vigilance and early identification, bitter roots must be addressed before they grow large enough to cause widespread damage.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Peace-making requires "every effort", it's active work, not passive hoping, and includes pursuing difficult conversations and relationships
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- Some people's bitterness becomes toxic to entire communities, creating the tension between individual grace and corporate health
- Early intervention in brewing conflicts and unresolved resentments protects communities from larger damage later
- Wisdom involves discerning when peace pursuit means accommodation versus when it means addressing harmful patterns before they spread

Grades 4, 6

- Making peace means doing specific actions to fix relationships, not just wishing things were better
- When someone stays angry and bitter, it affects other people like germs spreading through a classroom
- Sometimes grown-ups need to step in when someone's anger is hurting the whole group, not just themselves
- You can feel angry or hurt about something AND still work to solve the problem instead of staying stuck in bad feelings

Grades 1, 3

- God wants us to work hard to be kind to everyone, even when it's difficult
- God helps us stop being angry so we can be friends again
- When we stay angry for a long time, it makes other people sad too

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Oversimplifying "peace with everyone."** This doesn't mean accepting abuse or avoiding necessary confrontation. Peace pursuit can include setting boundaries and addressing harmful behavior, the goal is relationship health, not conflict avoidance.
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- **Making bitterness only about the bitter person.** The text emphasizes that bitter roots "defile many", this is about corporate consequences. Individual unforgiveness becomes a community health issue that affects everyone's spiritual environment.
- **Ignoring the "every effort" requirement.** Peace doesn't just happen; it requires intentional, sustained work. This isn't about personality compatibility but about active choices to pursue reconciliation and health in relationships.
- **Missing the early intervention element.** "See to it" suggests vigilant attention to brewing problems before they become entrenched. This isn't about judging individual emotions but about community responsibility to address spreading toxicity before it causes widespread damage.

Handling Hard Questions

"What if the other person refuses to make peace no matter what you do?"

The command is about your effort, not their response. "Make every effort" means you do everything within your power, honest communication, sincere apology when appropriate, seeking mediation, changing your own contributing behaviors. But you cannot control their choice to respond. Your responsibility is maximal effort; their responsibility is their own response. Sometimes peace pursuit means creating healthy boundaries when someone consistently chooses conflict.

"Who gets to decide when someone's bitterness has become toxic to everyone else?"

This requires wisdom and often community discernment, not individual judgment. Generally, when someone's unresolved anger begins affecting multiple other relationships, creating division, or poisoning the atmosphere for others, it has moved from personal struggle to communal concern. Church leadership, counselors, or trusted community members can help identify when individual bitterness has become corporate toxicity requiring intervention.

"How do you address bitter roots without becoming judgmental or harsh?"

The goal is healing and protection, not punishment or shame. Addressing bitter roots means offering support for resolution, helping someone process their hurt constructively, and sometimes creating boundaries to prevent spread of toxicity. It's like addressing physical illness, you take it seriously

because you want health for the individual and protection for the community, not because you're judging the sick person.

The One Thing to Remember

True peace-making is hard work that protects entire communities from the spreading damage of unresolved bitterness.

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 peace with everyone while also recognizing when someone's bitterness becomes toxic to the entire community. Help them think through what "every effort" actually looks like in practice.

The Tension to Frame

When is peace-making your responsibility versus someone else's? How do you pursue peace with someone whose bitterness is hurting others around them?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with difficult people and acknowledge that peace-making can feel impossible sometimes
 - Honor the complexity, peace pursuit isn't always accommodation, and sometimes protecting community health requires difficult conversations
 - Let students wrestle with scenarios rather than giving them simple formulas for complex relational situations
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about your friend group or your family. You know how sometimes one person's bad mood can absolutely wreck the vibe for everyone else? They're mad about something that happened last week, and now every conversation feels tense, every plan gets complicated, and you find yourself walking on eggshells just to keep things from exploding. You want to help, but you also start to resent how their unresolved anger is affecting everyone.

Your first instinct is probably to try to make peace, talk it through, smooth things over, maybe even take some blame you don't deserve just to get back to normal. That's actually a good instinct. Peace is worth pursuing, and relationships matter more than being right most of the time.

But here's where it gets complicated: what if their anger and bitterness isn't just hurting them anymore? What if it's becoming toxic to the whole group? What if your attempts at peace-making are actually enabling them to continue poisoning the atmosphere for everyone else? When does individual compassion conflict with protecting the community?

Today we're looking at a passage that commands us to "make every effort to live in peace with everyone", but it also warns about "bitter roots" that grow up and "defile many." These two things are in the same breath, which means we need to figure out how they work together.

Open your Bibles to Hebrews 12:14-17. As you read, pay attention to the action words, what are we supposed to DO? And notice who gets affected when bitterness goes unchecked.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. This passage is dense with meaning, so let them sit with it. Some will finish quickly, have them read it again slowly. Others will get stuck on "godless like Esau", help them see it's an example of making irreversible choices when emotions run high.

As You Read, Think About:

- What does "every effort" actually require in real relationships?
 - Why does the author connect peace with "holiness" and seeing the Lord?
 - How do "bitter roots" grow up to "defile many", what does that process look like?
 - What would you feel if you were tasked with "seeing to it" that others don't fall short or become bitter?
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Hebrews 12:14-17 (NIV)

14 Make every effort to live in peace with everyone and to be holy; without holiness no one will see the Lord. 15 See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many. 16 See that no one is sexually immoral, or is godless like Esau, who for a single meal sold his inheritance rights as the oldest son. 17 Afterward, as you know, when he wanted to inherit this blessing, he was rejected. Even though he sought the blessing with tears, he could not change what he had done.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the Esau section since it's emotionally complex.

Reader 1: Verse 14 (The peace and holiness command) **Reader 2:** Verse 15 (The bitter root warning)

Reader 3: Verses 16-17 (The Esau example)

Listen for the tension in this passage, active commands for you to follow, but also warnings about other people's choices affecting everyone.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to come up with genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you?" or "What confused you?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1-2 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. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How can..." or "What if..." You have 3 minutes. Focus on what you actually want to understand better.

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 and look for themes.

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

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What's the difference between peace that helps relationships and peace that just avoids necessary confrontation?"
- "How do you 'make every effort' with someone who refuses to engage or keeps creating drama?"
- "Why do you think individual bitterness is described as defiling 'many' rather than just hurting the bitter person?"
- "What does it look like when someone's unresolved anger starts affecting your whole friend group or family?"
- "If you're supposed to 'see to it' that bitter roots don't grow, what's your responsibility when someone else is stuck in resentment?"
- "When does protecting others from someone's toxicity conflict with showing that person grace and patience?"
- "What's the difference between holding someone accountable and becoming judgmental about their struggle with forgiveness?"
- "Why does the author include the Esau example here, what does irreversible choice have to do with peace-making and bitterness?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? The passage starts with YOUR responsibility, make every effort for peace. But then it shifts to community protection, don't let bitter roots defile many. The author isn't contradicting himself. He's saying that true peace-making includes both pursuing reconciliation AND protecting communities from toxic bitterness. Sometimes the most peaceful thing you can do is address someone's bitter root before it spreads and hurts others.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you actually see this tension playing out? Think about school, your family, online spaces, friend groups, where do you encounter people whose unresolved bitterness is affecting everyone around them, not just themselves?

Real Issues This Connects To

- That friend who's been angry about drama from months ago and brings toxic energy to every hangout
 - Family members whose old grudges make every gathering tense and uncomfortable
 - Social media spaces where someone's constant negativity and call-out culture creates an atmosphere of fear
 - School groups where one person's unresolved conflict with a teacher or student affects the whole class dynamic
 - Teams or clubs where someone's bitter attitude toward leadership spreads discouragement to other members
 - Church or youth group situations where someone's complaints and criticism poison other people's faith experiences
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to give them answers. Some situations call for individual peace pursuit, others require community intervention. Help them think through discernment rather than providing blanket advice.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone successfully make peace with a genuinely difficult person, what did that process actually look like?"
 - "What would help you discern when someone's bitterness has moved from personal struggle to community toxicity?"
 - "How do you pursue peace without enabling someone to continue hurting others through their unresolved anger?"
-

- "What's the difference between healthy conflict resolution and just keeping the peace to avoid temporary discomfort?"
-

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Real peace-making is more complex than just being nice or avoiding conflict. It requires "every effort", which means doing the hard work of honest communication, genuine apology when needed, and sometimes difficult conversations about how someone's behavior is affecting others. This isn't easy, and it's not simple.

This week, pay attention to your own bitter roots, places where you're holding onto resentment that might be affecting others around you. Also notice situations where someone else's unresolved anger is creating toxicity in a group you're part of. Ask yourself: What would "every effort" for peace look like here? Sometimes it's individual conversation, sometimes it's community intervention, but it's always active work.

You had really thoughtful discussions today about genuinely difficult relational situations. Keep wrestling with these questions, they'll serve you well as you navigate complex relationships throughout your life. The world needs people who can pursue peace wisely, not just easily.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that making peace takes actual effort and work, not just wishing for it, and that staying bitter about something can spread to hurt other people like germs spreading through a classroom.

If Kids Ask "What if someone won't be friends with me no matter what I do?"

Say: "You can only control your part, being kind, saying sorry when you mess up, and trying to solve problems. You can't make someone else choose to be friendly, but God sees your hard work to make

peace."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in a group project where one person was really angry or upset about something, and it made the whole project feel uncomfortable and stressful. Keep your hand up if that person's bad mood made it harder for everyone else to do good work or have fun together.

Now here's a harder question: Have you ever been the person whose anger or frustration affected everyone else in the group? Maybe you were mad about something completely different, maybe a teacher was unfair to you, or your parents said no to something important, but that angry feeling followed you around and made you snappy with people who didn't even do anything wrong.

It's totally normal to feel angry sometimes, and your feelings are always valid. But here's what gets tricky: when we stay angry for a long time and don't work to fix the problem, those angry feelings can start affecting other people around us. It's like how when one person has a cold, pretty soon the whole class is sniffing and coughing.

This reminds me of the movie *Inside Out*, where Riley's emotions affect how she treats her parents and friends. When Sadness and Anger take over the control panel, it doesn't just change how Riley feels inside, it changes how she acts toward everyone around her, even people she loves who didn't cause the problem.

The tricky part is figuring out what to do when someone's anger or hurt feelings are spreading to everyone else. How do you help that person AND protect the group from getting dragged down? How do you actually fix problems instead of just hoping they'll go away?

Today we're going to hear about what God says about working hard to make peace with people and stopping angry feelings from spreading to hurt lots of people. It's from a letter in the Bible where someone was teaching a group about how to live well together. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to group dynamics and the "spreading" concept. Acknowledge their examples briefly but keep momentum moving toward the biblical teaching.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there was a group of people who loved Jesus and were trying to follow God together. But they were having a really hard time.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Some of the people in their community were being mean to them because they believed in Jesus. Others were telling them they should give up their faith and go back to their old way of life. It was scary and confusing and stressful.

[Use a worried, stressed facial expression]

When people are scared and stressed, what often happens to friendships? That's right, people start getting cranky with each other. They start arguing about things that don't really matter. They get their feelings hurt more easily. They stop being patient with each other.

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

Someone who cared about this group wrote them a letter with advice. He could see that their outside problems were starting to create inside problems. He knew that if they didn't learn how to make peace with each other, their community would fall apart.

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

So here's what he told them. He said, "Make every effort to live in peace with everyone." Did you catch that? "Every effort." That means work really, really hard at it. Making peace isn't something that just happens by accident. You have to try and keep trying.

[Move to side, sound concerned but hopeful]

But then he said something else that was really important. He told them to watch out for "bitter roots" that could "grow up and cause trouble and hurt many people."

Hebrews 12:14-15 (NIV)

"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone... See to it that no one falls short of the grace of God and that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

[Pause and look around at each child]

A bitter root is like a weed that grows underground where you can't see it at first. But if you don't pull it up, it gets bigger and stronger and starts choking out all the good plants. When people stay angry and bitter about something for a long time, it's like that weed, it doesn't just hurt them, it starts hurting everyone around them.

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

The letter writer was saying: "Don't just think about your own feelings. Think about how your feelings affect other people. And don't just ignore it when someone else's bitterness is making life hard for everyone."

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

He was teaching them that sometimes loving people means having hard conversations. Sometimes making peace means telling someone, "Your anger is hurting other people, and we need to work together to fix this." It's not mean to do that, it's actually kind, like telling someone they have food stuck in their teeth.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

The people who received this letter had to learn how to work really hard at making peace with each other. They had to learn how to talk through problems instead of just staying mad. And they had to learn how to help each other when someone was stuck in angry feelings.

[Speak with excitement]

And you know what? When they started doing this, their community became stronger! Instead of everyone being dragged down by a few people's bitterness, they learned how to solve problems and support each other. They became the kind of group where people felt safe and loved.

[Pause dramatically]

God wants our communities to be like that too. God wants us to work hard to make peace, which means doing specific things to solve problems, not just wishing they would disappear. And God wants us to help each other when someone gets stuck in bitter, angry feelings that start hurting everyone.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we need to do the hard work of making peace. That might mean apologizing when we mess up, or talking through a problem instead of just staying mad, or asking for help when we can't stop feeling bitter about something that happened.

[Move closer to the children]

And sometimes we might need to help other people work through their angry feelings, not by being mean to them, but by caring enough to help them solve the problem instead of staying stuck. When someone's bitterness is spreading like germs and making everyone else feel bad, you can help them find a grown-up who can help them work through those feelings.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God gives us the power to be peace-makers! God helps us know what to do when relationships get hard, and God helps communities become places where people solve problems together instead of just staying mad at each other.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Hard Work

Imagine your best friend is mad at you because of something you said that hurt their feelings, but you both really want to be friends again. What would "every effort" to make peace actually look like? What would you have to do, not just think or hope for?

Listen For: "Apologize," "Talk about it," "Ask what I did wrong", affirm: "Those are exactly the kinds of efforts that show you're serious about making peace, not just waiting for it to happen."

Question 2: The Spreading Problem

Think about a time when one person's bad mood or anger made your whole family dinner or class time feel uncomfortable and tense. How did their feelings affect everyone else, even people who didn't do anything wrong?

If They Say: "Everyone got quiet" or "We all felt worried", respond "That's exactly how bitter roots work, they spread the bad feelings to people who weren't even part of the original problem."

Question 3: The Helping Part

If you noticed that a friend's anger about something was starting to make your whole friend group feel stressed and unhappy, how could you help them without being mean or bossy about their feelings?

Connect: "This is exactly what the letter meant by 'see to it', caring enough to help someone work through their bitterness instead of just letting it spread."

Question 4: The Results

What do you think would happen to a classroom or family or friend group if everyone worked really hard to make peace and help each other with angry feelings instead of just ignoring problems?

If They Say: "It would be more fun" or "People would trust each other", affirm "Yes! That's the kind of community God wants us to create together."

You're really understanding this! Making peace takes work, and bitter feelings can spread like germs. But when we work together to solve problems and help each other, we create communities where people feel safe and loved. Now let's try an activity that shows how this works.

4. Activity: The Cooperation Challenge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that peace-making takes effort and cooperation by having kids physically experience how one person's non-cooperation affects the whole group's success. Success looks like kids discovering that they need everyone working together, and one person's refusal to participate makes it impossible for anyone to succeed.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to do the Cooperation Challenge. Everyone stand up and form a circle, holding hands. Your goal is to sit down as a group, all at the same time, without letting go of anyone's hands and without anyone falling over.

Here's the rule: Everyone has to participate fully, or it won't work. If even one person doesn't cooperate, if they refuse to hold hands, or they don't sit when everyone else sits, or they let go in the middle, the whole group will fall over or fail the challenge.

But here's the twist: I'm going to secretly ask one person to not cooperate at first. They'll represent someone with a "bitter root", someone who's angry about something and doesn't want to work with the group. Everyone else has to figure out how to make peace and help that person join in before you can succeed.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what the Bible passage taught us, one person's bitterness can affect everyone, and making peace takes effort from the whole community.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

First phase: Let them try a few times with the "bitter root" person not fully cooperating. They'll quickly discover that one person's lack of participation makes it impossible for anyone to succeed. Let them get frustrated for about 90 seconds.

The struggle: As they encounter the challenge, they'll start to focus on the non-cooperating person. This is when you coach: "What does this person need? How could you help them want to participate? What would convince them to join in?"

Coaching phrases: "I notice you need everyone working together. I wonder if there's a way to help that person feel included? What if you asked them what's wrong? What if you listened to why they don't want to participate?"

The breakthrough: When someone starts talking to the non-cooperating person kindly and asking what they need, have that person "change their mind" and join in fully. Then let them succeed at the sitting challenge.

Completion: Once they've succeeded, have them notice how different it felt when everyone was working together versus when someone was holding back. Point out that success required both effort from everyone AND helping the resistant person choose to participate.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to help the non-cooperating person instead of just getting frustrated with them, this is the physical representation of "making every effort for peace" and addressing bitter roots with care.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when one person wasn't cooperating versus when everyone was working together? Did you feel frustrated when that person was holding everyone back? How did it change when you started trying to help them instead of just being annoyed? This is exactly what the Bible passage was talking about, one person's bitterness affects everyone, but when we make effort to help each other, the whole group succeeds.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to make "every effort" to live in peace with people. That means doing actual work, talking through problems, apologizing when we mess up, and not just ignoring conflict and hoping it goes away. It takes effort, just like physical exercise.

This doesn't mean you have to let people be mean to you or that every disagreement is bad. It means you choose to work toward solutions instead of staying stuck in anger. And when someone else's bitterness is affecting the whole group, you can help them work through it instead of just getting frustrated.

The amazing result is that when we do this work, our communities become places where people feel safe and loved. Problems get solved instead of growing bigger, and everyone gets to experience what it's like to be part of something healthy and good.

This Week's Challenge

This week, notice when you need to make "every effort" for peace in your family, classroom, or friend group. Instead of just wishing someone would stop being difficult, try doing something specific to understand their feelings or solve the problem. Also notice if your own angry feelings are affecting other people, and ask for help working through them.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

God, help us work hard to make peace with people, especially when it's difficult. When we get angry or bitter about something, help us work through those feelings instead of letting them hurt other people. Give us wisdom to help our friends and families when they're stuck in anger too. Thank you for giving us the power to be peace-makers. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help children understand that God wants us to work hard to be kind to everyone, and when we stay angry for a long time, it makes other people sad too.

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 cold that spreads to other people, then ask "How do we help someone feel better when they have a cold?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about kindness, helping others, or God's love. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Love One Another," or "God is So Good." Use movements: point to others during "one another," hug yourself during "love," raise hands during "God" lyrics.

Great singing! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because I have an exciting story to tell you about God helping people be kind to each other even when it's hard work.

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 the letter writer, sound sad when describing angry feelings, sound excited when describing peace.

Today we're going to meet some people who loved God but were having trouble being kind to each other.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

There was a big group of people who wanted to follow God. But some mean people were being unkind to them because they loved Jesus.

[Use a sad, worried facial expression]

When people are scared and worried, sometimes they start being grumpy with each other. Have you ever noticed that? When you're upset about something, it's harder to be patient and kind.

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

Someone who loved this group very much wrote them a letter. He wanted to help them learn how to be kind to each other even when life was hard.

[Move to center, speak with gentle but strong voice]

The letter said, "Work really, really hard to be peaceful and kind with everyone." Not just easy people, everyone! Even when someone is grumpy or difficult.

[Move to side, sound concerned]

But then the letter said something else important. It warned them about something called "bitter roots." Those are like invisible weeds that grow when people stay angry for a long time.

Hebrews 12:14-15 (NIV)

"Make every effort to live in peace with everyone... See to it that no bitter root grows up to cause trouble and defile many."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think it's okay to feel angry sometimes? Yes! God knows we get angry, and that's normal. But staying angry for a long, long time can hurt other people too. It's like when you have a cold and you sneeze, other people might catch your cold.

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

When someone stays angry and bitter, their angry feelings can spread to other people and make everyone feel sad and worried. That's what the letter was warning about.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

The person who wrote the letter was teaching them: "Work hard to be kind! And help each other when someone gets stuck in angry feelings!" It's like helping someone who has a cold feel better.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

The people who got this letter learned that being kind takes work. You don't just wish for people to be nice, you do kind things! You say sorry when you mess up. You talk to people when there's a problem.

[Speak with excitement]

And when they started doing this hard work of being kind, their group became a happy, loving place! Instead of everyone being sad because of angry feelings, they learned to help each other feel better.

[Pause dramatically]

God wants us to work hard at being kind too! Not just when it's easy, but even when it takes effort. God wants us to help stop angry feelings from spreading to other people.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, we need to do kind things even when we don't feel like it. We might need to share when we want to keep something for ourselves, or say sorry when we hurt someone's feelings, or be patient when someone is being difficult.

[Move closer to the children]

And sometimes we might need to help other people when they're stuck in angry feelings. We can tell a grown-up, or we can be extra kind to them, or we can ask God to help their heart feel better.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God gives us the power to be kind even when it's hard work! God helps our families and classrooms become happy places where people love each other and solve problems together.

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand facing each other. I'll give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell each other 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 in your family is really grumpy and angry?
 2. What's something kind you could do for someone who's having a bad day?
 3. When is it hard work to be kind to someone?
-

4. What would you do if your friend was mad and wouldn't talk to you?

5. How do angry feelings spread from one person to other people?

6. What does God want us to do when we feel angry?

7. How can you help someone who's stuck being angry?

8. What happens when everyone in a group works hard to be kind?

9. When do you need to say sorry to someone?

10. Who can you ask for help when you're having trouble being kind?

11. What makes you feel better when you're angry or sad?

12. How does it feel when someone is kind to you when you're grumpy?

13. What does "work hard to be peaceful" mean?

14. How can you tell if someone needs help with their angry feelings?

15. What's the difference between being angry and staying angry for a long time?

16. How does God help us be kind to difficult people?

17. What would your classroom be like if everyone worked hard to be kind?

18. When should you tell a grown-up about someone's anger?

19. How can you stop your own angry feelings from hurting other people?

20. What can you pray for when someone you know is angry?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about forgiveness, kindness, or helping others. Use movements: make helping gestures during kindness lyrics, point upward during God lyrics, hug yourself during love lyrics.

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

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us to work hard at being kind to everyone.

[Pause]

Help us be patient and loving even when someone is grumpy or difficult. Help us say sorry when we hurt someone's feelings.

[Pause]

When we feel angry, help us not let those feelings hurt other people. Help us ask grown-ups for help when we need it.

[Pause]

Thank you for giving us the power to be kind and for helping our families and classrooms be happy, loving places. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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

Remember to work hard at being kind this week, even when it's not easy. God will help you, and your kindness will help other people feel happy and loved. Have a wonderful week!

Heavenly Wisdom

Peacemaking Character, What does your approach to conflict reveal about your wisdom source?

James 3:13-18

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 3:13-18 (NIV)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

Context

James is writing to Jewish Christians scattered throughout the Roman Empire, addressing practical issues of faith-in-action. He's just finished discussing the destructive power of the tongue (3:1-12) and now transitions to examine the heart source behind our words and actions. This isn't abstract theology, these believers are facing real conflicts over resources, social status, and religious practice.

James poses a direct challenge: "Who is wise and understanding among you?" He's responding to apparent claims of wisdom within the community, but he's seeing evidence of "bitter envy and selfish ambition." The immediate concern is how people handle disagreement and conflict, their approach reveals their wisdom source.

The Big Idea

Heavenly wisdom produces peaceable character that sows peace and reaps righteousness, while earthly wisdom creates disorder through envy and selfish ambition.

This isn't about avoiding conflict or keeping everyone happy. James describes a character cluster, pure, peace-loving, considerate, submissive, merciful, impartial, sincere, that works together as comprehensive transformation. The sequence matters: purity comes first, then peace-loving, showing that genuine peace flows from integrity, not compromise of truth.

Theological Core

- **Wisdom Source Determines Character.** James presents only two options: heavenly or earthly wisdom. There's no neutral ground, our approach to conflict reveals which wisdom source is operating in us.
 - **Purity Precedes Peace.** The sequence "first pure, then peace-loving" shows that genuine peacemaking begins with integrity and truth, not avoidance or compromise.
 - **Character Clusters Together.** The eight characteristics of heavenly wisdom aren't isolated traits but work together as integrated transformation of how we relate to others.
 - **Peacemaking Produces Harvest.** Those who "sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness", peacemaking isn't just conflict management but produces lasting spiritual fruit.
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Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- How to evaluate their conflict approach against James's markers of heavenly versus earthly wisdom
 - The tension between maintaining purity (truth/integrity) while remaining peace-loving
 - How character traits cluster together, you can't choose just one or two
 - The difference between genuine peacemaking and conflict avoidance
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Grades 4, 6

- Specific attitudes that help resolve conflicts (considerate, merciful, sincere)
 - How their choices in disagreements affect their relationships and community
 - That peacemaking often requires brave choices, not just easy ones
 - How to handle strong feelings while still choosing helpful actions
-

Grades 1, 3

- God helps us be gentle and kind when someone makes us mad
 - God likes it when we help people get along instead of fighting
 - We can ask God to help us choose good words and actions
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Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **False Peace-vs-Truth Dilemma.** Don't let students think they must choose between being truthful and being peaceful. James's sequence shows purity enables genuine peace-loving, not the reverse.
 - **Reducing to Conflict Management.** This isn't about techniques for handling disagreements but about heart transformation that produces different kinds of people, peacemakers rather than troublemakers.
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- **Ignoring the Stark Contrast.** James allows no middle ground between heavenly and earthly wisdom. Don't soften his either-or presentation into a both-and compromise.
 - **Misunderstanding "Submissive."** This doesn't mean passive or weak but teachable and responsive to God's direction. It's about humility that comes from wisdom, not personality type.
-

Handling Hard Questions

"What if standing for truth requires conflict?"

James isn't calling for avoiding all conflict but for approaching it with heavenly wisdom. Purity comes first, we don't compromise truth. But then we engage with peace-loving, considerate, merciful attitudes. The question isn't whether to address wrong but how to do it in ways that reflect God's character. Sometimes love requires difficult conversations, but heavenly wisdom shapes how we have them.

"Isn't this just being a doormat?"

The characteristics James lists, pure, considerate, submissive, merciful, aren't weakness but strength under control. A peacemaker who is "full of good fruit" isn't passive but actively produces positive outcomes. "Submissive" means teachable to God, not dominated by people. This is about being strong enough to choose responses that heal rather than harm.

"What if the other person won't make peace?"

James focuses on what we control, sowing in peace. We can't control others' responses, but we can control whether we approach conflicts with heavenly wisdom. The harvest of righteousness comes from our faithfulness to sow peace, not from successful outcomes every time. Sometimes peacemaking means setting boundaries with grace or speaking truth with love, even when others resist.

The One Thing to Remember

Your approach to conflict reveals your wisdom source, heavenly wisdom produces peacemakers who sow peace and reap righteousness, even when purity requires difficult truth-telling.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to honestly examine their own conflict approach against James's markers of heavenly versus earthly wisdom. Help them wrestle with how purity and peace-loving work together rather than pulling apart.

The Tension to Frame

How can you be "first pure, then peace-loving" without using truth as an excuse for conflict or peace as an excuse for avoiding hard conversations?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with conflict, most have seen both helpful and harmful approaches
 - Honor the complexity, some situations genuinely require difficult choices between competing goods
 - Let them wrestle with James's stark either-or rather than lecturing about the right answers
-

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Think about the last time you were in a serious disagreement with someone, maybe a friend, sibling, parent, or classmate. Remember how you felt when you realized you saw things completely differently. Maybe you were frustrated, angry, or disappointed. Maybe you felt misunderstood or like they weren't listening to you.

Now think about how you handled it. Did you argue? Walk away? Give in even though you disagreed? Try to convince them you were right? Get other people involved? Whatever you did probably felt like the right choice in the moment. Most of us default to strategies that feel natural or have worked before.

But here's what's interesting, James says our approach to conflict actually reveals something deeper about us. He's not talking about techniques or strategies but about what's driving our hearts when we disagree with people. According to him, there are only two sources of wisdom operating when we face conflict.

Today we're looking at a passage where James describes these two kinds of wisdom and shows how they produce completely different kinds of people. He's going to challenge us to examine not just what we do in conflict but what's motivating it. Pay attention to the characteristics he lists, they're not random.

Open your Bibles to James 3:13-18. We're going to read it silently first, then discuss what you notice.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly among students. This passage is dense with concepts, so help with vocabulary if needed. Watch for early finishers, let them reread and think about the contrasts James is drawing.

As You Read, Think About:

- What two types of wisdom does James describe, and how are they different?
 - What motivates each type of wisdom, what's driving the heart?
 - Which characteristics of heavenly wisdom surprise you or seem challenging?
 - How does James connect peacemaking to "harvest of righteousness"?
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James 3:13-18 (NIV)

13 Who is wise and understanding among you? Let them show it by their good life, by deeds done in the humility that comes from wisdom. 14 But if you harbor bitter envy and selfish ambition in your hearts, do not boast about it or deny the truth. 15 Such "wisdom" does not come down from heaven but is earthly, unspiritual, demonic. 16 For where you have envy and selfish ambition, there you find disorder and every evil practice.

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. 18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers who are comfortable reading aloud. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the contrasting sections to emphasize the drama.

Reader 1: Verses 13-14 (James's challenge and earthly wisdom) **Reader 2:** Verses 15-16 (source and results of earthly wisdom) **Reader 3:** Verses 17-18 (heavenly wisdom and its harvest)

Listen for the sharp contrast James is drawing. This isn't a gentle suggestion but a direct confrontation about wisdom sources and their results.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

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

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two real questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or confused by. Don't try to think of questions you think I want to hear. Ask about what actually puzzles you or makes you wonder. For example, "What does 'submissive' wisdom look like?" or "How can you be pure and peace-loving at the same time?" You have three minutes starting now.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Let students drive with their questions. Facilitate and probe deeper rather than lecturing. Guide discovery by asking follow-up questions that help them think.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board, looking for themes. Start with questions most students will relate to or find intriguing.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence does James give for each type of wisdom, how can you tell which is which?"
 - "What's the difference between 'bitter envy' and legitimate concern about wrongdoing?"
 - "How does 'first pure, then peace-loving' work practically, what would that look like in a real conflict?"
 - "Why do you think James uses such strong language, 'earthly, unspiritual, demonic'?"
 - "What's the difference between being 'submissive' and being a pushover?"
 - "How does 'sowing in peace' connect to 'reaping a harvest of righteousness'?"
 - "What if being pure (truthful) seems to require hurting someone's feelings?"
 - "Why does James say wisdom shows up in 'deeds' rather than just words or knowledge?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? James isn't giving us conflict resolution techniques, he's describing two completely different kinds of people. One type is driven by envy and selfish ambition, which creates disorder. The other type is transformed by heavenly wisdom into someone who naturally sows peace. The characteristics cluster together because they flow from the same source. You can't choose just the easy ones and skip the hard ones.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Think about conflicts you actually face, at school, at home, online, with friends. Where do you see these two types of wisdom playing out? Sometimes we can recognize earthly wisdom in others more easily than in ourselves.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Group projects where someone isn't doing their share
 - Family disagreements about rules, privileges, or responsibilities
-

- Friend drama where you know someone is being treated unfairly
- Social media conflicts where people attack rather than discuss
- Situations where telling the truth might damage a relationship
- Standing up for someone when it might cost you socially

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

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone handle conflict in a way that actually made things better?"
- "What would help you choose heavenly wisdom when you're really angry or hurt?"
- "How do you discern when peace-loving requires difficult conversations versus stepping back?"
- "What's the difference between being wise and being 'nice'?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: James says there are only two wisdom sources operating when you face conflict. Your approach reveals which one is driving you. Heavenly wisdom doesn't avoid hard conversations, it approaches them with purity first, then peace-loving attitudes. This isn't easy, and sometimes you'll have to choose between competing goods.

This week, pay attention to what motivates you in disagreements. Are you driven by envy, selfish ambition, or the need to win? Or are you approaching conflicts with the goal of sowing peace and reaping righteousness? Notice the difference between genuine peacemaking and just avoiding uncomfortable situations.

You asked great questions today and wrestled honestly with hard concepts. Keep thinking about how character and wisdom connect. The goal isn't to become conflict-avoidant but to become the kind of people who can handle disagreements in ways that honor God and build others up.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids recognize peacemaking attitudes that help relationships flourish versus attitudes that create more problems. Show them that God wants to help them choose helpful responses even when they disagree with others.

If Kids Ask "What if I'm right and they're wrong?"

Say: "Being right about something is important, but how you handle being right makes all the difference. You can be right and kind at the same time."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been in an argument with someone in your family, maybe your brother, sister, or even your parents. Keep your hands up! Now keep them up if you've ever had a disagreement with a friend at school or in your neighborhood. Look around, we all have!

Here's a harder question. Think about the last time you really disagreed with someone about something important. Maybe they broke a promise, or you thought they were being unfair, or they said something that hurt your feelings. Part of you might have wanted to yell at them or tell them exactly what you thought. But another part of you might have felt bad about fighting or worried about hurting their feelings.

It's totally normal to feel confused when people we care about make us mad or disappointed. Your feelings make sense! Sometimes you want to fight for what's right, and sometimes you want everyone to just get along. Both of those wants are okay, but figuring out what to do can be really tricky.

It's like in the movie *Inside Out*, where Riley has all these different emotions competing to control her actions. When someone disappoints you, Anger might want to take charge, but Sadness or Fear might have different ideas. The hard part is choosing what to actually do with all those feelings.

The tricky part is figuring out how to handle disagreements in ways that actually help instead of making things worse. Sometimes what feels good in the moment, like telling someone off or just giving up, doesn't solve the real problem.

Today we're going to hear about what God says makes the difference between arguments that hurt relationships and conversations that actually help people understand each other better. Let's find out what James learned about this.

What to Expect: Kids will readily relate to family conflicts. Acknowledge their experiences briefly, "Yes, siblings can be so frustrating!", but keep momentum moving toward the Bible story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

James was a leader in the early church, and he was worried about something he was seeing in the Christian communities.

Picture this: James would visit different groups of believers, and he'd hear about all kinds of problems. People were arguing about who was the smartest or most important. Some people would get jealous when others received attention or respect.

But here's what really bothered James, many of these people claimed to be wise. They'd say things like, "I know what we should do," or "I understand God better than you do." They thought being wise meant being the one with all the answers.

Imagine how frustrating that would be. You're trying to have a church family, but people are competing and arguing and trying to prove they're the wisest. That doesn't sound like a very loving community, does it?

So James decided to write a letter to help people understand what real wisdom actually looks like. He wanted to show them the difference between two completely different kinds of wisdom.

First, James talked about the wrong kind of wisdom, the kind that was causing all the problems. He said some people have "bitter envy and selfish ambition" in their hearts. That means they're jealous of others and mostly thinking about what they want for themselves.

When people operate with that kind of wisdom, James said, "you find disorder and every evil practice." In other words, everything becomes a mess! Relationships get damaged, people get hurt, and the

community falls apart.

Think about what that would look like. If someone is mostly thinking about themselves and feeling jealous of others, how would they handle disagreements? They'd probably try to win every argument, put others down to make themselves look better, or hold grudges when things didn't go their way.

But then James described something completely different. He said there's another kind of wisdom that comes from God, and it creates totally different kinds of people.

James 3:17 (NIV)

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

James was saying that when God gives someone wisdom, it changes how they treat other people, especially when they disagree. Let me help you understand what each of these words means.

"Pure" means honest and truthful, they don't lie or try to manipulate people. "Peace-loving" means they want relationships to be healthy and strong, not broken and hurtful.

"Considerate" means they think about how their words and actions affect others. "Submissive" means they're willing to listen and learn, not just insist on their own way. "Full of mercy" means they're kind to people who make mistakes.

"Impartial" means they treat everyone fairly, not just their favorite people. And "sincere" means they're genuine, what you see is what you get. They're not fake or putting on an act.

Now here's the amazing part. James said when people have this kind of wisdom from God, they become "peacemakers." And here's what happens when you're a peacemaker:

James 3:18 (NIV)

18 Peacemakers who sow in peace reap a harvest of righteousness.

That means when you choose to "sow peace", to do and say things that help relationships instead of hurting them, you get a "harvest of righteousness." You get good results! People trust you more,

relationships get stronger, and problems actually get solved instead of getting worse.

Think about someone you know who's really good at helping people work out their problems. Maybe it's a teacher, a parent, or even another kid. What makes them so helpful? They probably listen carefully, speak kindly but honestly, and really care about everyone involved feeling better.

James was telling people that this isn't just a natural talent some people have. This is something God wants to give to all of us. When we ask God for wisdom, He helps us become the kind of people who make relationships stronger, even when we disagree about important things.

The difference isn't that peacemakers never disagree with anyone. The difference is how they disagree. They can stand up for what's right while still being kind. They can be honest about problems without being mean about it.

Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice James was writing about. When someone does something that bothers us, we can respond with earthly wisdom, getting jealous, thinking only about ourselves, trying to win. Or we can ask God for heavenly wisdom and respond in ways that help.

What we learn from James is that God wants to help us become peacemakers, people who make relationships better, not worse, even when we disagree.

The amazing thing is that God promises when we choose to be peacemakers, we'll see good results. Maybe not immediately, but over time, people will trust us more and relationships will get stronger.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Two Kinds of Wisdom

Think about the two kinds of wisdom James described. If you had to pick animals to represent them, what would you choose? For example, earthly wisdom, the kind driven by jealousy and selfishness, might be like a porcupine that shoots quills when it feels threatened. What animal might represent heavenly wisdom, the kind that's considerate and peace-loving?

Listen For: Creative animal comparisons. Affirm: "That's a great picture! I can see how a [animal] shows that kind of wisdom because..."

Question 2: When Wisdom Gets Hard

James says heavenly wisdom is "first pure, then peace-loving." That means being honest and truthful comes first. But sometimes telling the truth might hurt someone's feelings or cause a disagreement. Think of a situation where being honest might be difficult but important. How could you be truthful AND peace-loving at the same time?

If They Say: "Just lie to avoid hurting feelings", respond: "What happens to relationships when we're not truthful? How might honest kindness be different from mean honesty?"

Question 3: Peacemaker Results

James said peacemakers "reap a harvest of righteousness", they get good results from choosing to sow peace. Think about someone you know who's really good at helping people work out problems. What good results do you see in their relationships? How do people respond to them differently?

Connect: "This is exactly what James meant by reaping a good harvest, the peace you sow comes back to you."

Question 4: The Choice We Face

Imagine your best friend promised to sit with you at lunch but then sat with someone else instead, leaving you alone. You feel hurt and maybe a little angry. What would earthly wisdom tell you to do? What would heavenly wisdom tell you to do? How might the results be different?

If They Say: Ideas about revenge or ignoring, respond: "Those feelings make sense. The question is what choice will actually help your friendship get stronger."

You're really thinking well about this! James wanted people to understand that we have a choice about how we handle disagreements and hurt feelings. The wisdom we choose makes a huge difference in what happens to our relationships.

4. Activity: Wisdom Bridge Building (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces the difference between earthly and heavenly wisdom by having kids physically experience how different approaches to conflict either build bridges between people or create walls. Success looks like kids discovering that cooperation and consideration actually accomplish more than competition and selfishness.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to build human bridges! I'm going to divide you into two groups. Each group will stand on opposite sides of the room, and your goal is to create a "bridge" of people that connects your side to the other side.

Here's the challenge: Group 1, you can only use "earthly wisdom" approaches, you need to compete with Group 2, try to make your bridge better than theirs, and focus on your group winning. Group 2, you can only use "heavenly wisdom" approaches, you need to be considerate of the other group, think about how to help everyone succeed, and focus on peace-loving solutions.

The twist is this: neither group can complete their bridge without somehow connecting to the other group in the middle. But you have to approach that connection using your assigned type of wisdom.

We're doing this because it's exactly like James's lesson, the type of wisdom you use completely changes how you interact with others and what results you get.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Start by having each group begin building their bridge from their side. Group 1 (earthly wisdom) will likely start competing, maybe criticizing Group 2's approach or trying to take up more space. Let this go for about 1-2 minutes while observing.

As they approach the middle and realize they need each other to complete the bridge, Group 1 will likely try to dominate or negotiate for advantage. Group 2 will likely look for ways to collaborate and consider both groups' needs.

Coach Group 1: "Remember, you're focused on winning and being better than them." Coach Group 2: "How can you be considerate and peace-loving while still accomplishing your goal?" Don't give away the solution, but guide them toward their assigned approaches.

The breakthrough comes when Group 2's approach enables actual bridge completion while Group 1's approach creates conflict that prevents success. Celebrate when they figure out that heavenly wisdom actually accomplishes the goal better.

Once they successfully connect (likely through Group 2's influence), have them notice how different the process felt and what made the difference in the outcome.

Watch For: The moment when Group 2's considerate approach enables bridge completion while Group 1's competitive approach creates obstacles. This is the physical representation of James's teaching about wisdom sources producing different results.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt to use earthly wisdom versus heavenly wisdom? Group 1, was it frustrating to focus on competing? Group 2, what happened when you stayed focused on being considerate and peace-loving? You just experienced exactly what James was talking about, heavenly wisdom actually gets better results because it helps people work together instead of against each other.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: God wants to give us heavenly wisdom that helps us become peacemakers. That doesn't mean avoiding all disagreements, it means handling them in ways that make relationships stronger instead of weaker.

This doesn't mean you should just let people be mean to you or never stand up for what's right. Being a peacemaker means you can be honest about problems while still being kind. You can disagree with someone while still treating them with respect.

The amazing result is that when you choose to sow peace, when you respond to conflicts with consideration, mercy, and honesty, you reap good results. People trust you more, relationships get healthier, and problems actually get solved.

This Week's Challenge

This week, when you have a disagreement with someone, try using one of James's heavenly wisdom characteristics before you react. Ask yourself: "How can I be considerate right now?" or "What would mercy look like in this situation?" Notice what happens when you approach conflicts as a peacemaker rather than just trying to win or avoid the problem.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for wanting to give us wisdom that helps our relationships. When we feel angry or hurt by others, help us remember to ask for your heavenly wisdom. Help us become peacemakers who sow peace and see good results. 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 to help them be gentle and kind when they disagree with others, and that this makes relationships better.

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 heavenly wisdom to being a good friend who helps solve problems, and earthly wisdom to being mean when you don't get your way.

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love or being kind to others. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Love One Another." Use movements: point to heaven during "God" lyrics, hug yourself during "love" lyrics, point to others during "one another" lyrics.

Great singing! You know what? God loves it when we sing together nicely. Now we're going to hear a story about how God helps us be kind to others, even when we disagree. Sit down in our horseshoe shape and get ready for an exciting story!

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when describing arguments, sound happy when describing peacemaking.

Today we're going to meet a man named James who loved God very much!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

James had lots of friends who loved God too. But James noticed something that made him sad. His friends were arguing and fighting with each other a lot!

[Make a sad face and speak in a concerned voice]

Some people would get jealous when others got attention. Some people would say mean things when they didn't get their way. It was like when you're playing with toys and someone takes the toy you wanted, you might feel mad and say something not very nice.

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

But James knew something wonderful! He knew that God wants to help us when we feel mad or upset with others. God doesn't want us to be mean or hurtful.

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

So James told his friends about two different ways to act when we disagree with someone. The first way was the wrong way, being selfish and mean. The second way was God's way, being kind and gentle.

[Move to side, sound excited]

James said when God gives us wisdom, that means help knowing what to do, we become different kinds of people!

James 3:17 (NIV)

17 But the wisdom that comes from heaven is first of all pure; then peace-loving, considerate, submissive, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere.

[Pause and look around at each child]

Those are big words, aren't they? Let me tell you what they mean in words you know! When God helps us, we become honest and truthful. We want to help people get along instead of fighting!

[Move to center, speak with enthusiasm]

We think about other people's feelings. We listen when grown-ups teach us. We're kind to people who make mistakes. We're fair to everyone, not just our best friends. And we're real, not fake or pretending.

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

James said when we ask God to help us be this way, something amazing happens! We become "peacemakers", that means people who help others get along and solve problems nicely.

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

And here's the best part, when we choose to be kind and helpful, good things happen! People like being around us more. We have better friends. Problems get solved instead of getting worse.

[Speak with excitement]

It's like planting flower seeds in a garden. When you plant kindness and gentleness, you grow friendship and happiness! When you plant meanness and selfishness, you grow sadness and loneliness.

[Pause dramatically]

God can help us choose to be peacemakers! Even when someone makes us mad or sad, God can help us be gentle and kind instead of mean and hurtful.

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes in our lives, someone might take our toy, or not share, or say something that hurts our feelings. When that happens, we can ask God to help us respond with kindness instead of being mean back.

[Move closer to the children]

When someone makes you upset, you can choose to be gentle and kind. You can tell them how you feel without being mean. You can ask a grown-up for help. You can forgive them and try to be friends again.

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when we help people get along instead of fighting. He wants to help us be peacemakers who make everything better, not worse!

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 somewhere in the room where you have space to talk! I'm going to give each pair of friends a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just share what you think!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think James felt when he saw his friends arguing?

2. When someone takes your toy, how do you feel inside?

3. What does it mean to be a "peacemaker"?

4. If your friend was sad, what would you do to help?

5. How can you be kind even when you feel mad?

6. What good things happen when people are nice to each other?

7. How can God help us when we feel angry?

8. What would you do if someone wasn't sharing with you?

9. How can you tell the truth but still be gentle?

10. Who do you know that's really good at helping people get along?

11. What makes you feel better when you're upset?

12. How can you show kindness to someone who was mean to you?

13. What does God think when we help others instead of fighting?

14. How can you be brave and gentle at the same time?

15. What happens when you say sorry and really mean it?

16. How can you help two friends who are arguing?

17. What did you learn about being a peacemaker?

18. How can we pray when we feel mad at someone?

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

20. How can you be like Jesus when someone hurts your feelings?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about kindness or helping others. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "Be Kind to One Another," or "Jesus Loves the Little Children." Use movements: hug yourself during "love" lyrics, reach out to others during "help" lyrics, point upward during "Jesus" lyrics.

Beautiful singing! You know what? When we sing about being kind, it helps us remember to actually be kind. Now let's sit down for prayer time and thank God for helping us be peacemakers.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for James who taught people about being peacemakers.

[Pause]

When someone makes us mad or sad, help us remember to be gentle and kind instead of mean. Help us ask you for wisdom to know what to do.

[Pause]

Help us be peacemakers who make everything better, not worse. Thank you for loving us and helping us be like Jesus.

[Pause]

Thank you for always being there to help us when we need you. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about being kind to others. Examples: "Help me be nice when I'm mad" or "Thank you for helping us love each other."

Remember, God wants to help you be a peacemaker this week! When someone makes you upset, ask God to help you choose kindness. Have a wonderful week!

Expanding Our Circle

Boundary Expansion, Who exactly counts as "against us"?

Mark 9:30-50

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

Mark 9:30-50 (NIV)

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve to him and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." 39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us."

41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

42 "If anyone causes one of these little ones, those who believe in me, to stumble, it would be better for them if a large millstone were hung around their neck and they were thrown into the sea. 43 If your hand causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life maimed than with two hands to go into hell, where the fire never goes out. 45 And if your foot causes you to stumble, cut it off. It is better for you to enter life crippled than to have two feet and be thrown into hell. 47 And if your eye causes you to stumble, pluck it out. It is better for you to enter the kingdom of God with one eye than to have two eyes and be thrown into hell, 48 where 'the worms that eat them do not die, and the fire is not quenched.'

49 Everyone will be salted with fire. 50 "Salt is good, but if it loses its saltiness, how can you make it salty again? Have salt among yourselves, and be at peace with one another."

Context

Jesus has just finished teaching the disciples about his coming death and resurrection, but they don't understand and are afraid to ask. Immediately after, they argue about who among them is the greatest. This reveals their continued misunderstanding of Jesus's mission and kingdom values. They're still thinking in terms of hierarchy and status rather than servanthood.

Into this context comes John's report about the unauthorized exorcist. The disciples have just been corrected about greatness, yet they're still operating from exclusionist thinking. They see someone effectively doing ministry in Jesus's name but stop him because "he was not one of us." Their boundary-drawing instinct reveals the same status-consciousness Jesus just addressed.

The Big Idea

Jesus expands the boundaries of who belongs by shifting the criterion from "one of us" to "not against us", a dramatic widening of the circle of acceptance for those doing effective ministry in his name.

This doesn't eliminate all boundaries, but it dramatically narrows who should be considered an adversary. The natural human instinct is to exclude those outside our immediate group, but Jesus's correction suggests we should only oppose those who are actually working against kingdom purposes, not simply those who work outside our organizational structures.

Theological Core

- **Functional Assessment over Group Identity.** Jesus evaluates ministry effectiveness and heart orientation rather than organizational membership or formal authorization.
 - **Boundary Expansion.** The kingdom includes those who work in Jesus's name authentically, even when they operate outside established religious structures.
 - **Welcome over Prohibition.** The default response to effective ministry done by outsiders should be welcome and affirmation, not suspicion and stopping.
 - **Narrow Definition of Opposition.** "Against us" is a much smaller category than "not one of us", only those actively opposing kingdom work are true adversaries.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Effective ministry by those outside our denomination or organization should be welcomed, not stopped
 - The boundary of opposition is much narrower than our instincts suggest, only those actually against Jesus and his work are adversaries
-

- Organizational membership is less important to Jesus than authentic ministry done in his name
 - Discerning when to maintain boundaries versus when to expand the circle of acceptance requires wisdom about actual opposition versus mere difference
-

Grades 4, 6

- People who look different from us or belong to different groups might still be on God's team
 - When someone is doing good things and helping others in Jesus's name, we should cheer them on instead of complaining
 - Being "different from us" is not the same as being "against us"
 - Sometimes our feelings of "that's not fair" or "they don't belong" need to be checked against what Jesus actually cares about
-

Grades 1, 3

- Jesus wants us to be kind to people who love him
 - God can use anyone to do good things
 - We should be happy when people help others, even if they're not in our group
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Eliminating All Boundaries.** Jesus's correction doesn't mean there's no such thing as false teaching or harmful ministry. "Whoever is not against us" still acknowledges that some people genuinely oppose kingdom work and should be resisted.
 - **Ignoring Legitimate Concerns.** The disciples' desire for order and proper authority wasn't entirely wrong, it becomes problematic when it leads to excluding effective, authentic ministry simply based on organizational membership.
 - **Denominational Superiority.** This passage shouldn't be used to argue that all expressions of Christianity are equally valid, but rather that effective ministry done authentically in Jesus's name deserves recognition regardless of denominational affiliation.
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- **Avoiding Discernment.** The key is learning to assess whether someone is actually "against us" (opposing Jesus and his work) versus simply "not one of us" (outside our particular group structure). This requires wisdom, not blanket acceptance or rejection.
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Handling Hard Questions

"But what about false teachers and people who distort the gospel?"

Jesus's principle doesn't eliminate discernment about true versus false teaching. Notice he says those who do miracles in his name can't immediately speak evil of him, this implies there's authentic ministry happening. The test is whether they're genuinely working in Jesus's name and for his purposes, or whether they're actively opposing his work. False teachers who distort the gospel would fall into the "against us" category that Jesus allows for resistance.

"How do we know if someone is really 'for us' or just using Jesus's name?"

Jesus points to evidence: effective spiritual ministry (driving out demons) done authentically in his name. The fruit of their work matters more than their organizational credentials. Look for genuine love for Jesus, effective ministry that helps people, and consistency between their claims and their actions. If they're producing good spiritual fruit and honoring Jesus's name, they're likely "for us" even if they operate outside our structures.

"Doesn't this mean denominations and church membership don't matter?"

This passage addresses the tendency to exclude effective ministry based solely on organizational boundaries. It doesn't eliminate the value of church structure, accountability, or denominational distinctives. Rather, it warns against using these important structures as reasons to oppose or stop ministry that's genuinely effective and honors Jesus. The goal is partnership and mutual encouragement, not organizational control over who can minister in Jesus's name.

The One Thing to Remember

Jesus draws the boundary much wider than we instinctively do, the circle of opposition is much smaller than the circle of difference.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with their own boundary-drawing instincts and discover how Jesus's criterion of "not against us" challenges their assumptions about which Christian groups, denominations, or ministries they should support versus oppose.

The Tension to Frame

How do we tell the difference between necessary boundary-keeping and the kind of exclusivism Jesus corrects here?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experience of denominational differences and organizational tensions, these feelings are real and often based on genuine theological or practical concerns
- Help them explore nuance rather than giving blanket answers, some boundaries are appropriate while others reflect the exclusivism Jesus corrects
- Let them discover the principle through questioning rather than lecturing about what they should think

1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You're working on a group project at school, and it's going really well. Your team has great ideas, good chemistry, and you're all pulling your weight. Then you hear that another group in class is working on the exact same problem you are, but they're using completely different methods and they didn't ask permission to work on "your" topic. Part of you feels territorial: "That's our project idea." But then you realize their approach is actually really good, and they're solving the same problem you care about.

The question becomes: Are they competition you need to shut down, or partners you could collaborate with? Your instinct might be to protect your team's work and keep them separate. After all, they're not

part of your group, they didn't ask your permission, they're doing things differently, and they might even get credit for something you thought was uniquely yours.

Today we're looking at a moment when Jesus's disciples faced something similar, except the stakes were much higher. They encountered someone doing ministry, real, effective spiritual work, but he wasn't officially part of their group. Their instinct was to shut him down. Jesus's response surprised them and challenges our thinking about who we should support versus oppose.

As we read, pay attention to two things: the disciples' reasoning for stopping this person, and the completely different criterion Jesus offers for deciding who counts as an ally versus an adversary. Notice how much wider Jesus draws the circle of acceptance than they expected.

Open your Bibles to Mark 9, starting with verse 38. We'll read silently first, then discuss what you discover.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words if needed. Some will finish early, let them think about the "As You Read" questions. Allow the organizational tension in the passage to create genuine curiosity about Jesus's response.

As You Read, Think About:

- What exactly was this unauthorized person doing, and how effective was he?
 - Why did the disciples feel justified in stopping him?
 - What surprises you about Jesus's response?
 - How would you feel if you were in the disciples' position?
-

Mark 9:30-41 (NIV)

30 They left that place and passed through Galilee. Jesus did not want anyone to know where they were, 31 because he was teaching his disciples. He said to them, "The Son of Man is going to be delivered into the hands of men. They will kill him, and after three days he will rise." 32 But they did not understand what he meant and were afraid to ask him about it.

33 They came to Capernaum. When he was in the house, he asked them, "What were you arguing about on the road?" 34 But they kept quiet because on the way they had argued about who was the greatest.

35 Sitting down, Jesus called the Twelve to him and said, "Anyone who wants to be first must be the very last, and the servant of all." 36 He took a little child whom he placed among them. Taking the child in his arms, he said to them, 37 "Whoever welcomes one of these little children in my name welcomes me; and whoever welcomes me does not welcome me but the one who sent me."

38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us." 39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us."

41 Truly I tell you, anyone who gives you a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly not lose their reward.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read with expression. Let students pass if uncomfortable. Choose confident readers for the Jesus dialogue, his words need to land with authority and clarity.

Reader 1: Verses 33, 37 (Setting: greatness argument and child object lesson) **Reader 2:** Verse 38 (John's report about unauthorized exorcist) **Reader 3:** Verses 39, 41 (Jesus's response and principle)

Listen for the contrast between the disciples' mindset and Jesus's response. This is about competing ways of drawing boundaries around who belongs.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you most?" or "What would be hardest about Jesus's instruction?"

Get into groups of 3-4. Your job is to come up with 1 or 2 genuine questions about what you just read, things you're actually curious about or find confusing or challenging. Good questions might start with "Why did..." or "How would..." or "What if..." Don't worry about having answers; focus on asking what you really want to understand. You have 3 minutes.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with their questions. You facilitate deeper thinking and guide discovery. Resist the urge to lecture; help them uncover insights through questioning.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board. Look for themes. Start with questions that most students will connect with emotionally or experientially.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What evidence does the passage give us about whether this unauthorized exorcist was effective?"
- "Why do you think the disciples felt justified in stopping him, what were they trying to protect?"
- "How is Jesus's criterion of 'not against us' different from the disciples' criterion of 'not one of us'?"
- "What would be hard about accepting Jesus's instruction here if you were responsible for maintaining order and authority?"
- "When might the disciples' concern about unauthorized ministry be legitimate versus when might it reflect the exclusivism Jesus corrects?"
- "Where do you see this same tension playing out in churches or Christian organizations today?"
- "What would have happened if the disciples had successfully stopped this person's ministry?"
- "How do we tell the difference between someone who's genuinely 'for us' versus someone who's just using Jesus's name?"

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? The disciples are drawing the boundary based on organizational membership, "he's not one of us." But Jesus draws it based on actual opposition, "whoever is not against us is for us." That's a huge difference. It means the circle of people we should welcome and support is much bigger than the circle of people who belong to our specific group. The only people we should actively oppose are those who are genuinely working against Jesus and his purposes.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your world. Where do you see this same tension playing out? Think about churches, youth groups, Christian schools, denominations, or even Christian friends and organizations. When do you find yourself thinking "they're not one of us" about other Christians?

Real Issues This Connects To

- Different churches or denominations in your community that do ministry differently
 - Christian clubs or organizations at school that compete for the same students
 - Youth ministries that seem to "steal" kids from your group
 - Christians who are involved in social justice causes your church doesn't emphasize
 - Contemporary Christian music versus traditional worship styles
 - Online Christian influencers or ministries that operate outside traditional church structures
-

Facilitation: Let students share specific examples without rushing to judge their concerns as right or wrong. Help them apply Jesus's criterion: "Are they actually against Jesus's work, or just different from us?"

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen effective ministry happening outside your church or denomination that you could celebrate instead of compete with?"
 - "What helps you distinguish between legitimate concerns about doctrine or practice versus territorial feelings about 'our' way of doing things?"
-

- "How do you decide whether another Christian group is genuinely 'against us' or just 'not one of us'?"
- "What's the difference between wise discernment about ministry practices and the kind of exclusivism Jesus corrects here?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: Jesus draws the boundary of opposition much more narrowly than our instincts suggest. The circle of Christians we should partner with and celebrate is much bigger than the circle of those who belong to our specific organization or do things exactly our way. This doesn't mean anything goes or that all forms of Christianity are equally helpful, but it does mean we should reserve our opposition for those who are genuinely against Jesus's work, not just different from us.

This week, pay attention to your gut reactions when you encounter Christians who do things differently than your church or youth group. Ask yourself: Are they actually against Jesus and his work, or are they just not part of our organizational structure? Look for opportunities to celebrate effective ministry happening in other churches, denominations, or Christian organizations instead of viewing them as competition.

I'm genuinely impressed by the thoughtfulness you brought to this discussion today. These boundary questions are some of the hardest things Christians wrestle with, and there's no shame in admitting it's complicated. Keep wrestling with these questions, and don't be afraid to expand the circle of who you consider to be on the same team.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids recognize when their instinct to exclude people who are "different from us" conflicts with Jesus's heart to include those who genuinely love and serve him.

If Kids Ask "What if someone is doing bad things and saying they love Jesus?"

Say: "Jesus is talking about people who are genuinely helping others and doing good things in his name. If someone is hurting people or being mean, that's different, they're working against Jesus."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever been on a sports team, in a club, or part of a group where you had matching shirts, special handshakes, or inside jokes that made you feel like you belonged. Keep your hands up if you've ever seen another team or group doing something similar and felt a little competitive or protective of your group.

Now here's a harder question: What if you found out that other team was actually trying to accomplish the same goal as your team, and they were doing a really good job? Part of you might think, "Hey, that's great, we're all working toward the same thing!" But another part might feel like, "Wait, that's supposed to be our thing. They should have asked permission or joined our group if they wanted to help."

These feelings make sense! When you belong to a group you care about, you want to protect it and make sure it's special. You want credit for the good work your group does. And it can feel weird or even unfair when outsiders do similar work without asking permission or following your rules.

This reminds me of the movie Moana, when she meets other wayfinders on different islands who navigate the ocean differently than she learned, but they're all trying to help their people and restore life to their islands. At first, it might seem like they're competing with each other, but really, they're all on the same mission.

The tricky part is figuring out when someone who's "not one of us" is actually on the same team working toward the same good goal, versus when they're truly working against what you care about. How do you tell the difference?

Today we're going to hear about a time when Jesus's disciples ran into exactly this situation. They found someone doing amazing ministry and helping people, but he wasn't part of their official group. Their first instinct was to shut him down. But Jesus's response taught them something surprising about who really belongs on their team. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will relate to team loyalty and the competitive feelings that come with group identity. Acknowledge these feelings as normal while steering toward curiosity about Jesus's different perspective.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Jesus and his disciples were walking through the countryside, heading to a town called Capernaum. But something was bothering the disciples. They were arguing with each other about which one of them was the most important.

When they got to town and went inside a house, Jesus asked them directly: "What were you arguing about on the road?" The disciples got quiet and looked embarrassed, because they knew arguing about who was greatest wasn't what Jesus wanted them focused on.

So Jesus sat them all down and said something that probably surprised them: "If you want to be first, you have to be last. If you want to be great, you have to serve everyone else." Then he picked up a little child and put the child right in the middle of their circle.

Imagine being that kid! All these grown-up disciples are staring at you, and Jesus is holding you like you're the most important person in the room. Jesus said, "When you welcome a child like this in my name, you're welcoming me. And when you welcome me, you're welcoming God the Father."

The disciples were probably still processing this when John spoke up with something that had been bothering him. "Teacher," he said, "we saw someone driving out demons, casting out evil spirits and helping people who were trapped by spiritual darkness."

"That sounds like good work," you might think. But here's what bothered John: "This person was doing it in your name, Jesus. He was using your authority and your power to help people."

"So what did you do?" Jesus asked. John replied, "We told him to stop, because he was not one of us. He's not part of our group. He wasn't chosen by you like we were. He doesn't travel with us or get your direct training. So we shut down his ministry."

Mark 9:38 (NIV)

38 "Teacher," said John, "we saw someone driving out demons in your name and we told him to stop, because he was not one of us."

John probably expected Jesus to say, "Good job! You were protecting my authority and making sure only official disciples do ministry in my name." But Jesus's response was completely different and probably shocked them.

"Do not stop him," Jesus said firmly. The disciples looked at each other. Wait, what? Don't stop someone who's operating outside our official group?

Then Jesus explained his reasoning, and it was brilliant: "No one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me." Think about that! If someone is genuinely using Jesus's power to help people and cast out evil, they can't turn around and badmouth Jesus.

Mark 9:39-40 (NIV)

39 "Do not stop him," Jesus said. "For no one who does a miracle in my name can in the next moment say anything bad about me, 40 for whoever is not against us is for us."

Here's the key principle Jesus gave them: "Whoever is not against us is for us." This was a completely different way of thinking about who belongs on their team.

The disciples were thinking: "If you're not officially one of us, you don't belong." But Jesus was thinking: "If you're not working against us, you're working with us." That's a much bigger circle of inclusion!

Jesus was saying: Instead of asking "Are they part of our official group?" ask "Are they actually opposing our mission or helping it?" Instead of focusing on membership and credentials, focus on what they're actually accomplishing and whether their heart is aligned with God's purposes.

The unauthorized exorcist was doing real good, freeing people from spiritual oppression, helping those who were hurting, and doing it all while honoring Jesus's name. He wasn't trying to compete with the disciples or undermine their ministry. He was just serving people in need using the authority of Jesus.

By stopping him, the disciples were actually working against their own mission! They were preventing good work from happening just because it wasn't happening through their organizational structure.

Jesus continued: "Anyone who gives you even a cup of water in my name because you belong to the Messiah will certainly be rewarded." Even small acts of kindness done by people outside the inner circle matter to Jesus.

Sometimes in our lives, we encounter people who love Jesus and are doing good things to help others, but they might go to a different church, or pray differently than we do, or have different worship styles. Jesus's lesson here is that we should cheer them on, not shut them down, as long as they're genuinely serving him and helping people.

What we learn is this: The most important question isn't "Are they part of our group?" but "Are they loving Jesus and helping people in his name?" When the answer to that second question is yes, Jesus wants us to celebrate and support their good work, even if it's happening outside our particular church or group.

This teaches us about God's heart, his kingdom is bigger than any one church or group, and he can use all kinds of people to accomplish his purposes of love, healing, and help for those who need it.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Put yourself in the disciples' shoes. You've been chosen by Jesus, you travel with him every day, you get special training that others don't get. Then you see someone who's not part of your group doing the same kind of ministry you do. How would that feel? Would part of you feel like, "Hey, that's our thing!"?

Listen For: "Jealous," "Protective," "Unfair", affirm: "Those feelings make sense. You'd want to protect something special you belonged to."

Question 2: The Evidence

But what was this unauthorized person actually doing? Was he hurting people, or helping them? Was he making fun of Jesus, or using Jesus's power respectfully? Based on what John reported, was this person's ministry working?

If They Say: "He was helping people" or "It was working", respond: "Exactly. So even though he wasn't 'one of them,' his ministry was genuinely good."

Question 3: The Big Difference

Jesus gave the disciples a totally different way to decide who's on their team. Instead of asking "Are they one of us?" he told them to ask, "Are they against us?" What's the difference between those two questions? How many more people might be "for us" than are "one of us"?

Connect: "This is exactly why Jesus had to correct the disciples, they were thinking too small about who God could use."

Question 4: In Our World

Think about other churches in your town, or Christian kids at school who go to different churches than you do. If you found out they were doing something really good to help people, like feeding homeless people or visiting elderly folks, would your first reaction be "That's awesome!" or "They should have asked our church first"?

If They Say: "I'd be happy for them", great! If they express territorial feelings, respond gently: "Those feelings are normal, but Jesus wants us to celebrate good work even when it's not happening through our group."

The disciples learned that Jesus cares more about people being helped than about who gets credit for helping them. That's a lesson we can apply when we see other Christians doing good work, even if they're not part of our specific church or group.

4. Activity: Circle of Welcome (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces Jesus's principle by having kids physically experience the difference between exclusive circles (only our group) and inclusive circles (everyone who's not against us). Success looks like kids discovering that the "not against us" criterion creates much more unity and effectiveness than the "one of us" criterion.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Circle of Welcome." First, I'm going to divide you into three groups based on something about you, maybe your birth month, favorite color, or something like that. Each group will form a tight circle holding hands, with backs facing outward.

Your job is to accomplish a mission: getting everyone in the room to feel welcomed and included. But here's the catch: you can only welcome people who are exactly like your group, same birth month, same favorite color, whatever we decide. If someone doesn't match your group's criteria, you have to keep them out of your circle.

After we try that for a while, I'll give you a new rule that's more like Jesus's principle, and we'll see what happens differently. Ready?

We're doing this because it's exactly like the situation in our story, the disciples had a small, exclusive circle, but Jesus wanted them to expand their thinking about who belongs.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

Phase 1 (2 minutes): Let groups form exclusive circles based on the arbitrary criterion. Watch as some kids end up left out, circles compete for members, and the overall room feels divided. Don't let this go too long, just long enough for them to feel the exclusion.

Phase 2 (2 minutes): Call a timeout. Now give the new rule: "Your circle can welcome anyone who isn't actively trying to disrupt or hurt others. The only people you can't welcome are those who are genuinely being mean or working against the goal of including everyone."

Coaching: "I notice some people are still left out... I wonder if there are others who could help with your mission... What would happen if you expanded your circle... Look around, who else wants to accomplish the same goal you do?"

Celebrate when circles start merging or opening up to include others. Point out how much more effective they become at accomplishing the mission when they use Jesus's criterion instead of exclusive membership.

The breakthrough moment: When kids realize that almost everyone in the room actually wants the same thing, to welcome and include others, and that the arbitrary group divisions were preventing them from accomplishing their shared mission.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to break open their exclusive circle to welcome others, this is the physical representation of Jesus's principle in action.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you could only welcome people who were exactly like your group, versus when you could welcome anyone who wasn't working against your goal? In the first version, how many people got left out? In the second version, how much easier was it to accomplish the mission of including everyone? This is exactly what Jesus was teaching the disciples, the circle of people working for the same good goals is much bigger than the circle of people who belong to our specific group.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: Jesus wants us to cheer for people who love him and help others, even if they go to different churches or do things differently than we do. The question isn't "Are they part of our group?" but "Are they working against Jesus or for him?"

This doesn't mean everyone who claims to love Jesus is automatically doing good work. If someone is being mean, hurting people, or teaching things that go against what Jesus taught, that's different, they would be "against us." But when people are genuinely helping others and honoring Jesus's name, we should celebrate their good work.

The amazing result is that God's kingdom becomes so much bigger and more effective when we welcome others who share our love for Jesus, instead of only supporting people who belong to our specific church or group.

This Week's Challenge

This week, pay attention to news or stories about other churches or Christians doing good things in your community, maybe feeding people, helping the homeless, or serving in other ways. Instead of thinking "Why didn't our church think of that?" practice thinking "That's awesome that they're helping people in Jesus's name!" Look for one opportunity to celebrate or encourage good work being done by Christians outside your immediate church family.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear Jesus, thank you for showing us that your kingdom is bigger than any one church or group. Help us to be happy when we see other people loving you and helping others, even if they do things differently than we do. Give us generous hearts that celebrate good work instead of feeling jealous or left out. Help us remember that we're all on the same team when we love you. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Show kids that Jesus wants us to be happy when people who love him do good things, even if they're not in our church.

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 the disciples' feelings to not wanting to share toys with kids who aren't their best friends, then ask "But what if those kids were being kind?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about loving others or God's big family. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves the Little Children," "We Are One in the Spirit," or "Love One Another." Use movements: arms wide during lyrics about everyone, pointing to others during lyrics about loving each other, hands to heart during lyrics about Jesus's love.

Great singing! I love how you sang about God's love for everyone. Now let's sit in our horseshoe shape because I have an exciting story about Jesus and his helpers learning that God's family is bigger than they thought!

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 you talk about the man helping people, sound confused when you're the disciples, sound loving but firm when you're Jesus.

Today we're going to meet Jesus's special helpers called disciples!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

Jesus and his helpers were walking through towns, teaching people about God's love and helping people who were sick or sad.

[Use excited voice]

One day, one of Jesus's helpers named John saw something amazing! There was a man who was helping people too. He was making sick people well and helping people who were very sad.

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, sound confused]

But John was confused. This man wasn't one of Jesus's twelve special helpers. He didn't travel with them or eat dinner with them every day.

[Move to center, speak firmly but kindly]

So John and the other helpers told the man, "Stop helping people! You're not one of us! Only we are allowed to help people in Jesus's name!"

[Move to side, sound like you're reporting to a teacher]

Then John went to Jesus and said, "Teacher, we saw someone helping people in your name, and we told him to stop because he's not one of us."

Mark 9:39-40 (NIV)

39 *"Do not stop him," Jesus said. "Whoever is not against us is for us."*

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think John thought Jesus would be happy that they stopped the man? John probably expected Jesus to say "Good job!" But Jesus said something different!

[Move to center, speak with gentle authority]

Jesus said, "Do not stop him! If someone is helping people and being kind in my name, that makes me happy!"

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

Jesus explained: "Anyone who is not working against us is working with us." That means if someone loves me and helps people, they're on our team, even if they're not in our group!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

So the man could keep helping people! And Jesus was happy about it because more people were being helped and loved!

[Speak with excitement]

Jesus wants everyone who loves him to help others and be kind. It doesn't matter if they go to our church or a different church. If they love Jesus and help people, that's wonderful!

[Pause dramatically]

Jesus taught his helpers that God's family is bigger than they thought. God can use anyone who loves him to do good things!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes we might meet kids who go to different churches than we do, or families who pray differently than we do, but they still love Jesus. Jesus wants us to be happy when they do kind things, not jealous or mean.

[Move closer to the children]

When you see someone being kind and helping others because they love Jesus, you can smile and be happy, even if they're not from your church or your group!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

Jesus loves it when people work together to help others. His love is so big that there's room for everyone who wants to follow him!

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 somewhere with space to talk. I'll give each pair one question to discuss. Talk for about a minute, and remember, there are no wrong answers!

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think John felt when he saw the man helping people?
 2. Was the man doing good things or bad things?
 3. Why did Jesus's helpers tell the man to stop?
-

4. What did Jesus tell them to do instead?

5. How do you think the man felt when Jesus said he could keep helping?

6. Why was Jesus happy that the man was helping people?

7. Have you ever seen someone from a different church doing something nice?

8. How should we feel when other people help others?

9. What if someone goes to a different church but they're being kind, should we be happy?

10. Can God use people from different churches to do good things?

11. What good things can kids do to help others?

12. Should we only be friends with people who go to our church?

13. What would you do if you saw a kid from another church helping someone?

14. How big is God's family?

15. Does Jesus only love people who go to our church?

16. What makes Jesus happy?

17. Should we try to stop people who are being kind?

18. How can we help others this week?

19. What did the disciples learn from Jesus?

20. How can we be like Jesus when we meet people who are different from us?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select songs about helping others or being kind. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Helping Hands," or "Love Your Neighbor." Include movements: reaching out to help during lyrics about helping, hugging yourself during lyrics about love, pointing to others during lyrics about neighbors or friends.

Beautiful song about helping and being kind! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time. Sit cross-legged in your rows, fold your hands, and close your eyes.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for teaching us about the man who helped people...

[Pause]

Please help us to be happy when we see other people being kind and helping others, even if they go to different churches than we do...

[Pause]

Help us remember that your family is very big and includes everyone who loves Jesus...

[Pause]

Thank you that you love everyone and can use anyone to do good things. Help us be kind helpers too. In Jesus's name, Amen.

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

Remember, Jesus wants us to be happy when people who love him do good things! Have a wonderful week being kind helpers just like the man in our story!

Restoring Broken Trust

Jesus's Process for Healing Community, When someone hurts the community, is exclusion the only answer?

Matthew 18:10-22

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

Matthew 18:10-22 (NIV)

10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. 12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or tax collector.

18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree

about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

Context

This teaching comes directly after Jesus's lesson about becoming like children and not causing others to stumble. The disciples have been arguing about greatness, and Jesus has just redefined community values around vulnerability and care for the least. Now he addresses the inevitable question: what happens when someone in this redefined community sins against others? The parable of the lost sheep sets the emotional tone, God pursues the wandering one with joy, not condemnation.

The immediate context reveals Jesus addressing community fracture. Peter's follow-up question about forgiveness "seventy-seven times" shows the disciples are wrestling with the tension between accountability and grace. Jesus has just described a process that could lead to exclusion, but he frames it within an overall narrative of relentless pursuit and restoration. The community's response to sin must mirror God's heart for the lost sheep.

The Big Idea

When someone in community commits sin, Jesus prescribes a graduated process of intervention that prioritizes privacy first, escalates involvement only when necessary, and aims at restoration throughout, even when temporary exclusion becomes necessary.

This teaching contains a profound tension: Jesus provides clear steps that could lead to treating someone "as a pagan or tax collector," yet his own ministry was defined by radical engagement with pagans and tax collectors. The apparent contradiction suggests that even final "exclusion" serves restoration. The goal is never punishment but "winning them over", language of recovery, not rejection.

Theological Core

- **Private Before Public.** Sin within community requires address, but exposure should be minimal and graduated, one person first, then small group, then full community, only as needed for restoration.
-

- **Restoration as Goal.** Every step in the process aims at "winning them over," not punishment or vindication. Even exclusion serves the hope of eventual return and healing.
- **Community Responsibility.** Sin affects the whole body, so the community has both authority and obligation to address it through structured intervention rather than avoidance or gossip.
- **Graduated Intervention.** The escalation from private conversation to community involvement reflects wisdom about human nature, some people respond to gentle correction, others need community pressure, all need love.

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Sin within community requires structured intervention that balances accountability with grace and prioritizes restoration over punishment
 - The process escalates from private to public only when necessary, respecting both the sinner's dignity and the community's health
 - Even apparent "exclusion" can serve restoration when understood through Jesus's own practice with outcasts and tax collectors
 - Discernment requires understanding when to use each step of the process and how to maintain restorative heart throughout
-

Grades 4, 6

- When someone in your group does something wrong, the first step is to talk to them privately, not tell everyone else
 - If private conversation doesn't work, you can ask trusted adults or friends to help, but the goal is always to fix the problem
-

- Sometimes people have to step away from the group for a while, but that doesn't mean they're rejected forever
 - It's okay to feel hurt when someone wrongs you, but you still try to help them do better rather than just getting them in trouble
-

Grades 1, 3

- God wants everyone to be part of His family, even when they make wrong choices
 - When someone hurts others, we try to help them learn to make better choices
 - Jesus teaches us to be patient and keep loving people even when they mess up
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Treating Exclusion as Punishment.** The final step is often interpreted as permanent rejection, but Jesus's own engagement with "pagans and tax collectors" suggests this "exclusion" is missional repositioning, treating them as people who need the gospel rather than people who should know better.
 - **Skipping to Public Exposure.** The privacy principle gets violated when people jump immediately to involving others instead of attempting direct, private conversation first. This destroys trust and makes restoration harder.
 - **Using Process for Personal Grievances.** This teaching addresses sin that affects community, not personal preferences or style differences. The process isn't for getting your way but for addressing behavior that genuinely harms others.
 - **Ignoring the Heart of Restoration.** Each step aims at "winning them over," not proving you're right. If your heart is punitive rather than restorative, the process becomes manipulation rather than ministry.
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Handling Hard Questions

"What if someone won't change no matter what you do?"

This is exactly why Jesus provides a process with clear steps rather than leaving us to guess. Sometimes people choose to persist in harmful behavior despite multiple interventions. The final step acknowledges this reality while maintaining hope. Even treating someone "as a pagan or tax collector" doesn't end the relationship, it changes the nature of engagement from internal accountability to external mission. Jesus never stopped pursuing tax collectors; he just approached them differently than he approached disciples.

"Isn't this just church discipline that drives people away?"

The difference lies in the heart and goal. Punitive discipline aims at punishment and often results in permanent exclusion. Jesus's process aims at restoration throughout. Notice the language: "you have won them over." Even the final step serves restoration by protecting both the community and the individual from ongoing harm while maintaining hope for return. The key is ensuring every step is motivated by love for both the person and the community, not by anger or self-righteousness.

"How do you know when something is serious enough to use this process?"

The context suggests this applies to sin that affects community relationships and spiritual health, not personal preferences or minor disagreements. Ask: Is this behavior harming others? Is it contradicting the gospel? Would ignoring it enable more harm? The process is for restoration, not control, so it should only be used when genuine harm to people is occurring and when the goal is truly helping the person change rather than getting them to comply with your wishes.

The One Thing to Remember

God's heart is always for restoration, even when accountability requires temporary separation, the goal is winning people over, not shutting them out.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Guide students to wrestle with the tension between accountability and grace in community relationships. Help them discover that Jesus's process serves restoration, not punishment, even when it requires difficult conversations or temporary separation.

The Tension to Frame

When someone in community commits sin that hurts others, how do you balance holding them accountable with maintaining relationship and hope for restoration?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences of being hurt by others and struggling with forgiveness versus accountability
 - Honor the complexity of this teaching, it's not simple rules but wisdom requiring discernment in each situation
 - Let them wrestle with the apparent contradiction between exclusion and Jesus's practice with outcasts rather than resolving it quickly
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

Imagine someone in your friend group does something that really hurts people, maybe they spread rumors, betray trust, or consistently use others without giving back. You care about this person, but their behavior is damaging relationships and hurting people you also care about. Your gut reaction might be to cut them off or call them out publicly.

But cutting them off feels harsh and public confrontation feels messy and potentially destructive. Maybe you try ignoring it, hoping it will stop, but it doesn't, if anything, it gets worse. You're stuck between wanting to protect people from harm and not wanting to give up on someone you care about.

Today we're looking at Jesus addressing exactly this dilemma, except the stakes are higher, he's talking about sin within spiritual community, where the damage can be both relational and spiritual. He's just told a story about a shepherd who leaves ninety-nine sheep to pursue one who wandered off, emphasizing God's heart for restoration.

Watch for how Jesus balances accountability with restoration. Notice especially what he means by the final step, treating someone "as a pagan or tax collector", given that his own ministry was defined by radical engagement with those very groups.

Open your Bibles to Matthew 18:15-17 and read silently, but start at verse 10 to get the full context about God's heart for those who wander.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "pagan." Watch for students who finish early and encourage them to reread the lost sheep parable. Let them feel the weight of the apparent contradiction between pursuing lost sheep and excluding unrepentant community members.

As You Read, Think About:

- What's the connection between the lost sheep story and the discipline process that follows?
- Why does Jesus emphasize privacy first rather than going directly to community leaders?
- What's surprising or difficult about this teaching?
- How would you feel as the person being confronted? As someone watching this process?

Matthew 18:10-22 (NIV)

10 "See that you do not despise one of these little ones. For I tell you that their angels in heaven always see the face of my Father in heaven. 12 "What do you think? If a man owns a hundred sheep, and one of them wanders off, will he not leave the ninety-nine on the hills and go to look for the one that wandered off? 13 And if he finds it, truly I tell you, he is happier about that one sheep than about the ninety-nine that did not wander off. 14 In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish.

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over. 16 But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.' 17 If they

still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or tax collector.

18 "Truly I tell you, whatever you bind on earth will be bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will be loosed in heaven. 19 "Again, truly I tell you that if two of you on earth agree about anything they ask for, it will be done for them by my Father in heaven. 20 For where two or three gather in my name, there am I with them." 21 Then Peter came to Jesus and asked, "Lord, how many times shall I forgive my brother or sister who sins against me? Up to seven times?" 22 Jesus answered, "I tell you, not seven times, but seventy-seven times."

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Choose confident readers for the process steps since the structure needs to be clear. Let students pass if they're not comfortable reading aloud.

Reader 1: Verses 10-14 (Lost sheep parable and God's heart) **Reader 2:** Verses 15-17 (The three-step process) **Reader 3:** Verses 18-22 (Authority and forgiveness context)

Listen for the emotional progression, notice how Jesus moves from celebrating God's joy over finding lost sheep to providing a process that could lead to exclusion, then back to unlimited forgiveness.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4. Give exactly 3 minutes to generate 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups to listen for good questions and help stuck groups. If a group is struggling, ask "What surprised you most?" or "What seems hardest to actually do?"

Get into groups of 3-4 and come up with 1-2 questions about what you just read, not questions you think you should ask, but things you're actually curious or confused about. Good questions might be: "Why does Jesus...?" "What if someone...?" "How do you know when...?" You have 3 minutes. Focus on what genuinely puzzles you or what seems difficult to put into practice.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions. You facilitate and probe deeper, guiding discovery rather than lecturing. If they generate good questions, use those. If not, use the probing questions below to go deeper.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on board. Look for themes connecting accountability, grace, process, and restoration. Start with questions most students will connect with.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "Why do you think Jesus emphasizes 'just between the two of you' first? What would happen if everyone started with step two or three?"
 - "What does 'you have won them over' reveal about the goal of confrontation? How is this different from proving you're right?"
 - "Given Jesus's own relationships with tax collectors and pagans, what do you think 'treat them as a pagan or tax collector' actually means?"
 - "Peter asks about forgiving 'up to seven times', what tension is he feeling after hearing about this discipline process?"
 - "What's the difference between accountability and punishment in this teaching? How can you tell which motivation you have?"
 - "When might it actually be loving to exclude someone from community, even temporarily? When would exclusion be harmful?"
 - "What would happen to community if no one ever addressed sin? What happens if everyone always calls out sin publicly?"
 - "Why might some people respond to private conversation while others need community pressure before they'll change?"
-

Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Jesus provides a structured process that escalates involvement only when necessary, but the goal never changes, restoration. Even the final step serves this goal by protecting both the community and the individual from ongoing harm while maintaining hope for

return. The heart remains: winning people over, not shutting them out.

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see the need for this kind of structured approach to addressing harmful behavior? Think about friend groups, family dynamics, team relationships, online communities, or even broader social issues where someone's actions hurt others.

Real Issues This Connects To

- Friend group dynamics when someone consistently lies, manipulates, or uses others without reciprocating care
 - Family situations where a sibling's behavior affects everyone but parents seem unwilling to address it directly
 - Team or club contexts where someone's actions undermine group goals but confrontation feels too risky
 - Online communities where trolling or harmful content needs addressing without just silencing voices
 - Broader social justice issues where accountability is necessary but cancel culture feels destructive
 - Personal decision-making about whether to address someone's harmful behavior or just avoid them
-

Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Some situations call for this process, others don't. Help them think through when restoration is possible versus when safety requires different approaches. The goal is discernment, not blanket application.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen accountability that actually led to positive change rather than defensiveness or resentment?"
 - "What would help you have the courage to have a difficult one-on-one conversation when someone's behavior is harmful?"
-

- "How do you distinguish between sin that affects community and personal preferences or style differences?"
- "What's the difference between restorative exclusion and punitive rejection in your actual relationships?"

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God's heart is always for restoration, even when accountability requires difficult conversations or temporary separation. The goal is winning people over, not proving you're right or protecting yourself from discomfort. This isn't simple, it requires discernment, courage, and genuine love for both individuals and community.

This week, pay attention to how you respond when someone's behavior bothers you. Do you gossip, avoid, or attack publicly? Or do you consider whether a private, grace-filled conversation might actually address the problem while preserving relationship? Not every situation calls for confrontation, but some do, and Jesus gives us wisdom for how to do it well.

I'm proud of the way you wrestled with these complex questions today. Keep thinking deeply about how to balance grace and accountability in your relationships. The world needs people who can address harm without becoming harmful themselves.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that when someone hurts others, the goal is fixing the problem and relationship, not getting them in trouble. Teach them Jesus's process of private conversation first, then involving trusted adults only if needed.

If Kids Ask "What if they never stop being mean?"

Say: "Sometimes people have to step away from the group for a while so they can learn to make better choices. But God never stops loving them and wanting them to come back."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone in your class or friend group who did something that really hurt people, maybe they were mean, spread rumors, or kept breaking promises. Keep your hand up if part of you wanted to help them but another part of you wanted to just avoid them or get them in trouble.

Now here's a harder question: imagine this person is someone you used to be close friends with. They're not just being mean to strangers, they're hurting people you care about, including you. Part of you thinks "They're being terrible and need consequences," but another part thinks "I miss who they used to be and wish they'd change."

These feelings make total sense. When someone hurts people, it's natural to feel angry and want them to stop, but it's also natural to hope they can change and become a good friend again. Both feelings are okay, in fact, they're both important.

This situation is like what happens in the movie "Monsters University" when Mike and Sulley's friendship breaks down because they can't trust each other anymore. Or in "Wonder" when Julian bullies Auggie, people around them have to figure out how to address the harm without giving up on the possibility of relationship.

The tricky part is figuring out how to help someone stop hurting others while still showing them love and giving them a chance to change. It would be easier to just ignore the problem or to immediately get adults involved, but neither of those actually helps the person learn to do better.

Today we're going to hear about how Jesus taught his friends to handle exactly this situation. He told them a step-by-step process for helping people who are making harmful choices, and the goal was always to help them change, not just to punish them. Let's find out what he said.

What to Expect: Kids may share stories about playground conflicts or family drama. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds hard" or "I can see why that was confusing" but keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Jesus was teaching his disciples about how to treat people in God's family. He had just told them that God cares about every single person, especially those who seem small or unimportant.

To help them understand God's heart, Jesus told them a story about a shepherd who had one hundred sheep. These sheep were his responsibility, he loved them and took care of them every day.

One day, the shepherd was counting his sheep and discovered that one was missing. Ninety-nine sheep were safe with the flock, but one had wandered off somewhere in the hills.

Imagine being that shepherd. You could think, "Well, I still have ninety-nine sheep. Losing one isn't that big a deal." But that's not what happened.

The shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep in a safe place and went searching through the hills for the one lost sheep. He looked behind rocks, in valleys, anywhere a sheep might wander.

And when he found that lost sheep, Jesus said the shepherd was happier about finding the one than about the ninety-nine who never got lost! That might seem strange, but think about how it feels when you find something precious that you thought was gone forever.

Jesus said that's exactly how God feels. God doesn't want anyone to be lost or separated from his family, even when they make wrong choices.

Then Jesus taught them what to do when someone in their community was making choices that hurt other people.

Matthew 18:15 (NIV)

15 "If your brother or sister sins, go and point out their fault, just between the two of you. If they listen to you, you have won them over."

The first step, Jesus said, is to go talk to the person privately, just you and them. Don't tell everyone else first. Don't go to the teacher or your parents first. Go to them directly and explain how their actions are hurting people.

Notice that Jesus said "If they listen to you, you have won them over." The goal isn't to prove you're right or to get them in trouble. The goal is to help them understand and change their behavior so they can be restored to good relationships.

But Jesus knew that sometimes private conversation doesn't work. Sometimes people get defensive or angry, or they just don't want to change.

Matthew 18:16 (NIV)

16 "But if they will not listen, take one or two others along, so that 'every matter may be established by the testimony of two or three witnesses.'"

Step two: if the private conversation doesn't work, bring one or two trusted people with you, maybe friends who also see the problem, or wise adults who can help. This isn't about ganging up on someone, but about having more people who can help them understand the seriousness of their choices.

Sometimes people listen to a group when they won't listen to just one person. Sometimes having witnesses helps everyone understand what really happened and what needs to change.

But even this doesn't always work. Some people are so stuck in their harmful patterns that they won't listen even to a group of people who care about them.

Matthew 18:17 (NIV)

17 "If they still refuse to listen, tell it to the church; and if they refuse to listen even to the church, treat them as you would a pagan or tax collector."

Step three: if they won't listen to the small group, bring the problem to the whole community, the church, the class, the family, whoever is being affected. Sometimes people need to understand that their choices are hurting everyone, not just a few individuals.

And if they still refuse to change? Jesus said to treat them "as you would a pagan or tax collector." Now, this might sound harsh, but here's the important thing: Jesus spent most of his time with pagans and tax collectors! He loved them, ate with them, and taught them about God.

So "treating someone as a pagan or tax collector" doesn't mean rejecting them forever. It means recognizing that they're not ready to be part of the community right now, but continuing to love them and hope for their return.

Sometimes in our lives, a friend might have to step away from the friend group because their behavior is hurting everyone. A student might need to sit out from team activities because they're not following the rules. This isn't punishment, it's giving them space to think about their choices while protecting others from harm.

What we learn from Jesus is that when someone makes choices that hurt others, we don't ignore it and we don't immediately try to get them kicked out. We start with love, private conversation, then small group help, then community involvement, always hoping they'll choose to change.

The goal is always restoration, helping people learn to make better choices so they can be part of the community again. Even when someone has to step away, God never stops loving them and wanting them to come back.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Private Conversation

Think about a time when someone talked to you privately about something you did wrong versus a time when someone called you out in front of others. How did those two experiences feel different? Which one made you more likely to actually want to change your behavior?

Listen For: "Private felt less embarrassing," "I got defensive when it was public", affirm: "That makes sense. When someone cares enough to talk to you privately, it shows they want to help you, not humiliate you."

Question 2: The Goal of Restoration

Jesus said the goal is to "win them over," not to prove you're right. What's the difference between trying to win someone over and trying to get them in trouble? How can you tell which motivation you have?

If They Say: If they say "Winning over means you still care about them", respond "Exactly! What would that look like in your words or tone of voice when you talk to them?"

Question 3: When Community Gets Involved

Why do you think some people listen to their friends when they won't listen to teachers or parents? And why do some people need the whole community to get involved before they'll take the problem seriously?

Connect: "This is exactly why Jesus gave us different steps, people are different, and what motivates one person to change might not work for someone else."

Question 4: Temporary Separation

Think about times when someone had to step away from a group because of their behavior, maybe from sports, friend groups, or family activities. When did that help them learn to make better choices? When did it just make things worse?

If They Say: If they mention permanent exclusion feeling unfair, respond "That's why Jesus's way is different, even stepping away is meant to help someone change, not punish them forever."

What I hear you saying is that motivation really matters. When the goal is helping someone change and be restored to good relationships, even difficult conversations can lead to good outcomes. Jesus gives us a process that protects both the person and the community while working toward healing.

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

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces Jesus's graduated process by having kids physically experience how private help works first, then small group support, then community involvement. Success looks like kids discovering that the goal is getting everyone across together, not just solving the problem for yourself.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to build human bridges to get everyone across an imaginary river. Divide into groups of 6-8. Your challenge is that everyone in your group needs to get from this side of the room to that side, but you can only step on "bridge pieces", which are other people's hands and feet.

Here's the catch: one person in each group will be given a secret card that says "Make this harder." That person's job is to subtly make bridge-building more difficult, maybe by not following directions, being uncooperative, or creating obstacles.

Your group's job is to figure out how to help that person become cooperative so everyone can get across together. You can't just leave them behind or force them, you have to win them over to working with the group.

We're doing this because it's exactly like Jesus's teaching, when someone's behavior is making it hard for the community to accomplish its goals, you have to find a way to help them change while still caring about them.

During the Activity(4 minutes)Let groups struggle for about a minute with the uncooperative member before giving any hints. Watch for groups that immediately try to exclude the difficult person versus groups that try to understand what's wrong.As frustration builds, watch for kids who try private conversations with the difficult person versus those who immediately complain to you or rally others against them.When you see good examples of Jesus's process, point them out: "I notice Sarah is talking privately with Alex first" or "I see this group brought two people to help solve the problem together."If groups get stuck, coach them toward Jesus's steps: "What if you tried talking to them one-on-one first?" "What if you got a couple people to help brainstorm solutions?" Don't solve it for them.Celebrate breakthrough moments when the difficult person starts cooperating: "Look how much better this works when everyone's working together!" Help them notice the change from conflict to collaboration.Watch For:The moment when someone chooses to have a patient conversation with the difficult person instead of getting frustrated, this is the physical representation of Jesus's private conversation step.Debrief(1 minute)What did you notice about how it felt when people were working against each other versus when everyone was cooperating? Which approaches actually helped the difficult person become part of the solution? This is exactly what Jesus was teaching, the goal is to get everyone working together, and sometimes that requires patient conversation and group support to help someone change their approach.

Let groups struggle for about a minute with the uncooperative member before giving any hints. Watch for groups that immediately try to exclude the difficult person versus groups that try to understand what's wrong.

As frustration builds, watch for kids who try private conversations with the difficult person versus those who immediately complain to you or rally others against them.

When you see good examples of Jesus's process, point them out: "I notice Sarah is talking privately with Alex first" or "I see this group brought two people to help solve the problem together."

If groups get stuck, coach them toward Jesus's steps: "What if you tried talking to them one-on-one first?" "What if you got a couple people to help brainstorm solutions?" Don't solve it for them.

Celebrate breakthrough moments when the difficult person starts cooperating: "Look how much better this works when everyone's working together!" Help them notice the change from conflict to collaboration.

Watch For: The moment when someone chooses to have a patient conversation with the difficult person instead of getting frustrated, this is the physical representation of Jesus's private conversation step.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when people were working against each other versus when everyone was cooperating? Which approaches actually helped the difficult person become part of the solution? This is exactly what Jesus was teaching, the goal is to get everyone working together, and sometimes that requires patient conversation and group support to help someone change their approach.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when someone in your group is making choices that hurt others, the goal is to help them change and be restored to good relationships, not just to get them in trouble. Jesus gave us a process, private conversation first, then small group help, then community involvement if needed.

This doesn't mean you ignore harmful behavior or let people walk all over you. It means you care enough about both the person and the group to address problems in a way that could actually lead to positive change.

The amazing result is that when we follow Jesus's process, people can learn to make better choices and relationships can be healed instead of just broken. Even when someone has to step away from the group for a while, the door is always open for them to come back when they're ready to treat others well.

This Week's Challenge

This week, if someone's behavior bothers you, try Jesus's first step: talk to them privately before telling anyone else. Use words like "I noticed..." or "I felt hurt when..." and focus on helping them understand rather than proving you're right. See what happens when your goal is restoration instead of winning.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, help us to care about people the way you do, wanting them to make good choices and be part of your family. When someone hurts us or others, help us to have conversations that lead to healing instead of just getting them in trouble. Give us courage to speak up and wisdom to do it with love. Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that God wants everyone in His family, even when they make wrong choices, and we try to help people learn to make better choices.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

If Kids Don't Understand

Compare helping someone make better choices to helping a friend learn to share toys, then ask "How do we help without being mean?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's love and family. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "We Are Family in God's House," or "God's Love Is So Wonderful." Use movements: point to friends during "family" lyrics, spread arms wide during "love" lyrics, march in place during upbeat parts.

Great singing, everyone! I love how you showed God's love with your movements. Now let's sit in our story horseshoe because we're going to hear about how Jesus wants everyone to be in God's family, even when they make wrong choices.

2. Bible Story Time (5, 7 minutes)

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

Animated Delivery: Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound gentle and caring when you're Jesus, sound worried when talking about lost sheep, sound happy when talking about finding them.

Today we're going to meet a shepherd who loved his sheep very much.

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

This shepherd had one hundred sheep, that's a lot! Every day he took care of them and made sure they were safe and happy.

[Count on your fingers and look amazed]

One evening, the shepherd was counting his sheep before bedtime: "One, two, three..." But when he got to the end, something was wrong! One sheep was missing!

[Look worried and scan around the room]

The shepherd could have said, "Oh well, I still have ninety-nine sheep. That's enough." But he didn't say that. Do you know why? Because he loved every single sheep!

[Move to center, speak with determination]

So the shepherd left the ninety-nine sheep in a safe place and went looking for the one lost sheep. He looked everywhere!

[Pretend to search, looking behind imaginary rocks]

And when he found that little lost sheep, he was SO happy! He picked it up gently and carried it home, singing with joy!

Matthew 18:14 (NIV)

"In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Jesus told this story to show that God loves every person in His family. God doesn't want anyone to be lost or left out. Yes!

[Move to center, speak like a wise teacher]

Then Jesus taught his friends what to do when someone in God's family makes wrong choices that hurt other people.

[Hold up one finger]

First, Jesus said, "Go talk to them by yourself. Tell them what they did wrong and help them understand."

[Hold up two fingers]

If that doesn't work, take one or two friends with you to help explain why the wrong choice hurt people.

[Hold up three fingers]

If they still won't listen, tell the grown-ups or the whole group so everyone can help them understand.

[Speak gently]

And if they still keep making wrong choices? Sometimes they need to step away from the group for a while to think about their choices. But God never stops loving them!

[Move closer to the children]

Sometimes at school, a friend might be mean or not share or say hurtful words. When that happens, you can talk to them nicely and say, "That hurt my feelings" or "That wasn't kind."

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

Jesus teaches us to be patient and keep loving people even when they mess up, because God wants everyone to learn to make good choices and be part of His family!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand together. I'm going to give each pair one question to talk about. You'll have about one minute to share your ideas. There are no wrong answers, just tell each other 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 lost sheep felt when the shepherd found it?
 2. Why do you think the shepherd left all the other sheep to look for just one?
 3. When someone is mean to you, what makes you feel better?
 4. What's the difference between being mean back and trying to help someone?
-

5. Why did Jesus say to talk to someone by yourself first?

6. When might you need a grown-up to help solve a problem?

7. How do you show someone you still care about them even when they make wrong choices?

8. What would happen if everyone just ignored it when someone was being mean?

9. How can you help a friend learn to make better choices?

10. Why does God want everyone in His family?

11. What does it mean to be patient with someone?

12. When someone hurts your feelings, what can you say to them?

13. How do you know if someone really wants to change?

14. What makes you want to do better when you mess up?

15. Why is it hard to be kind to someone who was mean to you?

16. How can friends help each other make good choices?

17. What did you learn about God from the sheep story?

18. How can you pray for someone who makes wrong choices?

19. What would happen if the shepherd just forgot about the lost sheep?

20. How can you be like Jesus when someone hurts you?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Choose songs about kindness and helping others. Suggestions: "Kindness Is," "Love One Another," or "Helper Song." Include movements: gentle hand gestures during "kindness" lyrics, helping motions during "helper" lyrics, hugging motions during "love" lyrics.

Beautiful singing! I can see you really understand how to show love and kindness. Now let's sit quietly for prayer and thank God for His love.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for loving every person in your family...

[Pause]

Help us to be kind to friends who make wrong choices and to help them learn to do better instead of being mean back to them...

[Pause]

Help us remember that you never give up on anyone and that you want everyone to be part of your family...

[Pause]

Thank you for being patient with us when we mess up and for always loving us no matter what. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about helping friends make good choices. Examples: "Help me be kind when someone is mean" or "Thank you for loving everyone."

Remember, God wants everyone in His family and He never gives up on anyone. This week, when someone makes a wrong choice, you can help them learn to do better by being patient and kind. Have a wonderful week!

Enemies at Peace

When God Steps In, How do we hold hope together with ongoing conflict?

Proverbs 16:1-15

Instructor Preparation

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

The Passage

Proverbs 16:1-15 (NIV)

1 To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue. 2 All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord. 3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. 4 The Lord works out everything to its proper end, even the wicked for a day of disaster. 5 The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished. 6 Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided. 7 When the Lord is pleased with anyone's life, he causes their enemies to make peace with them. 8 Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. 9 In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps. 10 The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth does not betray justice. 11 Honest scales and balances belong to the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making. 12 Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness. 13 Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value the one who speaks what is right. 14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it. 15 When a king's face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring.

Context

This passage comes from the heart of the Book of Proverbs, which focuses on practical wisdom for daily living. Written primarily by King Solomon and compiled during Israel's monarchy, these proverbs address how to navigate relationships, authority, and moral choices in a world where God's sovereignty meets human responsibility. The surrounding chapters emphasize the contrast between human planning and divine control.

Verse 7 appears within a section that repeatedly highlights God's active role in human affairs, from establishing plans (verse 3) to weighing motives (verse 2) to determining outcomes (verse 4). The immediate context emphasizes that living rightly before God produces unexpected results that go beyond human ability to achieve through effort alone.

The Big Idea

When God is pleased with how we live, He can cause even our enemies to make peace with us, this is divine intervention, not merely human diplomacy.

This doesn't mean righteous living guarantees the end of all conflict, but it points to God's power to transform hostile relationships in ways that surprise us. The focus should be on pleasing God rather than managing our enemies, trusting that He may choose to intervene in relationships we thought were beyond repair.

Theological Core

- **Divine Causation.** God actively "causes" enemies to make peace, this is not passive permission but intentional divine action that breaks the normal pattern of ongoing hostility.
 - **Conditional Hope.** The transformation happens "when the Lord is pleased" with a person's life, connecting relational breakthrough to righteous living that honors God.
 - **Unexpected Reconciliation.** Enemies making peace defies natural expectations, pointing to God's power to change hearts and circumstances beyond human ability.
 - **Focus Shift.** Rather than concentrating on enemy management, we're called to focus on living in ways that please God, trusting Him with the relational outcomes.
-

Age Group Overview

What Each Age Group Learns

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- God can transform enemy relationships through divine intervention, not just human effort
 - Proverbs contain wisdom principles with exceptions, righteous people sometimes face unrelenting opposition
 - Focusing on pleasing God rather than managing enemies may produce unexpected relational fruit
 - Persistent conflict doesn't necessarily indicate God's displeasure with our lives
-

Grades 4, 6

- When we live to please God, He might change our enemies' hearts toward us
 - Our job is to choose right actions, God's job is to handle the relationship results
 - Mean people aren't permanently stuck being mean, God can work on their hearts
 - It's okay to feel frustrated with bullies while still choosing to do what's right
-

Grades 1, 3

- God can make mean people be nice when we make God happy
 - God is powerful and can change hearts
 - We can pray for people who are mean to us
-

Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Promise vs. Proverb.** Don't present this as a guaranteed formula, "be good and enemies will always become friends." This is wisdom literature describing what often happens, not a universal promise that ignores righteous people who faced lifelong persecution.
-

- **Victim Blaming.** Avoid suggesting that ongoing conflict proves someone isn't living righteously enough. Sometimes righteous living actually increases opposition from those who reject God's ways.
- **Human Effort Focus.** Don't make this about techniques for winning over enemies. The emphasis is on God's causative action when He chooses to intervene, not on manipulation strategies.
- **Timing Assumptions.** Resist implying this happens quickly or on our timeline. God's intervention in enemy relationships may come after years or even generations, and sometimes not in ways we recognize.

Handling Hard Questions

"What about Christians who live righteously but still get persecuted and killed?"

That's exactly why we need to understand this as a proverb, not a promise. Proverbs describe what usually happens, but they acknowledge exceptions. Stephen was stoned, Paul was imprisoned, and Jesus was crucified, all while living lives that perfectly pleased God. This proverb points to God's power to transform enemy relationships when He chooses to, but it doesn't guarantee He always will. Sometimes God allows persecution for purposes we don't understand, and that doesn't mean those people failed to please Him.

"How do I know if I'm really living in a way that pleases God?"

Look at the surrounding verses in Proverbs 16, committing your plans to the Lord, pursuing righteousness over gain, speaking truthfully, acting with love and faithfulness. It's not about perfection but about the general direction of your life honoring God. The goal isn't to earn enemy transformation but to live faithfully regardless of how others respond. When our motivation is right, we can trust God with the outcomes.

"Should I expect my enemies to become friends if I'm living right?"

Expect God to be at work, but don't demand specific outcomes or timelines. Sometimes "making peace" might mean they stop actively opposing you rather than becoming close friends. Sometimes it happens

through changed circumstances rather than changed hearts. Focus on faithfulness to God and let Him surprise you with how He might work in relationships you thought were beyond repair.

The One Thing to Remember

God can break through enemy hostility in ways we never imagined, so focus on pleasing Him rather than managing them.

Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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

Your Main Job Today

Help students wrestle with the tension between hoping for enemy transformation while living faithfully through ongoing conflict. Guide them to see that pleasing God is the goal, with enemy reconciliation as a possible divine bonus rather than something they can control or earn.

The Tension to Frame

How do we hold hope for enemy reconciliation together with the reality that righteous people sometimes face lifelong persecution? Does persistent enmity indicate we're not pleasing God enough?

Discussion Facilitation Tips

- Validate their experiences with bullies, difficult family members, or social conflicts that haven't improved despite their efforts
 - Honor the complexity that righteous living sometimes increases opposition rather than decreasing it
 - Let students wrestle with the tension between divine sovereignty and human responsibility rather than offering quick answers
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1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

You've probably had that person, maybe a classmate who makes fun of you, a family member who constantly criticizes, a neighbor who seems to look for reasons to complain about you. You know, that person where every interaction feels like walking through a minefield. You've tried being nice, you've tried ignoring them, you've tried standing up for yourself. Nothing changes.

And well-meaning people probably tell you things like "Kill them with kindness" or "Just pray for them." You nod politely, but inside you're thinking, "Easy for you to say, you don't deal with them every day." The advice feels hollow because you've actually tried it, and this person is still making your life miserable.

Today we're looking at a verse that at first glance might sound like more of that simplified advice, except it's not about your technique or effort. It's about what God might choose to do when you stop focusing on changing your enemies and start focusing on something entirely different.

As we read, I want you to notice two things: First, who is doing the action in this verse, who's making the peace happen? And second, what's the precondition that might lead to this transformation? The answer to both questions might surprise you.

Let's open our Bibles to Proverbs 16, verse 7, and start reading silently from verse 1.

2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

Managing Silent Reading: Walk quietly around the room. Help with any difficult words like "detests" or "oracle." Watch for early finishers and give them time to reread verse 7 specifically. Let them wrestle with the apparent simplicity of the promise alongside the complexity of their actual experiences with difficult people.

As You Read, Think About:

- What pattern do you notice about who's in control throughout these verses?
 - What does it mean for the Lord to be "pleased" with someone's life?
 - How does verse 7 fit with your experience of difficult relationships?
 - What questions or doubts does this verse raise for you?
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Proverbs 16:1-15 (NIV)

1 To humans belong the plans of the heart, but from the Lord comes the proper answer of the tongue. 2 All a person's ways seem pure to them, but motives are weighed by the Lord. 3 Commit to the Lord whatever you do, and he will establish your plans. 4 The Lord works out everything to its proper end, even the wicked for a day of disaster. 5 The Lord detests all the proud of heart. Be sure of this: They will not go unpunished. 6 Through love and faithfulness sin is atoned for; through the fear of the Lord evil is avoided. 7 When the Lord is pleased with anyone's life, he causes their enemies to make peace with them. 8 Better a little with righteousness than much gain with injustice. 9 In their hearts humans plan their course, but the Lord establishes their steps. 10 The lips of a king speak as an oracle, and his mouth does not betray justice. 11 Honest scales and balances belong to the Lord; all the weights in the bag are of his making. 12 Kings detest wrongdoing, for a throne is established through righteousness. 13 Kings take pleasure in honest lips; they value the one who speaks what is right. 14 A king's wrath is a messenger of death, but the wise will appease it. 15 When a king's face brightens, it means life; his favor is like a rain cloud in spring.

3. Discussion (15, 18 minutes)

Oral Reading (2, 3 minutes)

Selecting Readers: Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the longer sections, and consider reading verse 7 yourself to emphasize its importance.

Reader 1: Verses 1-5 (Human planning vs. divine control) **Reader 2:** Verses 6-9 (Righteousness and divine action) **Reader 3:** Verses 10-15 (Authority and justice)

Listen for the tension between what humans try to control and what God actually controls. This isn't just information, it's wisdom about power and relationships.

Small Group Question Generation (3, 4 minutes)

Setup: Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes for groups to generate 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with "What surprised you most?" or "What doesn't match your experience?"

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 or confused about. For example, "Why does God sometimes let good people get persecuted?" or "How do you know if God is pleased with your life?" You've got three minutes. Go ahead and start talking.

Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

Remember: Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Let them wrestle with the tensions this passage creates.

Collecting Questions: Write student questions on the board, look for themes around promises vs. reality, enemy reconciliation, and pleasing God. Start with questions most students will connect with emotionally.

Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What specific action does God take in verse 7? Who's doing the work of making peace?"
 - "How does 'the Lord is pleased with anyone's life' connect to the other verses about righteousness and faithfulness?"
 - "What's the difference between God causing enemies to make peace and us trying to win them over?"
 - "How do we reconcile this with examples of righteous people who faced lifelong persecution?"
 - "What does it look like to focus on pleasing God rather than managing our enemies?"
 - "When have you seen someone's enemies surprisingly change their attitude toward them?"
 - "What would happen if we acted like this was a guarantee versus a proverb describing what often occurs?"
 - "Why might living righteously sometimes actually increase opposition from certain people?"
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Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Throughout this chapter, God is the one establishing, weighing, causing, and working things out. Verse 7 isn't a technique for enemy management, it's a description of divine intervention. When our lives genuinely please God, He might choose to transform relationships

we thought were hopeless. The focus shift changes everything: from "How do I get my enemy to like me?" to "How do I live in a way that honors God regardless of how they respond?"

4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where are you trying to manage difficult relationships through your own effort? Maybe it's a toxic friend who drains you, a family member who criticizes everything you do, someone at school who seems determined to make you miserable, or even conflicts you see playing out online or in your community.

Real Issues This Connects To

- A teacher who seems to have it out for you no matter how hard you try
 - Extended family conflicts where certain relatives always cause drama
 - Friend group dynamics where someone consistently undermines or excludes you
 - Social media conflicts where people attack your beliefs or values
 - Racial, political, or social justice tensions in your community or school
 - Decisions about how to respond when standing up for your faith creates opposition
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Facilitation: Let students share examples without rushing to fix them. Acknowledge that some situations genuinely call for wisdom about boundaries and safety. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice about how to handle every situation.

Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone unexpectedly change their attitude toward a person they used to dislike?"
 - "What would help you focus more on pleasing God and less on managing difficult people's opinions of you?"
 - "How do you discern between wisdom about setting boundaries and hope for enemy reconciliation?"
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- "What's the difference between naive optimism about difficult people and wise hope in God's power to transform relationships?"
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5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: God can break through enemy hostility in ways you never imagined, so focus on pleasing Him rather than managing them. This doesn't mean being naive about genuinely dangerous people or pretending conflict doesn't hurt. It means shifting your energy from trying to control others' responses to living faithfully regardless of how they respond.

This week, pay attention to where you're spending mental and emotional energy trying to manage difficult relationships. Experiment with redirecting that energy toward "What would please God in this situation?" instead of "How can I get this person to treat me better?" Don't be surprised if this shift creates space for God to work in ways you didn't expect.

You asked excellent questions today and wrestled with real tensions instead of accepting easy answers. That kind of thinking honors God and prepares you to navigate complex relationships with both wisdom and hope. Keep asking hard questions, that's how faith grows deeper.

Grades 4, 6

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

Your Main Job Today

Help kids understand that their job is to please God through right choices, while God's job is to handle the relationship results, including possibly changing bullies' or difficult people's hearts.

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

Say: "Sometimes God changes hearts quickly, sometimes slowly, and sometimes in ways we don't see. But God's power to change people is always bigger than the meanness we face."

1. Opening (5 minutes)

Raise your hand if you've ever had someone at school who seemed determined to make your life miserable. Maybe they made fun of your clothes, excluded you from games, or said mean things about you to other people. Keep your hand up if you tried really, really hard to get them to like you by being extra nice.

Now here's a harder question. Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where part of you wanted to get revenge or be mean back, but another part of you knew that wasn't right. Part of you thinks, "They deserve to be treated the way they treat me," but another part thinks, "I know I should be kind even when they're not." That feeling is confusing, isn't it?

It makes total sense to want people to treat you well, and it's normal to feel frustrated when they don't, even when you're trying your best to be good to them. Your feelings are completely valid, it really does hurt when people are mean to you for no good reason.

This reminds me of movies like "Wonder" or "Inside Out" where characters deal with bullies or difficult people. In "Wonder," Auggie tries so hard to fit in and get people to like him, but some kids are mean no matter what he does. The tricky part is figuring out what to do when being nice doesn't seem to work.

The tricky part is figuring out how to keep doing what's right even when the other person doesn't change, and whether we should give up hope that they might become different. It feels like we have to choose between being smart about protecting ourselves and believing that mean people might actually become nice people.

Today we're going to hear about something pretty amazing that happens when we focus on making God happy instead of trying to control whether difficult people like us. This story shows us that God can do things we never expected with people we thought would never change. Let's find out what happened.

What to Expect: Kids will likely share specific examples of bullies or difficult siblings. Acknowledge them briefly with "That sounds really hard" and keep momentum moving toward the story.

2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there was a very wise king named Solomon who noticed something amazing about how God works in the world. He watched people's lives carefully and saw patterns that most people missed.

King Solomon noticed that some people spent all their time and energy trying to get their enemies to like them. They would change how they dressed, change how they talked, even change their friends, all to try to win over people who were mean to them. It was exhausting, and most of the time, it didn't even work.

But then Solomon noticed something completely different happening with other people. These people stopped worrying so much about their enemies and started focusing on something else entirely. They focused on living in a way that made God smile.

Imagine being in a situation where everyone around you is choosing to be mean, dishonest, or selfish, but you decide to be kind, truthful, and generous anyway, not to impress people, but because you know it makes God happy. Think about how brave and difficult that would be, especially when no one seems to appreciate it.

And then Solomon saw something that absolutely amazed him. When people lived this way, when they truly focused on pleasing God instead of managing their enemies, something miraculous would happen. Their enemies would start treating them differently. Not because of anything the person did to manipulate them, but because God was working on the enemies' hearts.

One day, Solomon wrote down this incredible truth he had discovered. He wanted everyone to know about God's amazing power to change relationships. He was so excited about this pattern that he wrote it down as a proverb for all future generations to remember.

People gathered around to hear what this wise king had learned about God's power. They leaned in close because they had all experienced difficult relationships and wondered if there was any hope for change.

The crowd included people who had been bullied, people whose own family members were mean to them, people whose neighbors caused them problems, and people whose coworkers made their lives miserable. Everyone wanted to know if there was any way these relationships could ever get better.

Solomon looked at all these hurting people and smiled. He had good news for them, news about God's power that would give them hope they hadn't felt in a long time. He cleared his throat and prepared to share what God had shown him.

The crowd grew quiet. You could have heard a pin drop. Everyone was waiting to hear whether their difficult relationships were hopeless or if God might be able to do something they had never imagined

possible.

And then Solomon spoke these powerful words that would change how people thought about enemies forever:

Proverbs 16:7 (NIV)

"When the Lord is pleased with anyone's life, he causes their enemies to make peace with them."

The crowd gasped. Did you hear what Solomon said? God can cause enemies to make peace! Not "maybe they'll change" or "try harder to be nice to them." God has the power to actually change their hearts and make them want peace instead of conflict.

But notice something really important about what Solomon discovered. He didn't say, "When you try really hard to please your enemies, they might be nicer." He said something totally different: "When the Lord is pleased with your life, he causes enemies to make peace."

This was a complete game-changer. Instead of focusing all their energy on trying to win over difficult people, they could focus on living in a way that made God happy. Instead of worrying about controlling how others felt about them, they could trust God to handle the relationship part.

The wise king explained that when we live with love, kindness, honesty, and faithfulness, not to manipulate others, but because that's what pleases God, amazing things can happen. God might choose to work on our enemies' hearts in ways we could never accomplish through our own efforts.

People started sharing stories of times they had seen this happen. A neighbor who had been hostile for years suddenly started being friendly. A classmate who used to bully someone became their protector. A family member who had been mean and critical started showing kindness and support.

What made these transformations so amazing was that they happened when people stopped trying to control the relationship and started focusing on pleasing God instead. It was like God was saying, "You focus on living right, and I'll take care of changing hearts."

From that day forward, when people faced mean bullies, difficult family members, or hostile neighbors, they remembered Solomon's wisdom. They learned to ask, "What would please God in this situation?" instead of "How can I get this person to like me?"

Sometimes in our lives, we face people who seem determined to make us miserable, kids at school who say mean things, siblings who pick on us, or even adults who are unfair to us. It's tempting to spend all our energy trying to win them over or get revenge.

What Solomon discovered is that when we focus on making God happy through our choices, being kind when others are mean, telling the truth when others lie, helping when others hurt, God can do something amazing. He can actually change those difficult people's hearts toward us.

The incredible truth is that God's power to transform relationships is bigger than any meanness we face. When we live to please Him, we open the door for Him to work miracles in our relationships.

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

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

Question 1: The Feelings

Imagine you have a classmate who's been really mean to you for weeks. They make fun of your lunch, exclude you from games, and say things behind your back. You've tried being nice, but nothing changes. How would you feel if someone told you to stop worrying about winning them over and focus on making God happy instead? What would that feel like to hear?

Listen For: "Frustrated," "confused," "like it's not fair", affirm: "Those feelings make complete sense. It's hard to let go when someone's hurting you."

Question 2: The Power

In our story, God was the one who "caused" enemies to make peace. What's the difference between God changing someone's heart and us trying to convince them to like us? Why do you think God's way might work when our way doesn't?

If They Say: "God is stronger than we are", respond: "Exactly! And God can see and work on hearts in ways we never could."

Question 3: The Focus

Solomon discovered that focusing on pleasing God works better than focusing on pleasing enemies. What do you think it looks like to focus on pleasing God when someone is being mean to you? What kinds of choices would you make?

Connect: "Those choices take real courage. This is exactly what gives God the opportunity to work on people's hearts."

Question 4: The Hope

If you really believed that God could change your worst enemy's heart, how would that change how you felt about going to school tomorrow? What would be different about facing difficult people if you knew God was working on them?

If They Say: "I'd feel less scared" or "I might feel hopeful", affirm: "That hope can give you courage to keep doing what's right even when it's hard."

You've all shared some really wise thoughts about how hard it is to deal with difficult people and how amazing it would be if God could change their hearts. Now we're going to do an activity that shows us how God's way of handling enemies is completely different from our way.

4. Activity: Heart Bridge (8 minutes)

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

Purpose

This activity reinforces that God can build bridges between enemies by having kids physically experience the difference between human effort to reach across hostility versus divine intervention that changes hearts. Success looks like kids discovering that transformation happens when both sides change, not just when one side tries harder.

Instructions to Class(3 minutes)

We're going to play "Heart Bridge." I need you to count off by twos, ones and twos. All the ones go to this side of the room, all the twos go to that side. You're now standing on opposite sides of a canyon,

and your groups don't like each other.

Here's your challenge: the ones group is trying to reach the twos group to make peace, but every step you take toward them, they must take a step back to stay away from you. Twos, your job is to avoid the ones, you don't trust them and you don't want to make peace. You can move anywhere in your half of the room.

But here's the twist: I am going to be God in this activity. At some point, I'm going to whisper to some people in the twos group, and when I do, their hearts will change and they'll start moving toward the ones instead of away. When that happens, pay attention to what becomes possible.

We're doing this because it's exactly like what Solomon discovered about enemies making peace. Sometimes the problem isn't that we're not trying hard enough, sometimes we need God to work on the other person's heart before real peace is possible.

During the Activity(4 minutes)

For the first minute, let the ones group chase and the twos group avoid. They'll quickly realize that trying harder doesn't work when the other side doesn't want peace. Watch for frustration and acknowledgment that this feels hopeless.

Around the 90-second mark, they'll start to feel the futility. The ones group is getting tired of chasing, and the twos group is getting tired of running. This is when human effort reaches its limit and they're ready for a different solution.

Now start quietly whispering to twos group members: "Your heart is changing. You're starting to want peace instead of conflict. Start slowly moving toward the ones group." Do this with one person at a time over about 30 seconds.

Watch for the moment when a twos group member stops running away and starts walking toward the ones group. This is the physical representation of divine heart transformation. Celebrate this: "Look! Their heart is changing! They want peace now!"

Once about half the twos group has "changed hearts," let them experience what it feels like when both sides want peace. The activity should end with groups coming together, able to connect because both sides desire reconciliation.

Watch For: The moment when someone stops running away and starts approaching, this is the physical representation of God changing an enemy's heart toward peace.

Debrief(1 minute)

What did you notice about how it felt when you were trying really hard to make peace but the other side kept running away, versus when their hearts changed and they started wanting peace too? The first way was exhausting and hopeless. The second way felt like a miracle! That's exactly what Solomon was talking about, God can change hearts in ways our effort never could.

5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what we learned today: when we focus on making God happy through our choices, He might choose to change our enemies' hearts toward us. We can't control or force this to happen, but we can trust that God's power to transform people is bigger than any meanness we face.

This doesn't mean you should be unsafe around dangerous people or pretend that bullying doesn't hurt. It means you can choose to be kind, honest, and faithful because that pleases God, and then trust Him to work on difficult people's hearts in His own timing and way.

The amazing result is that sometimes, when we're not even trying to control it, God surprises us by changing people we thought would never change. Bullies become protectors, mean family members become supportive, and hostile neighbors become friends.

This Week's Challenge

When you face a difficult person this week, try asking yourself "What would please God right now?" instead of "How can I get this person to like me?" Practice doing the right thing because it makes God happy, and watch to see if God might surprise you by working on their heart.

Closing Prayer (Optional)

Dear God, thank you for having the power to change people's hearts, even when they're mean to us. Help us focus on making you happy with our choices instead of trying to control how others treat us. When people are difficult, give us courage to do what's right anyway, and surprise us by

working on their hearts. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Grades 1, 3

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

Your Main Job Today

Help little ones understand that God can make mean people nice when we do things that make God happy.

Movement & Formation Plan

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

Compare God changing hearts to a magic eraser that can clean up mean attitudes, then ask "What makes God happy when someone is mean to you?"

1. Opening Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in a circle

Select a song about God's power or love. Suggestions: "My God Is So Big," "Jesus Loves Me," or "God Is So Good." Use movements: spread arms wide during "so big" or "so good," point to hearts during "loves me," and clap hands during upbeat sections.

Great singing! I love how loud you sang about God being so big and powerful. Now come sit in our horseshoe shape because I have an amazing story to tell you about God's power. This story is about how God can make mean people become nice people!

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 amazed when you talk about God's power, sound gentle when talking about making God happy.

Today we're going to meet a very wise king named Solomon. He watched people and learned amazing things!

[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]

King Solomon saw people who had mean friends, mean neighbors, and mean bullies. These poor people tried and tried to make the mean people like them. They were so tired!

[Use tired, sad facial expression]

Solomon felt sad watching them work so hard when the mean people stayed mean. He wondered if there was a better way. And you know what? God showed him something amazing!

[Walk to other side of horseshoe, brighten up]

Solomon saw other people who did something totally different. Instead of trying to make mean people happy, they tried to make God happy! They were kind, they shared, they told the truth.

[Move to center, speak with excitement]

And then the most amazing thing happened! God started working on those mean people's hearts. He made them want to be nice instead of mean!

[Move to side, speak with amazement]

The bullies stopped being bullies! The mean neighbors became friendly! The grumpy people started smiling! Solomon couldn't believe what he was seeing!

Proverbs 16:7 (NIV)

"When the Lord is pleased with anyone's life, he causes their enemies to make peace with them."

[Pause and look around at each child]

Do you think Solomon was excited to discover this? Yes! He learned that God has the power to change mean people's hearts when we make God happy!

[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]

But here's the best part, this wasn't just for those people long ago. God can still change hearts today! God is just as powerful now as He was then!

[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]

When someone is mean to you at school or at home, God sees it. And when you choose to be kind anyway because that makes God happy, God can work on that mean person's heart!

[Stop walking and face the children directly]

You don't have to try to make bullies like you. You don't have to worry about changing mean people. That's God's job! Your job is to do what makes God smile!

[Speak with excitement]

And sometimes, surprise!, God will make that mean person want to be nice instead! Their heart will change, and they'll want to be your friend instead of being mean!

[Pause dramatically]

God can change any heart! Even the meanest bully, even the grumpiest grown-up, even the most selfish kid in your class. God's power is bigger than their meanness!

[Speak directly to the children]

Sometimes kids at school are mean, sometimes brothers and sisters are not nice, sometimes even grown-ups have bad attitudes. But you can choose to share your toys, use kind words, and help others anyway!

[Move closer to the children]

When someone pushes you, you can choose not to push back. When someone says mean words, you can choose to say nice words. When someone won't share, you can still choose to share!

[Speak warmly and encouragingly]

God loves it when you choose to be kind even when others are mean. And God can surprise you by making those mean people want to be nice to you!

3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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

Find a partner and stand together somewhere in the room. I'm going to give each pair a question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think! You'll have about one minute to talk together.

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

Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you feel when someone is mean to you?
 2. What's something you do that makes God happy?
 3. Have you ever seen a mean person become nice?
 4. What would you do if a bully was mean to you?
 5. Why do you think God can change people's hearts?
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6. What makes you want to be nice to someone?

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

8. What's the nicest thing someone ever did for you?

9. How can we be kind at school?

10. What would happen if everyone was nice to each other?

11. Who helps you when someone is mean?

12. How do you think God feels when we're kind?

13. What's something kind you could do tomorrow?

14. Why should we pray for people who are mean?

15. What does it mean that God can change hearts?

16. How do we know God loves us?

17. What's your favorite way to be kind?

18. How can we make God smile?

19. What if someone doesn't want to be your friend?

20. How is God stronger than mean people?

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

4. Closing Song (2, 3 minutes)

Formation: Standing in straight lines facing forward

Select a song about kindness or God's love. Suggestions: "Be Kind to One Another," "Jesus Loves the Little Children," or "Love One Another." Use movements: hug yourself during "love," reach out hands during "kind," and point up during "Jesus."

Beautiful singing about being kind! Now let's sit down in our rows for our prayer time. We're going to ask God to help us be kind and to work on mean people's hearts.

5. Closing Prayer (1, 2 minutes)

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

Dear God, thank you for being so powerful that you can change mean people's hearts.

[Pause]

Help us choose to be kind, share our toys, and use nice words even when others are mean to us.

[Pause]

We want to make you happy with our choices. Please work on the hearts of people who are mean and make them want to be nice.

[Pause]

Thank you that your love is bigger and stronger than any meanness. Help us remember that you can change any heart. In Jesus's name, Amen.

Alternative, Popcorn Prayer: If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about God changing hearts. Examples: "God, help the mean kids at school" or "God, make bullies want to be nice."

Remember, when someone is mean to you this week, you can choose to be kind because that makes God happy. And God might surprise you by making that mean person nice! Have a wonderful week!

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# Choose Control

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*Active Restraint, How do we pursue justice without anger as fuel?*

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**Psalm 37:1-11**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**Psalm 37:1-11 (NIV)**

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*1 Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. 3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteous deeds shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.*

*7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil. 9 For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.*

## Context

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This psalm addresses a community watching wicked people prosper while righteous people suffer. It's written as wisdom literature, teaching practical responses to the age-old problem of injustice. David

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faces the frustration of seeing evil succeed temporarily while good people wait for vindication that seems slow in coming.

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The immediate context builds a contrast between two ways of responding to injustice, fretting, envying, and becoming angry versus trusting, doing good, and waiting patiently. Each response leads to different outcomes. The psalm moves systematically through emotions (fretting, anger, wrath) and their consequences, offering concrete alternatives that produce different results.

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## The Big Idea

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**Active restraint from anger prevents the evil that flows from unchecked emotion, requiring intentional turning away rather than emotional suppression.**

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This isn't about stuffing feelings or accepting injustice passively. The Hebrew words suggest deliberate choice, refraining requires effort, turning demands direction, and avoiding fretting means redirecting mental energy. The complexity lies in distinguishing between righteous anger that motivates justice and anxious anger that produces evil.

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## Theological Core

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- **Active restraint requires intentional choice.** The verbs in verse 8 are commands for deliberate action, refrain, turn, don't fret, indicating that controlling anger is an active discipline, not passive avoidance.
  - **Unchecked anger produces evil outcomes.** The psalm clearly states that fretting "leads only to evil," warning that even justified anger can morph into harmful action without conscious restraint.
  - **Trust provides alternative energy for justice.** Rather than anger fueling response to injustice, the psalm offers trust in God's timing and justice as sustainable motivation for right action.
  - **Restraint serves prevention, not acceptance.** Refraining from anger prevents evil consequences while still allowing for appropriate response to wrongdoing through patient, strategic action guided by wisdom rather than emotion.
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## Age Group Overview

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# What Each Age Group Learns

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## Grades 7, 8 / Adult

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- Anger and wrath require active, intentional restraint rather than suppression or explosion
  - The distinction between righteous anger that motivates justice and anxious anger that produces evil
  - Trust in God's justice provides sustainable energy for pursuing righteousness without the destructive cycle of human wrath
  - Discernment skills for when to act on anger versus when to practice restraint for greater effectiveness
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## Grades 4, 6

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- Anger is a normal feeling, but our response to anger determines whether it helps or hurts
  - We have choices about what to do when we feel mad, we can pause, think, and choose our actions
  - Acting out of anger often makes problems worse instead of better
  - It's okay to feel upset about unfairness, but we can trust God to help us respond in ways that actually help
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## Grades 1, 3

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- God wants to help us when we feel angry
  - We can choose to stop and think instead of yelling, hitting, or being mean
  - God loves us and will help us make good choices even when we're upset
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Suppression versus restraint confusion.** Don't teach that anger itself is wrong or that feelings should be stuffed down. Active restraint means feeling the emotion while choosing wise action, not denying the emotion exists.

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- **Passivity in face of injustice.** Refraining from anger doesn't mean accepting wrongdoing or becoming passive. The psalm advocates for trust-based action rather than wrath-driven reaction, which can be more effective for actual justice.

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- **All anger is equal mistake.** Not all anger leads to evil, the psalm specifically addresses fretting and wrath that spiral into obsession and revenge. Righteous anger that motivates protective action or justice-seeking can be appropriate when guided by wisdom.

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- **Immediate gratification expectation.** The psalm's context is waiting for God's justice while wicked people temporarily prosper. Don't promise that restraint will immediately solve problems, but rather that it prevents making situations worse through evil consequences.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What about righteous anger? Didn't Jesus get angry?"**

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Excellent question. The psalm warns against fretting anger that leads to evil, not all anger. Jesus's anger in the temple was focused, purposeful, and aimed at protecting worship rather than personal revenge. The difference is motivation, anger that serves justice and protection versus anger that serves our ego or leads to harmful action. Righteous anger is brief, focused, and leads to constructive action. Destructive anger is ongoing, obsessive, and leads to harm.

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### **"How can we fight injustice without anger to motivate us?"**

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The psalm offers an alternative, trust in God's justice provides sustainable motivation for fighting injustice without the destructive consequences of wrath. Many effective justice movements have been driven by love, hope, and strategic thinking rather than anger. Anger burns out and often leads to harmful tactics that undermine the cause. Trust-based action can be more persistent and effective because it doesn't depend on emotional fuel that fluctuates.

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### **"Doesn't this just protect oppressors by making victims passive?"**

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Not at all. The psalm advocates for trust-based action rather than wrath-driven reaction. This can actually be more threatening to oppressors because it's sustainable, strategic, and less likely to provide them with justification for retaliation. History shows that movements combining righteous conviction with disciplined restraint often achieve more lasting change than those driven primarily by anger. The goal is effective justice, not emotional satisfaction.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Active restraint from anger prevents evil while opening space for trust-based action that can achieve real justice more effectively than wrath ever could.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the complex relationship between anger and justice, helping them discover when anger serves justice versus when it leads to evil. Focus on developing discernment skills rather than giving simple rules about anger.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we pursue justice without anger as fuel? Is restraint from anger a form of accepting injustice, or does it open better pathways to real change?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experience with injustice and anger, don't minimize what they've witnessed or felt
  - Honor the complexity of distinguishing between righteous and destructive anger rather than offering simplistic answers
  - Let them discover the distinction between feeling anger and acting on anger through guided exploration
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## 1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)

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Think about the last time you witnessed something genuinely unfair, maybe someone being bullied, maybe seeing privileged people escape consequences while others suffered, maybe watching news of injustice in the world. Feel that rise of anger in your chest? That heat? That urge to DO something about it right now? That anger makes perfect sense, injustice should make us angry.

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Now here's where it gets complicated. That anger can fuel action that brings real justice, or it can fuel action that makes everything worse. The tricky part is figuring out the difference in the moment when your heart is pounding and your mind is racing. Sometimes the thing that feels most satisfying to do is exactly the thing that backfires.

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Today we're looking at someone who faced this exact dilemma, watching wicked people succeed while good people suffered, feeling that rage at injustice, and getting some surprising advice about what to do with that anger. This isn't about stuffing your feelings or accepting wrongdoing. It's about something more strategic.

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As we read, pay attention to the progression of emotions the psalm describes and notice what the writer says anger actually accomplishes versus what we think it should accomplish. Also watch for the alternative energy source for pursuing justice, what motivation does the writer offer instead of anger?

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Open your Bibles to Psalm 37. We'll start by reading silently, then dig into what this ancient wisdom means for the injustices we face today.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult Hebrew concepts like "wrath" versus "anger." Watch for students who finish early, they can reread looking for emotional progression. Let them feel the tension between the psalm's advice and their natural instincts.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What specific emotions and actions does the psalm address?
  - Why might someone experiencing injustice struggle with the advice given here?
  - What alternative to anger-driven action does the psalmist propose?
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- How do you feel about the claim that fretting "leads only to evil"?
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### Psalm 37:1-11 (NIV)

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*1 Do not fret because of those who are evil or be envious of those who do wrong; 2 for like the grass they will soon wither, like green plants they will soon die away. 3 Trust in the Lord and do good; dwell in the land and enjoy safe pasture. 4 Take delight in the Lord, and he will give you the desires of your heart. 5 Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: 6 He will make your righteous deeds shine like the dawn, your vindication like the noonday sun.*

*7 Be still before the Lord and wait patiently for him; do not fret when people succeed in their ways, when they carry out their wicked schemes. 8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil. 9 For those who are evil will be destroyed, but those who hope in the Lord will inherit the land. 10 A little while, and the wicked will be no more; though you look for them, they will not be found. 11 But the meek will inherit the land and enjoy peace and prosperity.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. Let students pass if they're not comfortable. Choose confident readers for the emotional intensity of verses 7-8.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-4 (The initial problem and first response) **Reader 2:** Verses 5-7 (Trust and waiting themes) **Reader 3:** Verses 8-11 (The direct commands about anger and ultimate outcome)

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Listen for the emotional progression here, this isn't just advice, it's someone working through real anger about real injustice. Hear the struggle.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give exactly 3 minutes to develop 1-2 genuine questions about the passage. Walk between groups, listening for authentic curiosity. Help stuck groups with "What surprised you about the connection between anger and evil?"

Get into groups of three or four. Your job is to come up with one or two questions about what you just read, not questions you think you should ask, but questions you're actually curious about. Good questions might start with "Why does..." or "How can..." or "What if..." You have three minutes to discuss and pick the questions that represent genuine confusion or curiosity your group has about this passage.

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

**Remember:** Students drive with their questions while you facilitate deeper exploration. Guide discovery of the active restraint principle rather than lecturing about anger management.

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on the board and look for themes around anger, justice, timing, and action versus passivity.

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

- "What's the difference between 'refrain,' 'turn from,' and 'do not fret', are these the same action or different?"
  - "Why do you think the psalm connects anger specifically with evil rather than with justice or protection?"
  - "What's the difference between accepting injustice and refusing to let anger drive your response to injustice?"
  - "How would you distinguish between righteous anger and the destructive fretting described here?"
  - "What do you make of offering 'trust' as an alternative energy source for pursuing justice instead of anger?"
  - "When have you seen anger lead to evil even when the original anger was justified?"
  - "What would change about social justice movements if they followed this psalm's advice?"
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- "Why might active restraint from anger actually be more threatening to oppressors than explosive anger?"
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## Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? The psalm isn't saying anger itself is wrong, it's distinguishing between anger that serves us and anger that destroys us. Fretting anger becomes obsessive, feeding on itself and leading to evil action. But trust-based action is sustainable and strategic. The pattern is choosing our energy source: will we let anger drive us toward evil, or will trust drive us toward effective justice?

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## 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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Let's get real about your lives. Where do you see this tension between righteous anger and destructive fretting playing out? Think about school injustices, family conflicts, social media outrage, or larger social issues you care about. When does anger help and when does it hurt?

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## Real Issues This Connects To

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- Responding to bullying, when does confronting help versus when does it escalate the situation?
  - Family conflicts where someone gets away with unfair treatment of others
  - Friend group dynamics when someone consistently gets special treatment or escapes consequences
  - Social media responses to injustice, when does outrage help versus when does it become performative or harmful?
  - Systemic injustices like racism, poverty, or corruption where anger seems like the only appropriate response
  - Personal situations where you've been wronged and feel pressure to "get back" at someone
- 

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to solutions. Honor the complexity, some situations genuinely call for different responses. Focus on helping them develop discernment rather than blanket rules.

## Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone channel anger into effective action for justice?"
  - "What would help you distinguish between justified anger and destructive fretting in the moment when you're upset?"
  - "How do you discern when to act on anger versus when to practice restraint for strategic reasons?"
  - "What's the difference between sustainable motivation for justice and anger that burns out?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: active restraint from anger isn't about suppressing feelings or accepting injustice. It's about choosing your energy source for pursuing justice. Anger can be the spark that alerts you to wrongdoing, but trust provides the sustainable fuel for effective action. The goal isn't to stop feeling angry about injustice, the goal is to not let that anger lead you into evil.

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This week, pay attention to the progression from righteous anger to destructive fretting in your own life. Notice when anger serves justice and when it starts serving itself. Experiment with letting trust in ultimate justice sustain your action instead of letting anger drive it. See if trust-based responses are actually more effective than wrath-driven ones.

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You asked really insightful questions today about the complexity of anger and justice. Keep wrestling with these tensions, the ability to discern between constructive and destructive anger is one of the most important life skills you can develop. The world needs people who can fight injustice without becoming part of the evil they're fighting against.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

## Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that anger is a normal feeling but what we do with anger determines whether it helps or hurts, teaching them the difference between feeling mad and choosing to act mean.

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### **If Kids Ask "What if someone is being really unfair and I get angry?"**

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Say: "It's totally normal to feel angry when things are unfair. God gave us anger to help us notice problems. But we get to choose what to do with that anger, we can use it to help or let it make things worse."

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#### **1. Opening (5 minutes)**

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Raise your hand if you've ever felt really angry when something unfair happened. [Get hands up] Keep your hands up if you've ever done something when you were angry that you wished you could take back. [Acknowledge responses] Yeah, most of us have been there, feeling so mad that we said or did something that made the situation worse instead of better.

---

Now here's a harder question: have you ever been in a situation where part of you knew that yelling or getting revenge would feel really good in the moment, but another part of you wondered if it would actually help? Like when someone cuts in line and part of you wants to call them out loudly in front of everyone, but part of you knows that might just start a big argument?

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It's completely normal to feel confused about this because anger can feel so powerful and so right. When someone is being unfair, our bodies gear up to fight back, our hearts pound, our faces get hot, and we want to do something RIGHT NOW to make them stop. Those feelings make total sense, and they're not wrong feelings to have.

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This reminds me of that moment in Inside Out when Riley's emotions are all arguing about how to respond to something frustrating. Anger is convinced that yelling will solve the problem, but Joy is trying to think of another way. Or think about how in any superhero movie, the hero has to choose between getting revenge and doing what's actually right, revenge feels better, but it usually makes things worse.

---

The tricky part is figuring out the difference between using our anger to help solve problems and letting our anger create bigger problems. Sometimes when we're really upset about unfairness, the thing that feels most satisfying is exactly the thing that backfires on us and makes everything worse.

---

Today we're going to hear about someone who was watching really unfair things happen and getting angrier and angrier about it. He discovered something surprising about what anger actually accomplishes when we just let it take control. Let's find out what he learned about making smart choices when our hearts are pounding with anger.

**What to Expect:** Kids may share times they got in trouble for angry outbursts. Acknowledge briefly: "That's exactly what we're talking about," and keep moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

Long ago, there was a wise man named David who looked around at his world and saw something that made his blood boil. Bad people were getting away with terrible things. They were cheating, lying, hurting others, and instead of getting in trouble, they were getting richer and more powerful.

Meanwhile, good people, people who tried to do the right thing, people who helped others and told the truth, were having a really hard time. They were struggling while the mean people prospered. David watched this happening day after day, and it made him madder and madder.

Have you ever felt angry watching someone get away with being mean? That's exactly how David felt. His heart was pounding, his face was getting hot, and he wanted to DO something about it right now. He was tired of waiting for someone else to fix it. He wanted to take matters into his own hands.

Imagine what that would feel like, watching bullies succeed while kind people suffer. Your brain would be racing with ideas about how to get back at the mean people, how to make them pay for what they'd done. You might lie awake at night planning what you could do to even the score.

David was feeling all of this anger bubbling up inside him, and he started thinking obsessively about the unfairness. He couldn't stop thinking about it. His anger was turning into something that consumed his thoughts, what we call fretting. He was stuck in an angry spiral.

But then something happened. David realized that all this anger and fretting wasn't actually helping anyone. In fact, it was starting to make him think about doing things that weren't good. The anger that had started out being about justice was turning into something darker and more dangerous.

That's when David had an important realization, and he wrote it down so other people could learn from what he discovered. He realized that there's a big difference between feeling angry about unfairness and

letting that anger control what we do.

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David learned that anger left unchecked doesn't lead to justice, it leads to more problems. When we stay angry and keep obsessing about unfairness, it changes us in ways that aren't good. We start wanting revenge instead of wanting solutions.

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So David made a choice. Instead of letting his anger drive his actions, he decided to actively restrain it. Not ignore it, not pretend it wasn't there, but make a deliberate choice about what to do with it. He chose to turn away from wrath before it could turn him into someone he didn't want to be.

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Here's what David wrote down about what he learned:

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**Psalm 37:8 (NIV)**

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*8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil.*

David discovered that "refraining" means actively choosing to stop, not just waiting for the anger to go away on its own. "Turning from wrath" means deliberately choosing a different direction for your energy. And "not fretting" means refusing to let your mind get stuck in angry spirals about unfairness.

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The most important part is what David realized about where unchecked anger leads: "it leads only to evil." Not sometimes evil, not mostly evil, ONLY evil. When we let anger make our decisions for us, it doesn't lead to justice or solutions. It leads to more problems.

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But David didn't just tell people what NOT to do. He offered an alternative. Instead of letting anger be the fuel for fighting injustice, David suggested something much more powerful and much more sustainable: trusting God to handle justice while we focus on doing good.

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Here's the amazing thing David discovered: when we choose active restraint instead of revenge, when we choose trust instead of wrath, we don't become weak or passive. We become strategically powerful in a way that actually helps instead of making things worse.

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David learned that the people who practice this kind of active restraint, the people who feel anger but choose wisdom, are the ones who ultimately see real justice and real peace. Not the people who explode in anger, but the people who channel their caring into smart, helpful action.

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This doesn't mean David stopped caring about unfairness. It means he found a better way to fight it. Instead of fighting fire with fire and burning everything down, he chose to fight darkness with light, and light always wins in the end.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face the same choice David faced. When someone is being unfair to us or to someone else, we can choose to let anger make our decisions, or we can choose to actively restrain our anger and trust God to help us respond in ways that actually help.

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What David learned is that feelings are okay, even angry feelings about unfairness. But we get to choose what we do with those feelings. We can use anger as information that something needs to change, without letting anger be the boss of our actions.

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The wise choice is active restraint: feeling the anger, acknowledging that the unfairness is real, but choosing to respond in ways that help rather than ways that hurt. And trusting that God sees the unfairness too and will help us know how to make things better in the right way and at the right time.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Angry Spiral

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Think about a time when you were really angry about something unfair. How did it feel in your body, did your heart race, did you feel hot, did you want to yell or hit something? Now imagine staying that angry for hours or days, thinking about it over and over. What do you think would happen to your thoughts and your mood if you stayed angry like that for a long time?

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**Listen For:** "I'd get madder," "I'd want to be mean," "It would be hard to think about anything else", affirm: "That's exactly what David meant by fretting leading to evil. Our thoughts get stuck in an angry loop."

#### Question 2: The Difference Between Feeling and Acting

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David said to "refrain from anger," but that doesn't mean anger is a bad feeling to have. If you saw someone being bullied, it would be good and right to feel angry about that unfairness. So what do you think is the difference between feeling angry about something wrong and letting that anger control what you do about it?

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**If They Say:** "I don't know how to tell the difference", respond: "What do you think angry actions look like versus helpful actions? How can you tell if anger is helping you or hurting you?"

### Question 3: Smart Responses to Unfairness

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Let's say someone cuts in front of you in the lunch line, and you feel that flash of anger because it's not fair. You have choices about what to do with that anger. What are some ways you could respond that might actually help the situation, versus ways that might make it worse? What would active restraint look like in that moment?

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**Connect:** "This is exactly what David meant by choosing your response instead of letting anger choose for you. You're using anger as information without letting it be the boss."

### Question 4: Trust as an Alternative

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David discovered that trusting God to handle justice was more powerful than trying to get revenge himself. Think about a situation where someone was unfair to you. How might it change your response if you truly believed that God sees what happened and will make sure things work out right in the end, even if it doesn't happen immediately?

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**If They Say:** "But I want them to get in trouble now", affirm: "That feeling makes total sense! David felt the same way. But he discovered that trusting God's timing often led to better results than his own revenge."

You're all thinking really clearly about this. The main thing David learned is that anger can be helpful information that tells us something is wrong, but if we let anger make all our decisions, it usually makes things worse instead of better. The smart thing is to feel the anger, use it to know that something needs to change, but then choose actions that actually help.

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## 4. Activity: The Bridge Builders (8 minutes)

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

### Purpose

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This activity reinforces the principle that active restraint leads to better outcomes than explosive reactions by having kids physically experience how cooperation works better than competition. Success looks like kids discovering that working together with controlled energy accomplishes more than working against each other with explosive energy.

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

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We're going to play Bridge Builders. I'm dividing you into two groups standing on opposite sides of the room. Each group's goal is to build a human bridge to the middle of the room using only your bodies, no touching the floor between your starting line and the center.

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Here's the twist: if anyone on either team shows explosive energy, yelling, pushing, rushing, or getting aggressive, both bridges collapse and everyone has to start over. But if you use controlled energy, talking calmly, moving deliberately, helping each other, your bridge gets stronger.

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The challenge is that you really want to be the first team to reach the middle, but explosive energy destroys everyone's progress. This is exactly like what David learned about anger, explosive emotion feels powerful but it leads to worse results than controlled, smart action.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like real life when we're angry about unfairness. We want to fix things quickly with explosive energy, but that usually makes everything collapse. Controlled energy that helps instead of hurts is what actually builds solutions.

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

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Let them start trying to build bridges however they think will work. Watch for the inevitable moments when someone gets frustrated and uses explosive energy, immediately call "collapse!" and have both teams start over.

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As they struggle with the restraint requirement, you'll see them get increasingly frustrated. This is perfect, it's the exact feeling David described. Some will want to rush or push or yell at their teammates for going too slow. Every time explosive energy appears, restart both teams.

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After a couple of collapses, offer coaching: "I notice you really want to go fast, but what kind of energy actually keeps the bridges up? What would it look like to use your determination to help your team instead of rushing them?" Don't give away the solution, just redirect their energy.

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The breakthrough comes when teams realize they need to communicate calmly, help each other, and coordinate their movements. When someone shows controlled energy that helps their team succeed, celebrate it immediately: "That's controlled energy that builds instead of destroys!"

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Once one or both teams successfully reach the middle using controlled energy, have them notice the difference between how it felt when explosive energy kept making them fail versus how it felt when controlled energy led to success.

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone chooses to help a teammate instead of pushing them to go faster, this is the physical representation of active restraint leading to better outcomes than explosive reaction.

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

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What did you notice about how it felt when you used explosive energy versus controlled energy? The explosive energy felt more powerful and more satisfying in the moment, but it kept making you fail. The controlled energy felt slower and harder, but it actually got you to your goal. That's exactly what David discovered about anger, explosive anger feels powerful but leads to failure, while active restraint feels harder but leads to success.

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

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Here's what we learned today: anger is a normal, good feeling that tells us when something is unfair. God gave us anger to help us notice problems. But what we do with anger is what matters. We can let explosive anger make our decisions and watch everything collapse, or we can use active restraint to build solutions that actually help.

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This doesn't mean we should never feel angry or that we should just accept unfairness. It means we get to choose whether anger helps us or hurts us. Active restraint isn't being weak, it's being smart and strategic about how to actually fix problems instead of making them worse.

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The amazing result is that when we practice active restraint, we become the kind of people who can actually solve problems instead of just exploding at them. We become bridge builders instead of bridge destroyers. And that's the kind of person God can use to make the world more fair and more kind.

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

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This week, when you feel angry about something unfair, try this: pause for three seconds and ask yourself, "Will explosive anger or controlled energy help this situation more?" Then choose the one that actually builds bridges. Notice how different it feels and how differently people respond to you when you choose controlled energy over explosive energy.

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

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*God, thank you for giving us anger to help us notice when things aren't fair. Help us learn to use that anger wisely. When we feel like exploding, help us choose controlled energy that builds bridges instead of destroys them. Help us trust you to help us solve problems in ways that actually help. Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids understand that God helps us make good choices when we feel angry, we can choose to stop and think instead of acting out.

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### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

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Compare feeling angry to a fire alarm, it tells us something needs attention, but we don't need to let the alarm hurt our ears by staying loud forever.

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about making good choices or God's help. Suggestions: "I've Got Peace Like a River," "Be Kind to One Another," or "God is So Good." Use movements: point to head during "think" lyrics, hands over heart during "peace" lyrics, clap hands during "good choices" lyrics.

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Great singing, everyone! Now let's sit down in our horseshoe shape because we're going to hear an amazing story about someone who learned how to make good choices when he felt angry. This is going to be really good!

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when you're David feeling angry, sound calm and wise when you're David learning the lesson.

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Today we're going to meet a man named David who learned something very important about what to do when we feel angry!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

David looked around his world and saw something that made him feel really, really mad. Some people were being mean to others, and the mean people weren't getting in trouble! They were actually doing really well while the nice people were having a hard time.

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*[Make an angry face and clench your fists]*

---

David's heart started beating fast. His face got red and hot. He felt angry in his whole body! Have you ever felt angry like that? When someone is being unfair and you just want to yell or stomp your feet?

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, pacing back and forth]*

---

David kept thinking and thinking about how unfair everything was. He couldn't stop thinking about it! The more he thought about it, the angrier he got. He started thinking about ways to get back at the mean people.

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*[Move to center, speak with concern]*

---

But then David realized something important. All this angry thinking wasn't helping anyone. It was actually making David want to do mean things too! The anger was starting to take over his heart and make him think bad thoughts.

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*[Look thoughtful and put hand to chin]*

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That's when David learned something really important. He learned that feeling angry isn't wrong, but what we do with our anger matters a lot. God wants to help us make good choices even when we feel mad.

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**Psalm 37:8 (NIV)**

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*8 Refrain from anger and turn from wrath; do not fret, it leads only to evil.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

Do you think David was wrong to feel angry about unfairness? No! God made our feelings, and it's normal to feel mad when things aren't fair. But David learned something super important!

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*[Move to center, speak with excitement]*

---

David learned that he could choose what to do with his angry feelings. Instead of letting anger be the boss of him, David could be the boss of his anger. He could stop and think instead of just acting out!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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"Refrain" means to stop and choose. "Turn from wrath" means to choose a different direction. David learned he could feel angry but choose to do good things instead of mean things!

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

David made a smart choice. Instead of doing something mean when he felt angry, he decided to trust God to help him. He chose to do good things even when he felt mad inside. That's called making a wise choice!

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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And guess what happened? When David chose to stop and think instead of acting mad, good things happened! He felt better, he made better choices, and God helped him know how to handle unfair situations in good ways.

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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The big truth David learned is this: God can help us make good choices even when we feel angry! We don't have to let anger make us do mean things. We can choose to stop and think and ask God for help!

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in your life, someone might cut in front of you in line, or take something that belongs to you, or say something that hurts your feelings. It's normal to feel angry about that! But you get to choose what to do with that angry feeling.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When someone is being unfair, you can choose to stop, take a deep breath, think about what would help, and ask God to help you make a good choice. You don't have to yell or hit or be mean back. You can choose something better!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves you so much, and He wants to help you make good choices even when you feel angry. He's always there to help you choose kindness instead of meanness, even when your heart feels hot and mad!

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

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

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Great job listening! Now I want you to find a partner and stand facing them. I'll give each pair one question to talk about. There are no wrong answers, just tell your partner what you think!

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

## Discussion Questions

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

1. How do you think David felt in his body when he was angry?
2. When have you felt really angry about something?
3. What do you think David's face looked like when he was mad?
4. What would you want to do if someone was being unfair?
5. How do you think David felt after he made a good choice?
6. Who can help us when we feel angry?
7. What changed when David stopped and thought instead of acting mad?
8. If someone cut in front of you in line, what could you do?
9. How does God help us when we feel mad?
10. Can you think of someone who makes good choices when they're upset?
11. Why do you think stopping to think helps more than just acting mad?
12. What's the difference between feeling angry and being mean?
13. How does God feel about our angry feelings?
14. What would happen if everyone acted mean when they felt mad?
15. How can we be brave like David when someone is unfair?
16. What's one thing you learned from David's story?
17. What do you want to remember about making good choices?

18. How can we pray when we feel angry?

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19. What would happen if David had stayed angry forever?

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20. How can we be helpers when we see unfairness?

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

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

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

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Select a song about God's help or good choices. Suggestions: "Jesus Loves Me," "I Am a Promise," or "This is the Day." Include movements: point up to God during "help" lyrics, put hands over heart during "love" lyrics, march in place during "good choices" lyrics.

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Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down for prayer time. Criss-cross on the floor, hands folded, and let's thank God for helping us make good choices.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for loving us and helping us learn from David's story.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us remember that when we feel angry, we can choose to stop and think. Help us make good choices even when our feelings are big and strong.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you that you're always there to help us. Thank you that you love us no matter how we feel. Help us be kind even when others aren't kind to us. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about feeling angry or making good choices. Examples: "God, help me stop and think" or "God, help me be kind when I'm mad."

You all learned something really important today about choosing to stop and think when we feel angry. Remember, God is always there to help you make good choices. Have a wonderful week, and keep choosing kindness!

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# Anger Without Sin

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*Processing Strong Emotions Wisely, When Does Silence Become Avoidance?*

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**Psalm 4:1-8**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**Psalm 4:1-8 (NIV)**

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*1 Hear me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. 2 How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? 3 Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him. 4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. 5 Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord. 6 Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us. 7 Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. 8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

## Context

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Psalm 4 is David's evening prayer, likely written during the turbulent period of King Saul's persecution or Absalom's rebellion. David faces opposition from people who have turned his honor into shame and are following false hopes instead of trusting in God. The situation is urgent and emotionally charged, David feels distressed and under attack.

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This psalm follows the natural rhythm of a day ending with evening reflection. David moves from urgent petition in verses 1-3, to wise counsel about managing strong emotions in verses 4-5, to peaceful

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trust in verses 6-8. The evening setting is crucial, this is when emotions from the day's conflicts need to be processed before sleep comes.

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## The Big Idea

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**Strong emotions like anger aren't automatically sinful, what matters is creating space between feeling and action through heart-searching and intentional silence.**

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This isn't about suppressing emotions or pretending they don't matter. The Hebrew word "tremble" can mean deep emotion, righteous indignation, or even anger. David acknowledges these powerful feelings while insisting they need not lead to sin. The practice of evening examination and silence creates the space necessary for wise rather than reactive responses.

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## Theological Core

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- **Emotion and sin separation.** Strong feelings, including anger, are acknowledged as real and valid, but they don't have to produce sinful actions or attitudes.
  - **Evening examination as spiritual practice.** The daily rhythm of heart-searching before sleep allows for processing emotions and experiences in God's presence rather than carrying them into rest.
  - **Silence as active practice.** Biblical silence isn't emptiness but intentional listening, creating space for God's perspective to reshape our understanding of difficult situations.
  - **Process over perfection.** David models a temporal structure: strong emotion, then reflection, then silence, showing that wisdom is a process, not an instant achievement.
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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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**Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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- Anger and other strong emotions are not automatically sinful, what matters is how we process and respond to them
- The practice of evening heart-searching and silence creates necessary space between emotion and action
- Discerning when silence is wise processing versus unhealthy avoidance of necessary confrontation
- Building daily rhythms that allow for emotional processing in God's presence before making important decisions

### Grades 4, 6

- Feeling angry or upset is normal and okay, everyone has big feelings sometimes
- We need a pause between feeling something and deciding what to do about it
- Taking time to think and pray before acting usually leads to better choices
- Big feelings are still big even when we handle them well, being wise doesn't mean feelings disappear

### Grades 1, 3

- God knows when we have big, strong feelings and wants to help us
- When we're upset, we can talk to God before we do anything else
- God gives us peace when we trust Him with our problems

## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

- **Emotion shaming.** Don't suggest that anger or other strong emotions are inherently bad or unspiritual. The psalm acknowledges deep feeling while separating it from sinful response. Validate emotional experiences while teaching wise processing.

- **Oversimplifying silence.** Biblical silence isn't just "calm down" or suppression, it's active listening for God's perspective. Avoid treating silence as a technique rather than a practice of intentional spiritual attention.
- **Avoiding the tension.** Don't rush past the real question of when silence becomes unhealthy avoidance. Honor that some situations do require confrontation, while helping students discern the difference between reactive and wise response.
- **Missing the evening context.** This isn't about instant emotion management in the heat of the moment, it's about daily rhythms that create space for processing. Don't turn this into a quick-fix formula.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What if someone is hurting me and I need to speak up? Isn't silence just letting them win?"**

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Great question, this psalm isn't about never addressing wrongs or staying silent when action is needed. The "silence" here is about processing your emotions and seeking God's perspective before you respond. Sometimes after that processing, you'll realize you need to speak up firmly. Sometimes you'll realize the situation calls for a different approach. The key is responding from wisdom rather than just reacting from emotion. Silence creates the space to choose your response rather than just following your first impulse.

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### **"How do I know if I'm being wise or just avoiding conflict?"**

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That's the tension David wrestled with too. Here are some questions to ask yourself: Am I avoiding this because I'm seeking God's wisdom, or because I'm afraid? Am I taking time to process, or am I just hoping the problem goes away? Have I actually brought this situation to God in prayer, or am I just procrastinating? Wise silence often leads to clearer action later, while avoidance usually makes problems worse over time. The fruit of godly processing is usually greater courage and clarity, not less.

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### **"What about when I need to respond right away? I can't always wait until bedtime."**

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You're right that some situations need immediate response. This psalm teaches us the value of building daily habits that train us for those moments. When you regularly practice evening heart-searching, you

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develop the skill of quickly checking in with God even in urgent situations. The goal isn't always waiting until evening, it's learning to create space for God's perspective even in the middle of difficult moments. A quick internal "God, help me respond wisely" can be the shortened version of what this psalm teaches.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Strong emotions are not the enemy, reactivity is. Creating space between feeling and action through heart-searching and silence allows God's wisdom to shape our responses.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to discover that emotional intensity doesn't have to lead to sinful responses, while wrestling honestly with the tension between wise silence and necessary confrontation. Help them see that biblical wisdom involves process and timing, not just immediate reaction.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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How do we know when silence and reflection represent wise processing versus unhealthy avoidance of necessary action? When does patience become passivity?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences with anger and frustration, don't shame strong emotions
  - Honor the complexity of knowing when to speak and when to wait, this isn't a simple formula
  - Let them wrestle with real scenarios rather than giving quick answers to complex situations
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### **1. Opening Frame (2, 3 minutes)**

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Think about the last time you were really angry, maybe at a parent, a teacher, a friend, or someone online. You know that feeling when your heart is racing, your face is hot, and you have about fifteen different things you want to say or do? In that moment, part of you knows you should probably calm down first, but another part of you thinks, "No, I need to respond right now or they'll think I'm weak" or "If I don't say something, nothing will ever change."

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That inner conflict is so real, isn't it? Because sometimes when people tell you to "just calm down" or "let it go," it feels like they're telling you to be a doormat. Sometimes problems do need to be addressed. Sometimes people do need to be confronted. Sometimes waiting actually makes things worse. And yet we've all seen what happens when people respond purely from anger without thinking, it usually doesn't go well.

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Today we're looking at someone who faced something similar, except the stakes were even higher. King David had people actively working against him, spreading lies, trying to destroy his reputation. He was legitimately angry and probably had every right to be. But instead of immediately striking back, he wrote this psalm that shows us something fascinating about processing strong emotions.

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As we read, notice the movement from intense feeling to practical wisdom. Pay attention to how David acknowledges his anger without letting it drive his actions. And especially notice the question we're all wrestling with: How do you know when taking time to process is wise versus when it's just avoidance?

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Let's open our Bibles to Psalm 4 and read this together, starting with verse 1.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. This is a short psalm, but let them feel the emotional weight of David's situation. Help with vocabulary if needed, words like "distress," "delusions," "righteous." Watch for students who finish early and guide them to reread, looking for emotional movement.

### As You Read, Think About:

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- What is David feeling and why? What has happened to him?
  - How does David's emotional state change from the beginning to the end of the psalm?
  - What practical advice does David give in verse 4, and why might this be difficult to follow?
  - If you were in David's situation, what would you want to do immediately?
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## Psalm 4:1-8 (NIV)

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*1 Hear me when I call to you, my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; have mercy on me and hear my prayer. 2 How long will you people turn my glory into shame? How long will you love delusions and seek false gods? 3 Know that the Lord has set apart his faithful servant for himself; the Lord will hear when I call to him. 4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent. 5 Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord. 6 Many, Lord, are asking, "Who will bring us prosperity?" Let the light of your face shine on us. 7 Fill my heart with joy when their grain and new wine abound. 8 In peace I will lie down and sleep, for you alone, Lord, make me dwell in safety.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers who can read with expression. This psalm has real emotional movement, from distress to peace. Encourage them to read with feeling.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1-2 (David's urgent plea and frustration) **Reader 2:** Verses 3-5 (David's counsel about processing emotions) **Reader 3:** Verses 6-8 (David's movement toward trust and peace)

Listen for how David's emotional tone changes throughout this prayer. This isn't just information, it's the record of someone working through intense feelings in real time.

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

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**Setup:** Form groups of 3-4 students. Give them exactly 3 minutes to develop 1-2 genuine questions about what they just read. Walk between groups to listen and help stuck groups with prompts like "What surprised you?" or "What confused you?"

Get into groups of 3-4 people. Your job is to come up with 1-2 real questions about what you just read, things you're genuinely curious about or that seem confusing or surprising. Good questions might start with "Why does David..." or "What does it mean when..." or "How could someone actually..." Don't

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worry about having answers, focus on asking what you're actually wondering about. You have three minutes.

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### Facilitated Discussion (12, 14 minutes)

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**Remember:** Students drive with THEIR questions, you facilitate and probe deeper. Guide discovery rather than lecture. Write their questions on board and look for themes.

**Collecting Questions:** Let's hear your questions and write them on the board. Don't worry about having perfect answers yet, let's start with what you're curious about.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "What evidence do you see that David is genuinely angry or upset, not just mildly annoyed?"
  - "In verse 4, David says 'tremble and do not sin', how is it possible to have strong emotions without sinning?"
  - "What do you think happens during the 'searching your hearts and being silent' part that makes the difference?"
  - "When might taking time to be silent actually be the wrong choice? When would immediate action be better?"
  - "How can you tell the difference between wise processing and just avoiding conflict because you're scared?"
  - "David moves from distress in verse 1 to peace in verse 8, what caused that change?"
  - "What would this look like in a situation where someone is genuinely being mistreated? Should they still 'be silent'?"
  - "Why does this process happen 'when you are on your beds', what's significant about the evening timing?"
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### Revealing the Pattern

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Do you notice what's happening here? David doesn't suppress his emotions or pretend everything's fine. But he also doesn't let his emotions immediately drive his actions. There's this space he creates, this evening time of heart-searching and silence, where he can feel everything fully while also letting God's

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perspective reshape how he responds. It's not about eliminating strong emotions; it's about processing them wisely so they don't lead to sinful actions or attitudes.

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

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Let's get real about your lives for a minute. Where do you see this same tension playing out? When do you feel that pull between wanting to respond immediately because you're angry or hurt, versus taking time to process? Think about school situations, family conflicts, friend drama, social media interactions, or even bigger issues you care about in the world.

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- When a teacher treats you unfairly and you want to argue back versus talking to parents first
  - When family members criticize or misunderstand you and you want to defend yourself immediately
  - When friends betray your trust and you're deciding between confronting them now or waiting until you're calmer
  - When someone posts something offensive online and you're deciding whether to engage in the comments
  - When you see injustice happening at school or in the world and feel pressure to act immediately
  - When you're facing a major decision while feeling emotional and need to know if your feelings should drive your choice
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**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to fix their situations. Some circumstances call for immediate action, others for processing. Help them think through discernment rather than giving blanket advice.

#### Discussion Prompts

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- "When have you seen someone handle anger or frustration really well? What did that look like?"
  - "What would help you create space for processing when you're feeling intense emotions?"
  - "How do you discern between wise patience and unhealthy avoidance when facing conflict?"
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- "What's the difference between godly anger that leads to positive change and anger that just makes things worse?"
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## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

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Here's what I want you to take with you: Your strong emotions, including anger, are not your enemy. They often signal that something important is at stake. But reactivity is the enemy. When you create space between feeling and acting through prayer, reflection, and sometimes waiting, you give God's wisdom a chance to shape your response. That doesn't make you weak or passive, it often makes your eventual response much stronger and more effective.

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This week, try experimenting with David's pattern. When you feel those intense emotions rising, especially anger or frustration, instead of immediately reacting, try creating some space. It might be taking a walk, praying, journaling, or just sleeping on it like David suggests. Pay attention to whether your perspective or your sense of what to do changes when you give it some time.

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You all asked really good questions today and wrestled honestly with the complexity of this. That kind of thinking is exactly what wisdom looks like, not having all the answers immediately, but being willing to engage deeply with difficult questions. Keep that up. Keep wrestling. Keep seeking God's perspective on the hard stuff in your lives.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that angry feelings are normal and okay, but we need a pause between feeling and acting so we can make good choices that don't hurt ourselves or others.

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### If Kids Ask "But what if someone is being mean to me and I need to stop them?"

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Say: "Good question! Sometimes we do need to stand up for ourselves or get help. The important thing is thinking first, so we choose the best way to handle it instead of just reacting."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been really, really mad at someone. Keep it up if that feeling was so big that it felt like it was going to burst out of you. Okay, everybody keep your hands up! I see you, this is totally normal. Everyone has times when they feel angry or frustrated or hurt, and those feelings can be really intense.

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Now here's a harder question, keep your hand up if you've ever done something when you were really mad that you later wished you hadn't done. Maybe you said something mean, or hit someone, or broke something, or got yourself in trouble. Yep, I see those hands. Part of you was really angry, but another part of you knew you probably shouldn't act on it right away, but the angry part won.

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It's really confusing sometimes, isn't it? Because the angry feelings are real and they matter. If someone is being mean to you, it makes total sense that you'd feel mad. If something unfair is happening, of course you'd be upset. Those feelings aren't wrong. But sometimes when we act on them right away without thinking, we end up making things worse instead of better.

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This is like what happens to characters in movies you know. Think about when Elsa in "Frozen" got overwhelmed by her emotions and ended up freezing everything, or when Riley in "Inside Out" let her anger take control and ran away from home. They had good reasons to feel upset, but acting immediately from those big feelings created bigger problems.

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The tricky part is figuring out what to do with those really strong feelings so they don't end up controlling you or hurting people you care about. How do you handle it when you're really mad but you also want to make good choices?

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Today we're going to hear about King David, who was facing some really difficult people who were making his life miserable. He was angry and frustrated and probably wanted to fight back immediately. But he discovered something important about what to do with those big feelings before acting on them. Let's find out what happened.

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**What to Expect:** Kids may share specific situations that made them angry. Acknowledge them briefly: "That sounds really frustrating" or "I understand why that would make you mad." Keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Picture this: David is the king of Israel, but not everyone is happy about that. Some people are spreading lies about him, trying to make other people think he's a bad king. They're ruining his reputation and turning people against him.

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These aren't just random mean comments, these people are actively trying to destroy everything David has worked for. They're telling everyone that following God is foolish and that David can't be trusted. Day after day, David sees his honor being turned into shame.

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Imagine how that would feel. What if kids at school were telling everyone that you were a liar, even though you weren't? What if they were convincing your friends not to trust you anymore, even though you hadn't done anything wrong? Your heart would be pounding, your face would be hot, and you'd probably want to march up to them and set the record straight immediately.

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That's exactly how David felt. His heart was racing, he was stressed out, and he was probably really tempted to strike back at these people right away. He could have used his power as king to punish them or fight back immediately.

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But instead of reacting right away, David did something surprising. He started praying. Even though he was really upset, even though he had every right to be angry, he decided to talk to God about it first.

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"God," David prayed, "hear me when I call to you! I'm really distressed here. Please have mercy on me and listen to my prayer." David wasn't hiding his feelings from God, he was being completely honest about how upset he was.

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Then David turned toward the people who were causing him trouble, but not to attack them. Instead, he asked them some important questions: "How long are you going to keep doing this? How long are you going to love lies and chase after fake things instead of trusting God?"

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David was calling them out, but he was doing it in a way that gave them a chance to think about what they were doing instead of just trying to hurt them back. He was using his words to challenge their choices, not to destroy them as people.

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But here's where David shared the most important discovery he had made about handling big, strong feelings:

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**Psalm 4:4 (NIV)**

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#### *4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.*

David was basically saying, "It's okay to have really big feelings, you might even be shaking with anger or frustration. But don't let those feelings make you sin. Instead, when you go to bed at night, think carefully about what happened and spend some quiet time before you decide what to do."

This was revolutionary! David was saying that feeling angry isn't wrong, but we need a pause between feeling it and acting on it. He discovered that when we take time to think and pray and be quiet before God, we usually make much better decisions than when we just react immediately.

So what did David do during those quiet evening times? He reflected on what had happened during the day. He thought about what God would want him to do. He let his heart settle down so his brain could think clearly. And he gave God a chance to give him wisdom about how to respond.

#### **Psalm 4:5 (NIV)**

#### *5 Offer the sacrifices of the righteous and trust in the Lord.*

After taking that time to process, David was able to focus on doing what was right and trusting God to handle the things he couldn't control. Instead of trying to get revenge or hurt people back, he chose to do good things and let God take care of his reputation and his safety.

And you know what happened? The angry, stressed-out feelings that David started with began to change. The time he spent thinking and praying and being quiet didn't make his problems disappear, but it did something even better, it gave him peace.

By the end of his prayer, David could say, "Fill my heart with joy" and "In peace I will lie down and sleep, because you, God, keep me safe." He went from feeling like his heart was going to explode with anger to feeling peaceful enough to sleep well.

What changed wasn't his situation, those difficult people were probably still causing problems. What changed was that David had processed his big feelings with God instead of just reacting to them. He had created space between feeling angry and deciding what to do about it.

This is like what happens when you get really mad at your sibling but instead of hitting them right away, you go to your room for a few minutes to cool off. Often, after that pause, you can figure out a

better way to solve the problem than just fighting.

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What David learned is that our big feelings are signals that something important is happening, but we don't have to let them control our choices. When we take time to think and pray before we act, we usually come up with solutions that actually help instead of just making everything worse.

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God designed us to have emotions, even strong ones like anger. But He also gave us minds that can think and hearts that can listen to His wisdom. The key is using both together instead of letting our feelings make all our decisions for us.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Big Feelings

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Let's say you found out that someone was telling lies about you to your friends, trying to make them think you weren't a good friend. Your stomach would probably feel sick, your heart would be beating fast, and you'd feel angry and hurt at the same time. What do you think David was feeling when people were doing this to him?

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**Listen For:** "Angry," "Sad," "Hurt," "Mad," "Scared", affirm: "Yes! Those are all big, intense feelings that make total sense when someone is attacking you."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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David could have used his power as king to immediately punish these people or fight back. That probably would have felt good in the moment. But instead, he chose to pray and think first. Why do you think that was harder to do than just striking back right away?

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**If They Say:** "Because it's easier to just hit back" or "Because you want them to hurt too", respond: "Exactly. When we're really upset, waiting and thinking feels much harder than just reacting."

#### Question 3: The Pause That Helps

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David says to "search your hearts and be silent" when you go to bed. What do you think happened during those quiet times that helped David make better choices? What might have changed in his heart while he was thinking and praying instead of just staying angry?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made David's choice so wise, he gave God a chance to help him see the situation differently."

#### Question 4: The Big Change

David started this psalm feeling really distressed and angry, but by the end he's talking about peace and joy and sleeping well. His problems hadn't disappeared, those difficult people were probably still causing trouble. So what do you think changed that made him feel so different?

**If They Say:** "God helped him" or "He felt better after praying", affirm: "Yes! When we process our feelings with God instead of just reacting, our hearts can find peace even when our problems aren't solved yet."

You all are picking up on something really important here. David discovered that our feelings are important signals, but they don't have to control our choices. When we create space to think and pray before we act, we give God a chance to help us respond in ways that actually solve problems instead of creating bigger ones.

#### 4. Activity: Stop-Think-Choose (8 minutes)

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

##### Purpose

This activity reinforces the pattern of creating space between emotion and action by having kids physically experience the difference between reacting immediately versus pausing to think. Success looks like kids discovering that the pause actually helps them come up with better solutions than their first impulse.

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

We're going to play something called Stop-Think-Choose. I'm going to give you some scenarios where someone might feel really angry or frustrated. First, we'll see what happens when people react immediately. Then we'll see what happens when they pause to think first.

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When I say "REACT!" you should immediately show me with your whole body what someone might do if they just followed their first angry impulse, stomp around, make angry faces, cross your arms, whatever comes naturally. But when I say "PAUSE!" you need to freeze completely and count to five slowly in your head. Then when I say "CHOOSE!" you'll show me a wiser response with your body.

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We're doing this because it's exactly like what David learned, there's a big difference between your first angry reaction and the choice you make after you pause to think. Let's see if you can feel that difference in your body.

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

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First scenario: Your little brother just broke your favorite toy on purpose and he's laughing about it. REACT! Show me what your body wants to do immediately when you're really mad. Yes! I see angry stomping, frustrated gestures, hands on hips, you're feeling it!

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Now, PAUSE! Everyone freeze and count to five slowly. One... two... three... four... five. Take a deep breath. Think about what would actually help this situation. CHOOSE! Show me a wiser response. I see people walking away, I see someone taking deep breaths, someone looking like they're going to talk instead of yell.

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Did you feel the difference? Your first reaction was all about the angry feeling, but after the pause, your body could think of responses that might actually solve the problem. Let's try another one.

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Second scenario: Someone at school said something really mean about you in front of your friends, and everyone heard it. REACT! What does your body want to do immediately? I see angry faces, crossed arms, some people looking like they want to say something mean back!

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PAUSE! Freeze again. Five seconds to think. What would actually help here? What would make this situation better instead of worse? CHOOSE! Show me what wisdom looks like. I see people who look like they're going to ask for help, some who are walking away from conflict, some who look like they're choosing to respond calmly instead of angrily.

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Notice how the pause changed everything? Your first reaction came from the hurt and angry feeling, but after thinking, you could imagine responses that might actually improve the situation instead of just expressing your anger.

**Watch For:** The moment when someone moves from reactive body language (aggressive, defensive) to thoughtful body language (calm, purposeful), this is the physical representation of what David learned about processing emotions wisely.

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

What did you notice about how your body felt during the "react" part versus the "choose" part? The react part probably felt more intense and angry, but the choose part felt more calm and thoughtful, right? That's exactly what David discovered, when we pause to think and pray before we act, our bodies and our minds can come up with better solutions than just following our first angry impulse.

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

Here's what we learned today: Having big, strong feelings like anger isn't wrong or bad, everyone has them sometimes, and they usually mean that something important is happening. But David discovered that we don't have to let our feelings control our choices. When we take time to think and pray before we act, we usually come up with responses that actually help solve problems instead of making them worse.

This doesn't mean we never stand up for ourselves or that we just let people be mean to us. It means we use our brains and our prayers to figure out the best way to handle difficult situations, instead of just reacting with the first thing our anger tells us to do.

The amazing result is what happened to David, he went from feeling like his heart was going to explode with anger to feeling peaceful enough to sleep well. That's what can happen when we process our big feelings with God instead of just acting on them immediately.

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

This week, when you feel really angry or frustrated about something, try David's pattern: Stop, take some time to think and pray about it (maybe at bedtime like David did), and then choose how to respond. Notice if your ideas about what to do change after you've had some time to process your

feelings with God.

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

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*God, thank you for giving us emotions, even big ones like anger, because they help us know when something important is happening. Help us remember to talk to you about our feelings before we decide what to do. Give us wisdom to choose responses that help solve problems instead of making them worse. Help us trust you with the things we can't control. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## **Grades 1, 3**

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

### **Your Main Job Today**

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Help kids know that God wants to help them when they have big feelings, and that talking to God before they act helps them make good choices.

---

### **Movement & Formation Plan**

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

### **If Kids Don't Understand**

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Compare big angry feelings to a balloon that's too full of air, we need to let some out slowly so it doesn't pop and make a mess.

---

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

---

Select a song about God's peace or God helping us when we have big feelings. Suggestions: "Peace Like a River," "God is So Good," or "Jesus Loves Me." Use movements: spread arms wide for "peace," point up for "God," hug yourself for "loves me."

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down in our story horseshoe so we can hear about King David and the very important thing he learned about big feelings. Find your spot and get ready to listen!

---

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

---

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

---

**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound frustrated when you're describing David's enemies, sound calm and peaceful when you're describing God's help.

---

Today we're going to meet King David, and we're going to learn about a time when he had very big feelings!

---

*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

---

David was a good king, but some people were being very mean to him. They were saying things about him that weren't true. They were trying to make other people think David was bad when he really wasn't.

---

*[Use frustrated facial expression and voice]*

---

This made David feel really, really angry and sad and upset all at the same time. His heart was beating fast, his stomach felt funny, and he felt like he might cry or yell or do something big with all those feelings!

---

*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to worried]*

---

David had a choice. He could do what his angry feelings wanted him to do right away, maybe yell at those people or try to hurt them back. Or he could do something different.

---

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

---

And you know what David decided to do? He decided to talk to God first! Even though he had all these big, strong feelings, he said, "God, I need to talk to you about this!"

---

*[Move to side, sound like David praying]*

---

David told God all about his big feelings. He said, "God, please help me! I'm really upset and I don't know what to do!" David didn't hide his feelings from God, he told God exactly how he felt.

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**Psalm 4:4 (NIV)**

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*4 Tremble and do not sin; when you are on your beds, search your hearts and be silent.*

---

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

David learned something very important. He learned that it's okay to have big feelings, even really angry ones! But he also learned that we need to talk to God about those feelings before we decide what to do.

---

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

---

David said, "When you have big feelings, wait until bedtime, think about what happened, and be quiet with God." That means taking time to let God help you think about the best thing to do.

---

*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

So that's what David did. When bedtime came, instead of staying angry all night, David spent quiet time with God. He thought about what happened and asked God to help him know what to do.

---

*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

And you know what happened? David's heart started to feel peaceful! God helped David's big angry feelings become smaller and calmer.

---

*[Speak with excitement]*

---

By the end of his prayer, David could say, "I'm going to sleep peacefully tonight because God keeps me safe!" His big scary feelings had turned into peaceful, happy feelings!

---

*[Pause dramatically]*

---

David learned that God can help us with all our big feelings, angry ones, sad ones, scared ones. When we talk to God before we act, God gives us good ideas about what to do.

---

*[Speak directly to the children]*

---

Sometimes in our lives, we have big feelings too. Maybe someone is mean to us, or someone takes our toy, or we don't get what we want. Our hearts might beat fast and we might feel like crying or yelling or hitting.

---

*[Move closer to the children]*

---

When that happens, you can do what David did! You can say, "God, I have really big feelings right now. Please help me!" Then you can ask God to help you think of a good choice to make.

---

*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

---

God loves you and wants to help you with all your feelings, big ones and little ones! When you talk to God first, He will give you peace and help you make good choices.

---

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

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

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

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

---

1. How do you think David felt when people were being mean to him?

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2. What do you do when you have really big angry feelings?

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3. Why do you think David talked to God before doing anything else?

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4. What would you have wanted to do if people were being mean to you?

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5. How do you think David's feelings changed after he prayed?

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6. When do you have big feelings that are hard to handle?

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7. What happens when you wait before acting when you're angry?

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8. How does it feel when someone helps you with your big feelings?

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9. What big feelings do you have at home sometimes?

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10. What big feelings do you have at school sometimes?

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11. Who in your family helps you when you're upset?

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12. Why do you think talking to God helps with big feelings?

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13. How can God help us when we're really angry?

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14. What does it mean to trust God with our feelings?

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15. How do you think we can be like David?

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16. What would happen if we always acted right away when angry?

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17. What does it feel like when you make a good choice?

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18. How can we remember to pray when we have big feelings?

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19. What would happen if David didn't talk to God first?

---

20. How does God give us peace when we're upset?

---

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

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

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

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Select a song that reinforces trusting God or God's peace. Suggestions: "Trust and Obey," "I've Got Peace Like a River," or "God is Good to Me." Use movements: point up for "God," put hand over heart for "peace," spread arms wide for "good."

---

Beautiful singing! Now let's sit down quietly for prayer time. Sit cross-legged in your rows and fold your hands. We're going to thank God for helping us with our big feelings.

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

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

---

*Dear God, thank you for caring about all our feelings, even the really big ones.*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember to talk to you when we feel angry or upset or scared, just like David did. Help us wait and think before we act so we can make good choices.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for giving us peace when we trust you with our problems. Help us remember that you love us and want to help us all the time.*

---

*[Pause]*

---

*Thank you for being so good to us and for always listening when we pray. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about big feelings. Examples: "God, help me when I'm angry" or "Thank you for helping me make good choices."

Remember, when you have big feelings this week, you can talk to God just like David did! God loves you and wants to help you make good choices. Have a wonderful week!

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# Love Fulfills Law

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*The Permanent Debt, Is love just avoiding harm or actively doing good?*

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**Romans 13:1-14**

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## Instructor Preparation

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

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## The Passage

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**Romans 13:1-14 (NIV)**

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*1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 4 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*

*5 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 6 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

*8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command*

*there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

*11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and strife. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

## Context

Paul writes to Roman Christians living under imperial authority, addressing how faith intersects with civic duty. The Roman church included both Jewish and Gentile believers navigating questions about law, authority, and social responsibility. Paul has just concluded his teaching on living sacrificially and harmoniously within the Christian community.

Immediately before this passage, Paul urged believers to overcome evil with good and leave vengeance to God. Now he transitions from interpersonal relationships to broader social obligations, culminating in love as the unifying principle that fulfills all law. The context of Roman authority makes this teaching particularly pointed, love operates even within structured power relationships.

## The Big Idea

**Love is the permanent debt we owe everyone, and this debt actually fulfills rather than replaces God's law.**

This isn't sentimental affection but structured practice, love as non-harm represents the minimum standard, while the nature of true love may require much more. Paul doesn't eliminate moral boundaries but shows how they all serve love's purpose of protecting and honoring our neighbors.

## Theological Core

- **Law Fulfillment.** Love doesn't bypass God's commands but accomplishes their deepest purpose, protecting relationships and honoring human dignity.
- **Permanent Debt.** Unlike financial obligations that can be paid off, the debt to love others continues throughout our lives, creating ongoing responsibility for our neighbors' wellbeing.
- **Neighbor-Love as Self-Love.** The standard "as yourself" assumes healthy self-regard and extends that same care, protection, and honor to others in our sphere of influence.
- **Non-Harm as Minimum.** Love's foundation is refusing to damage our neighbor, but genuine love often requires active good beyond merely avoiding harm.

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## Age Group Overview

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### What Each Age Group Learns

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#### Grades 7, 8 / Adult

- Love fulfills law by accomplishing its purpose, not by ignoring its requirements
- The "permanent debt" of love creates ongoing responsibility for neighbors' wellbeing
- Non-harm is love's minimum standard, but genuine love often requires active good
- Moral decision-making involves asking "How does this serve or harm my neighbor?"

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#### Grades 4, 6

- Loving neighbors means both avoiding harm and actively helping when possible
- Our choices either build others up or tear them down, there's rarely neutral ground
- Taking care of others the way we want to be cared for guides our decisions
- Sometimes loving someone means doing the right thing even when we don't feel like it

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#### Grades 1, 3

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- God wants us to love our neighbors by being kind and helpful
  - Love means not hurting others and helping when we can
  - We should treat others the way we want to be treated
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **Reducing Love to Sentiment.** Paul describes love as structured practice, not emotional feeling. Love operates through concrete actions within social relationships, including authority structures, rather than floating above practical reality.
  - **Eliminating Moral Boundaries.** Love fulfills law rather than replacing it. The specific commands Paul mentions (against adultery, murder, theft, coveting) remain valid because they protect neighbors from harm.
  - **Making Non-Harm the Complete Standard.** While love "does no harm" establishes the minimum, genuine neighbor-love often requires active good, sacrifice, and intervention on behalf of others' wellbeing.
  - **Ignoring the Social Context.** Paul places this teaching immediately after discussing submission to authorities, suggesting that love operates within rather than apart from social structures and civic responsibilities.
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## Handling Hard Questions

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**"If love fulfills the law, why do we need specific rules anymore?"**

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Paul doesn't eliminate the specific commands but shows how they all serve love's purpose. The commandments he mentions, against adultery, murder, theft, and coveting, protect neighbors from harm. Love fulfills law by accomplishing what those rules intended: safeguarding relationships and human dignity. Think of it like traffic laws: the rules exist to protect everyone on the road, and following them is one way we love our fellow drivers by keeping them safe.

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**"Does this mean I have to feel loving toward everyone, even people who hurt me?"**

---

Paul describes love as action and practice, not necessarily feeling. The command to "love your neighbor as yourself" focuses on treating others with the same care and protection you give yourself. This might mean setting healthy boundaries, seeking justice, or refusing to enable harmful behavior, all while refusing to seek revenge or deliberately cause harm. Love sometimes looks like tough choices made for someone's long-term good rather than warm feelings.

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### **"How do I know when I'm supposed to just 'do no harm' versus actively helping?"**

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Paul presents "does no harm" as love's minimum standard, not its ceiling. Context matters: your capacity, relationships, and circumstances all influence how love should be expressed. Sometimes love means stepping back (not interfering), sometimes stepping in (offering help), and sometimes stepping up (confronting harmful behavior). Ask yourself: "What would I want if I were in their position?" and "What serves their genuine wellbeing, not just their immediate wants?"

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### **The One Thing to Remember**

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**Love is the debt we can never finish paying, and paying it faithfully fulfills everything God requires of us toward our neighbors.**

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## **Grades 7, 8 / Adult**

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

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### **Your Main Job Today**

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Guide students to wrestle with the tension between love as "doing no harm" and love as active good, helping them discover how genuine neighbor-love fulfills God's moral requirements rather than bypassing them.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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Is love merely avoiding harm to others, or does it require actively doing good? How does love actually fulfill moral law rather than replace it?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- Validate their experiences of moral complexity, situations where "love" seems to conflict with rules or where they're unsure what love requires
- Honor that love operates within real social structures rather than floating above practical constraints and relationships
- Let students work through the implications rather than lecturing about the "right" interpretation of love's requirements

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

You're scrolling social media when you see a classmate's post asking for help with homework that's due tomorrow, homework you spent two hours completing last night. You could easily send them your answers. Part of you wants to help; you've been there before. But another part knows that constantly helping this person skip their own work isn't really helping them learn.

Or maybe you're in a group chat where people are making jokes about someone who isn't there. The comments aren't exactly cruel, but they're not kind either. You could speak up, stay silent, or even leave the chat. None of these options feel obviously "wrong," but you sense that your choice matters somehow.

These moments reveal something complicated about love: it's not always clear what loving someone actually requires. Sometimes the "nice" thing and the "loving" thing aren't the same. Sometimes avoiding harm isn't enough, and sometimes active help might actually enable harm.

Today we're looking at Paul's radical claim that love actually fulfills all moral law. But he's not talking about sentimental feelings or simple niceness. He's describing something more structured, more demanding, and more practical than we might expect.

Open your Bibles to Romans 13. As you read, notice how Paul connects love to specific commandments, and pay attention to what he means when he says love "does no harm." Is that all love requires?

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

**Managing Silent Reading:** Walk quietly around the room. Help with difficult words like "covet" or "fulfillment." Let early finishers think about the questions below. Notice that Paul places this teaching immediately after discussing government authority, love isn't divorced from social structures.

### As You Read, Think About:

- What specific commandments does Paul mention, and why these particular ones?
- What does Paul mean by the "continuing debt to love one another"?
- How does "love does no harm" relate to "love your neighbor as yourself"?
- What would change in your relationships if you lived this way?

### Romans 13:1-14 (NIV)

*1 Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God. 2 Consequently, whoever rebels against the authority is rebelling against what God has instituted, and those who do so will bring judgment on themselves. 3 For the one in authority is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for rulers do not bear the sword for no reason. They are God's servants, agents of wrath to bring punishment on the wrongdoer. 4 Therefore, it is necessary to submit to the authorities, not only because of possible punishment but also as a matter of conscience.*

*5 This is also why you pay taxes, for the authorities are God's servants, who give their full time to governing. 6 Give to everyone what you owe them: If you owe taxes, pay taxes; if revenue, then revenue; if respect, then respect; if honor, then honor.*

*8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law. 9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

*11 And do this, understanding the present time: The hour has already come for you to wake up from your slumber, because our salvation is nearer now than when we first believed. 12 The night is nearly over; the day is almost here. So let us put aside the deeds of darkness and put on the armor of light. 13 Let us behave decently, as in the daytime, not in carousing and drunkenness, not in sexual immorality and debauchery, not in dissension and strife. 14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the flesh.*

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

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

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**Selecting Readers:** Ask for volunteers to read different sections. Let students pass if they prefer. Choose confident readers for the core teaching in verses 8-10.

**Reader 1:** Verses 1, 7 (Government authority and paying debts) **Reader 2:** Verses 8, 10 (Love as the continuing debt) **Reader 3:** Verses 11, 14 (Living in the light)

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Listen for the progression Paul makes, from civic duties to love as the ultimate obligation. Notice how practical and structured his vision of love actually is.

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

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

Get into groups of three or four. 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..." or "How can..." or "What would happen if..." You have three minutes. Go!

---

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

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

**Collecting Questions:** Write student questions on board. Look for themes around the relationship between love and law, the meaning of "permanent debt," and practical applications.

### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

- "What do the specific commandments Paul mentions have in common?"
- "Why does he call love a 'continuing debt' that never gets paid off?"
- "What's the difference between 'doing no harm' and actively loving someone?"
- "How does love 'fulfill' law rather than replace it?"
- "When might loving someone require doing something they don't want you to do?"
- "How do you love someone 'as yourself', what does that standard actually mean?"
- "What would happen if everyone in your school practiced this kind of love?"
- "Why does Paul put this teaching right after talking about government authority?"

### Revealing the Pattern

Do you notice what's happening here? Paul isn't eliminating moral standards, he's showing how they all serve the same purpose: protecting our neighbors from harm and actively promoting their flourishing. Love becomes the unifying principle that explains why those commands exist in the first place. It's not that we throw out rules for love's sake, but that genuine love accomplishes what every good rule is trying to achieve.

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

Let's get real about your lives for a moment. Where do you face questions about what love actually requires? Think about school relationships, family dynamics, online interactions, or how you handle conflict. Sometimes the "nice" choice and the "loving" choice aren't the same thing.

### Real Issues This Connects To

- Helping classmates with homework versus enabling them to avoid learning
- Speaking up when family members treat each other poorly versus keeping peace
- Confronting friends about destructive choices versus accepting them as they are
- Sharing personal struggles on social media versus protecting others from emotional burden
- Responding to injustice in your community versus minding your own business
- Setting boundaries with demanding people versus always being available to help

**Facilitation:** Let students share examples without rushing to simple answers. Some situations require discernment about what love actually looks like. Help them think through the decision-making process rather than giving blanket advice.

### Discussion Prompts

- "When have you seen someone practice this kind of love, protecting others while still caring for them?"
- "What helps you discern between enabling someone and genuinely helping them?"
- "How do you decide when to step in versus when to step back?"
- "What's the difference between being nice and being loving?"

## 5. Closing (2 minutes)

Here's what I want you to take with you: love isn't a feeling that bypasses moral thinking, it's the principle that gives all moral thinking its purpose. When Paul says love fulfills the law, he means that genuine love for our neighbors naturally leads us to avoid harming them and actively seek their good. This isn't always easy or comfortable.

This week, pay attention to moments when you're deciding how to treat someone. Ask yourself: "What would serve their genuine wellbeing?" Sometimes love looks like helping, sometimes like stepping back, sometimes like having a difficult conversation. The debt of love is never finished, which means you get new opportunities every day to practice this.

I'm impressed by the thoughtful questions you asked today and the way you wrestled with these complex ideas. Keep thinking about what love actually requires, it's more nuanced and demanding than our culture often suggests, and it's exactly what the world needs more of.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that loving neighbors means both avoiding harm and actively helping when possible, using concrete examples they can apply in their daily relationships.

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### If Kids Ask "What if someone is mean to me? Do I still have to love them?"

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Say: "Loving someone doesn't mean letting them hurt you. Sometimes love means getting help from adults or setting boundaries to protect yourself while still not trying to hurt them back."

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### 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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Raise your hand if you've ever been in a situation where someone needed help, but you weren't sure if you should help them or not. Maybe a classmate forgot their lunch money again, or a sibling was struggling with chores that were supposed to be their responsibility. Keep your hands up if you've felt torn between wanting to be nice and wondering if helping was actually the right thing to do.

---

Now here's an even trickier question: raise your hand if you've ever done something that you knew wasn't really wrong, but it didn't feel quite right either. Maybe you didn't share something when you could have, or you stayed quiet when someone was being excluded. It wasn't like you broke a rule, but something inside you said it could have been better.

---

These feelings make perfect sense! Part of you wants to be kind and helpful, but another part worries about being taken advantage of or making things worse. Sometimes you know you haven't done anything wrong, but you still feel like you could have done something more loving.

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This reminds me of a movie like "Inside Out," where Riley has different emotions giving her different advice about how to respond to situations. Sometimes being a good friend means helping immediately, but sometimes it means something else. The tricky part is figuring out what actually helps someone versus what just makes us feel better about ourselves.

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The tricky part is figuring out what love actually looks like in real situations. Does love just mean being nice? Does it mean never saying no? Does it mean always helping, even when someone could help themselves?

---

Today we're going to hear about Paul, one of Jesus's followers, who discovered that love is both simpler and more complicated than we might think. He learned that love means more than just following rules, but it also means more than just having good intentions. Let's find out what he learned.

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**What to Expect:** Kids will relate to the helping/not helping dilemma. Acknowledge their examples briefly, "That's exactly what I'm talking about", then keep momentum moving toward the story.

## 2. Bible Story Time (10 minutes)

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Paul was writing a letter to Christians who lived in Rome, the biggest, most powerful city in the world at that time. These followers of Jesus were trying to figure out how to live as God wanted while surrounded by people who didn't know Jesus.

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The Roman Christians had a lot of questions. They had to pay taxes to leaders who didn't follow Jesus. They had to obey laws made by people who worshipped different gods. They wondered: should we follow all these rules? Should we ignore them? How do we know what God really wants us to do?

---

Some people thought following God meant keeping a long list of specific rules perfectly. Others thought loving Jesus meant they didn't need to worry about rules at all. Both groups were confused about how love and rules fit together.

---

Imagine trying to be a good person when you're not sure what "good" means! Should you follow every single rule, even when it doesn't seem to help anyone? Should you ignore rules if you think you're being loving? These Christians felt pulled in different directions.

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Paul had learned something important from Jesus, and he wanted to share it with his friends in Rome. He had discovered that love wasn't the opposite of God's rules, love was actually the point of God's

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rules!

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So Paul sat down to write them a letter. He wanted to explain how love and rules work together, and how they could make good decisions even in complicated situations.

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Paul thought carefully about how to explain this. These people needed to understand that God's love wasn't just a warm, fuzzy feeling. It was something they could practice in real situations with real people who had real problems.

---

First, Paul reminded them about paying their taxes and respecting their leaders, even when those leaders weren't perfect. He was helping them see that love works through everyday responsibilities, not around them.

---

But then Paul said something that probably surprised them. He told them that there was one debt they could never finish paying off, and that was actually a good thing!

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Paul wrote: "Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another." What did he mean by calling love a debt? Think about what that would be like, owing someone something that you could never finish paying back!

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#### **Romans 13:8 (NIV)**

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*8 Let no debt remain outstanding, except the continuing debt to love one another, for whoever loves others has fulfilled the law.*

Paul was saying that love isn't something we do once and check off our list. It's something we owe to the people around us every single day. Just like how you need food every day, not just once a week, our neighbors need love from us regularly.

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But Paul knew his friends would ask: "What does this love actually look like? How do we know if we're doing it right?" So he gave them examples they could understand.

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Paul reminded them of rules they already knew: "Don't commit adultery", that means don't break your promises to your spouse. "Don't murder", don't hurt people. "Don't steal", don't take things that belong to others. "Don't covet", don't spend your time wanting what other people have.

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Then Paul explained something amazing: all these rules were actually about the same thing! They were all different ways of loving your neighbor.

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When you don't steal from someone, you're loving them by respecting what belongs to them. When you don't lie about someone, you're loving them by protecting their reputation. Every rule that protects people is actually a way to show love.

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**Romans 13:9-10 (NIV)**

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*9 The commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not covet," and whatever other command there may be, are summed up in this one command: "Love your neighbor as yourself." 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor. Therefore love is the fulfillment of the law.*

Paul was helping them see that God's rules weren't just random restrictions. They were protections! Every rule that God gave was designed to help people love each other better.

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But then Paul said something even more important: "Love does no harm to a neighbor." He was giving them a test they could use in any situation: "Will this choice harm my neighbor or help them?"

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Think about "love your neighbor as yourself." How do you want to be treated when you're having a bad day? How do you want people to respond when you make a mistake? How do you want to be helped when you're struggling? That's how you should treat others.

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This wasn't just about avoiding bad things. Paul was describing love that actively looks for ways to build people up, protect them, encourage them, and help them flourish. Love that does "no harm" is just the beginning.

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The Roman Christians realized that Paul had given them something better than a list of rules to memorize. He had given them a way of thinking about every situation: "How can I love my neighbor in this moment?"

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When they were deciding whether to help someone, they could ask: "What would love look like here?" When they were tempted to gossip or be selfish, they could ask: "Would this harm my neighbor or help them?"

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Paul's teaching spread to Christians everywhere. They learned that love wasn't just a nice idea, it was a practical way to make decisions that honored God and cared for people.

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Sometimes in our lives, we face similar questions. Should I help this person with their homework again, or would that prevent them from learning? Should I share my snack with someone who never brings their own, or should I let them experience the consequences? Paul's principle helps us: what would genuinely love this person?

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What we learn is that love means both avoiding harm and actively seeking someone's good. It's not just about being nice, it's about really caring for what's best for our neighbors, even when that's more complicated than simply saying yes to everything.

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The amazing thing is that when we love this way, we're actually doing what God wants most: taking care of each other the way God takes care of us.

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

### 3. Discussion (5 minutes)

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#### Question 1: The Feelings

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Imagine you have a friend who always "forgets" their lunch money and asks to share yours. You want to be kind, but you're starting to notice that they never forget when they want to buy something for themselves, only when it's time to buy lunch. Part of you wants to help, but part of you feels like maybe helping isn't actually helping anymore. What would you feel in this situation?

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**Listen For:** "Frustrated," "Confused," "Used", affirm: "Those feelings make sense! Your brain is trying to figure out what's really loving here."

#### Question 2: The Hard Choice

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Think about a time when you had to choose between being "nice" and doing something that was better for someone in the long run. Maybe not doing their chores for them, or not giving them answers to homework, or telling an adult when someone was making dangerous choices. Why are these choices so hard to make?

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**If They Say:** "Because people get mad at you", respond "True! Sometimes love requires courage because the person doesn't understand why you're making that choice."

### Question 3: The Real Help

Paul said that love "does no harm" to our neighbors. But he also said we should love others "as ourselves." Think about how you want to be treated when you're learning something new or working through a problem. Would you want someone to always do it for you, or would you want them to help you figure it out yourself?

**Connect:** "This is exactly what made Paul's teaching so helpful, it gave people a way to think through what love actually looks like."

### Question 4: The Bigger Picture

What do you think would happen in our school if everyone started making decisions by asking, "Will this harm my neighbor or help them flourish?" Think about how people would treat each other in the cafeteria, on the playground, in class, or online. What would change?

**If They Say:** "People would be nicer", respond "What kinds of 'nice' actions do you think would actually increase? What might look different?"

You're noticing something important: Paul wasn't just giving people a rule to follow, but a way to think about how to care for each other. When we love people "as ourselves," we're looking out for what they really need, not just what they want in the moment.

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

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

### Purpose

This activity reinforces the "love your neighbor as yourself" principle by having kids physically experience how individual choices affect the whole group's success. Success looks like kids discovering

that everyone flourishes when each person looks out for others' needs as well as their own.

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

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We're going to create a "neighbor network." Everyone stand in a circle, arms length apart. Each person needs to pick two other people in the circle to be their "neighbors", don't tell them who you picked, just remember them. Your job is to keep both of your neighbors safe and successful.

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Here's the challenge: I'm going to call out different situations, and everyone needs to move to help their neighbors while also taking care of themselves. But here's the twist, you can't talk or point. You have to pay attention to what your neighbors actually need, not what you think they need.

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The first few rounds, you can only take care of yourself. But later, you'll need to help your neighbors too. We're doing this because it's exactly like what Paul was teaching, love means paying attention to how our choices affect others, not just ourselves.

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

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Round 1: "Find the safest spot for yourself." Everyone moves to where they feel most comfortable. Notice how spread out everyone is. "You took care of yourselves, that's important!"

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Round 2: "Now find the safest spot for yourself, but also make sure your two neighbors are safe too." Watch as they start looking around, trying to position themselves to help others. Some will struggle to balance their own needs with others' needs.

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Coach during the struggle: "I notice you want to help your neighbor, but you're not sure how. What if you asked yourself: what would I want if I were in their position?" "I wonder if there are others who could help you help your neighbor?"

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Round 3: "Everyone try to end up in a formation where all neighbors are protected and no one is left out." Celebrate when they discover they need to work together, communicate non-verbally, and make space for everyone.

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Final formation: Have them notice how different this looks from Round 1, more connected, more aware of others, more inclusive. "Look how much more secure everyone is when each person was thinking about their neighbors too!"

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**Watch For:** The moment when someone sacrifices a better position to help a neighbor in need, this is the physical representation of loving your neighbor as yourself.

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

What did you notice about how it felt when you only thought about yourself versus when you were also thinking about your neighbors? In the final round, were you more secure or less secure when everyone was looking out for each other? This is exactly what Paul meant by loving your neighbor as yourself, when everyone's looking out for everyone else, the whole community becomes stronger and safer.

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

Here's what we learned today: God wants us to love our neighbors by both avoiding harm and actively helping when we can. Love isn't just about being nice or always saying yes, it's about genuinely caring for what's best for the people around us, the same way we care for ourselves.

This doesn't mean you have to fix everyone's problems or never say no to anyone. Sometimes love means setting boundaries, getting help from adults, or letting people learn from their own mistakes. But it always means asking: "What would really help this person flourish?"

The amazing result is that when everyone practices this kind of love, everyone becomes more secure, more cared for, and more able to care for others. It's like the activity we just did, when everyone looks out for each other, the whole group becomes stronger.

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

This week, when you're deciding how to treat someone, ask yourself: "What would I want if I were in their position?" Look for one opportunity to help someone flourish, maybe by including someone who's been left out, helping without being asked, or encouraging someone who's struggling.

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

*Dear God, thank you for teaching us that love means caring for our neighbors the same way we care for ourselves. Help us to see when people around us need encouragement, help, or protection. Give us wisdom to know when to help and when to let others learn. Help us build each*

*other up instead of tearing each other down. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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## Grades 1, 3

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

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### Your Main Job Today

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Help kids understand that God wants us to love our neighbors by being kind and helpful, not mean or hurtful.

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### Movement & Formation Plan

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

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Compare loving your neighbor to sharing toys with a friend, then ask "How do you want friends to treat you when you're sad?"

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

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**Formation:** Standing in a circle

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Select a song about love and kindness. Suggestions: "Love One Another," "I've Got the Love of Jesus," or "Be Kind to One Another." Use movements: point to yourself on "love," point to others on "neighbor," and hug yourself on "as yourself."

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Great singing, everyone! I love how you were pointing to each other when we sang about neighbors. Now let's sit in our story shape and hear about a man named Paul who learned something very important about loving our neighbors.

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

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

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**Animated Delivery:** Use big gestures, change your voice for different characters, move around the space. Keep energy high! Sound excited when you talk about God's love, and gentle when you talk about caring for neighbors.

Today we're going to meet a man named Paul who learned something very special about how God wants us to treat other people!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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Paul was writing a letter to his friends who lived far away. His friends had lots of questions about how to be good neighbors and how to follow God.

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*[Look confused and scratch your head]*

---

Paul's friends were confused! Some people told them, "Follow lots and lots of rules to be good!" Other people said, "You don't need any rules at all!" They didn't know what God really wanted.

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, speak with excitement]*

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But Paul had learned something wonderful from Jesus! He knew exactly what God wanted most. God wanted people to love each other!

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*[Move to center, speak with authority and warmth]*

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So Paul wrote to his friends: "Love your neighbors! Keep loving them every single day! When you love your neighbors, you're doing exactly what God wants!"

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*[Hold up fingers to count]*

---

Paul reminded them of some rules they knew: "Don't hurt people. Don't take things that aren't yours. Don't lie about your friends." But then he said something amazing!

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**Romans 13:9-10 (NIV)**

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*9 Love your neighbor as yourself. 10 Love does no harm to a neighbor.*

*[Pause and look around at each child]*

---

All those rules were really about one big thing: LOVE! When you don't hurt people, that's love. When you don't take their things, that's love. When you tell the truth, that's love!

---

*[Point to yourself, then to the children]*

---

"Love your neighbor as yourself" means treat other people the same good way you want to be treated. If you want friends to be kind to you, be kind to them!

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

---

Paul said, "Love does no harm to a neighbor." That means love never tries to hurt people. Love tries to help people feel happy and safe and cared for.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

---

When Paul's friends read his letter, they understood! They didn't need to memorize hundreds of rules. They just needed to ask: "How can I love my neighbor right now?"

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*[Speak with excitement]*

---

And you know what happened? When they started loving their neighbors this way, everyone felt happier! People felt cared for and safe. The whole community became a better place to live!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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God wants the same thing for us! God wants us to love our neighbors by being kind and helpful, not mean or hurtful.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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Sometimes in our lives, we can choose to love our neighbors too. At school, we can include someone who's sitting alone. At home, we can help our family without being asked. With our friends, we can share and be gentle.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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When you're not sure what to do, you can ask yourself: "How do I want to be treated?" Then treat your neighbor that same way!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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God loves it when we love our neighbors! And when we love each other, everyone feels happy and safe, just like God wants.

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

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

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

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#### **Discussion Questions**

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

1. How do you want friends to treat you when you're feeling sad?
  2. What's one way you can be kind to someone at school?
  3. How did Paul's friends feel when they learned about loving neighbors?
  4. What would you do if you saw someone sitting alone at lunch?
  5. What changed when people started loving their neighbors?
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6. How does God feel when we love each other?

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7. What does "love does no harm" mean to you?

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8. How can you love your family at home?

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9. How can you love your classmates at school?

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10. Who is someone you can be kind to this week?

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11. Why is it important to treat others the way we want to be treated?

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12. How can you help someone feel happy and safe?

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13. What does God want us to do for our neighbors?

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14. How do you feel when someone is kind to you?

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15. What's the difference between being mean and being loving?

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

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17. What do you want to remember about loving neighbors?

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18. How can we pray for our neighbors?

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19. What would happen if everyone loved their neighbors?

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20. How can you be like Paul and teach others about love?

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

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

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

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Select a song about kindness and helping. Suggestions: "Love Is Something You Do," "Be Kind," or "Jesus Loves Me." Include movements: hug yourself on "love," reach out to others on "neighbor," and clap hands on "kindness."

---

Beautiful singing! I can see that you understand what it means to love your neighbors. Now let's sit quietly for prayer time.

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

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

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*Dear God, thank you for Paul who taught us about loving our neighbors.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Please help us remember to be kind and helpful to the people around us. Help us treat others the way we want to be treated.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for loving us so much and for teaching us how to love each other. Help us be good neighbors every day. In Jesus's name, Amen.*

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**Alternative, Popcorn Prayer:** If your class is comfortable with it, invite kids to offer short one-sentence prayers about loving neighbors. Examples: "God, help me be kind at school" or "Thank you for my neighbors."

Remember to love your neighbors this week by being kind and helpful! I'm proud of how well you listened today. Have a wonderful week!

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