

# Managing Anger and Conflict

*Volume 20*

## Deep Research Sunday School Lessons

*A 24-Volume Comprehensive Series*

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*Deep Research Sunday School Lessons*

# **Managing Anger and Conflict**

*Volume 20*

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## **About This Series**

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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**

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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**

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### **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*

# Restoring Broken Trust

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*Jesus's Process for Healing Community, When someone hurts the community, is exclusion the only answer?*

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**Matthew 18:10-22**

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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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**Matthew 18:10-22 (NIV)**

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*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

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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.

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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.

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## The Big Idea

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**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.**

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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.

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## Theological Core

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- **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.
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- **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.

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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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- 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
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#### Grades 4, 6

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- 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
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- 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
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### Grades 1, 3

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- 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
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **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

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### **"What if someone won't change no matter what you do?"**

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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.

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### **"Isn't this just church discipline that drives people away?"**

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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.

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### **"How do you know when something is serious enough to use this process?"**

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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.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God's heart is always for restoration, even when accountability requires temporary separation, the goal is winning people over, not shutting them out.**

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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 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.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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When someone in community commits sin that hurts others, how do you balance holding them accountable with maintaining relationship and hope for restoration?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- 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)**

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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)

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**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.

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### Probing Questions (to go deeper)

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- "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?"
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### Revealing the Pattern

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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

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return. The heart remains: winning people over, not shutting them out.

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#### 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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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.

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##### Real Issues This Connects To

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- 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
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**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

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- "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?"
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- "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?"

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## 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.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

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### 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.

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### If Kids Ask "What if they never stop being mean?"

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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."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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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.

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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."

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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**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)

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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Then Jesus taught them what to do when someone in their community was making choices that hurt other people.

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#### **Matthew 18:15 (NIV)**

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*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.

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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.

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But Jesus knew that sometimes private conversation doesn't work. Sometimes people get defensive or angry, or they just don't want to change.

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**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.

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**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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 Private Conversation

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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?

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**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

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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?

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**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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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**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.**

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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.

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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.

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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."

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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)**

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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.

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## **5. Closing (2 minutes)**

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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.

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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.

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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.

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## This Week's Challenge

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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.

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## Closing Prayer (Optional)

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*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.*

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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 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.

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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
- 

## If Kids Don't Understand

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Compare helping someone make better choices to helping a friend learn to share toys, then ask "How do we help without being mean?"

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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 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.

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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.

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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 gentle and caring when you're Jesus, sound worried when talking about lost sheep, sound happy when talking about finding them.

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Today we're going to meet a shepherd who loved his sheep very much.

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*[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.

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*[Count on your fingers and look amazed]*

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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!

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*[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!

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*[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!

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*[Pretend to search, looking behind imaginary rocks]*

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And when he found that little lost sheep, he was SO happy! He picked it up gently and carried it home, singing with joy!

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**Matthew 18:14 (NIV)**

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*"In the same way your Father in heaven is not willing that any of these little ones should perish."*

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*[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!

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*[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.

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*[Hold up one finger]*

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First, Jesus said, "Go talk to them by yourself. Tell them what they did wrong and help them understand."

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*[Hold up two fingers]*

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If that doesn't work, take one or two friends with you to help explain why the wrong choice hurt people.

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*[Hold up three fingers]*

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If they still won't listen, tell the grown-ups or the whole group so everyone can help them understand.

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*[Speak gently]*

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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!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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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."

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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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!

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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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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!

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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.

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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.*

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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?
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5. Why did Jesus say to talk to someone by yourself first?

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6. When might you need a grown-up to help solve a problem?

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7. How do you show someone you still care about them even when they make wrong choices?

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8. What would happen if everyone just ignored it when someone was being mean?

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9. How can you help a friend learn to make better choices?

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10. Why does God want everyone in His family?

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11. What does it mean to be patient with someone?

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12. When someone hurts your feelings, what can you say to them?

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13. How do you know if someone really wants to change?

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14. What makes you want to do better when you mess up?

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15. Why is it hard to be kind to someone who was mean to you?

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16. How can friends help each other make good choices?

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17. What did you learn about God from the sheep story?

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18. How can you pray for someone who makes wrong choices?

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19. What would happen if the shepherd just forgot about the lost sheep?

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20. How can you be like Jesus when someone hurts you?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together. Who wants to share something interesting that you and your partner 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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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.

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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.

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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 every person in your family...*

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*[Pause]*

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*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...*

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*[Pause]*

---

*Help us remember that you never give up on anyone and that you want everyone to be part of your family...*

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*[Pause]*

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*Thank you for being patient with us when we mess up and for always loving us no matter what. 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 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!

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# Enemies at Peace

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*When God Steps In, How do we hold hope together with ongoing conflict?*

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**Proverbs 16:1-15**

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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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**Proverbs 16:1-15 (NIV)**

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*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

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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.

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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.

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## The Big Idea

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**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.**

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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.

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## Theological Core

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- **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.
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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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- 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
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## Grades 4, 6

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- 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
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## Grades 1, 3

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- 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
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## Common Pitfalls to Avoid

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- **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.
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- **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.

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## Handling Hard Questions

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### **"What about Christians who live righteously but still get persecuted and killed?"**

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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.

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### **"How do I know if I'm really living in a way that pleases God?"**

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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.

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### **"Should I expect my enemies to become friends if I'm living right?"**

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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

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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.

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## **The One Thing to Remember**

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**God can break through enemy hostility in ways we never imagined, so focus on pleasing Him rather than managing them.**

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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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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.

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### **The Tension to Frame**

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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?

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### **Discussion Facilitation Tips**

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- 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)**

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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Let's open our Bibles to Proverbs 16, verse 7, and start reading silently from verse 1.

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## 2. Silent Reading (5 minutes)

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**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:

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- 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?
- 

**Proverbs 16:1-15 (NIV)**

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*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.

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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. 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.

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### **Probing Questions (to go deeper)**

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- "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**

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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

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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?"

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#### 4. Application (3, 4 minutes)

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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.

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#### Real Issues This Connects To

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- 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

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- "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)

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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.

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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.

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## Grades 4, 6

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

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### Your Main Job Today

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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.

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### If Kids Ask "What if the mean person never gets nice?"

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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."

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## 1. Opening (5 minutes)

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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?

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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**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)

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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

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possible.

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And then Solomon spoke these powerful words that would change how people thought about enemies forever:

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**Proverbs 16:7 (NIV)**

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*"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.

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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."

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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."

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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?"

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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 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?

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**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

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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?

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**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

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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.

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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.

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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.

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### **During the Activity(4 minutes)**

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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!"

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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.

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**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.*

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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 little ones understand that God can make mean people nice when we do things that make God happy.

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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 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?"

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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 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.

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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!

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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 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!

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*[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!

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*[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!

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*[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.

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*[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!

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*[Move to side, speak with amazement]*

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The bullies stopped being bullies! The mean neighbors became friendly! The grumpy people started smiling! Solomon couldn't believe what he was seeing!

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**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]*

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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!

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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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!

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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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!

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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 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.

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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 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?

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

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8. What's the nicest thing someone ever did for you?

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9. How can we be kind at school?

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10. What would happen if everyone was nice to each other?

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11. Who helps you when someone is mean?

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12. How do you think God feels when we're kind?

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13. What's something kind you could do tomorrow?

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14. Why should we pray for people who are mean?

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15. What does it mean that God can change hearts?

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16. How do we know God loves us?

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17. What's your favorite way to be kind?

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18. How can we make God smile?

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19. What if someone doesn't want to be your friend?

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20. How is God stronger than mean people?

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Great discussions! Let's come back together in our lines for our song. 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 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."

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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.

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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 being so powerful that you can change mean people's hearts.*

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*[Pause]*

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*Help us choose to be kind, share our toys, and use nice words even when others are mean to us.*

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*[Pause]*

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*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.*

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*[Pause]*

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*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.*

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**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
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**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.

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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.

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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.

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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

### **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]*

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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]*

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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?

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*[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]*

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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]*

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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]*

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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]*

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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]*

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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]*

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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.

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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 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.

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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 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."

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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!

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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 describing David's enemies, sound calm and peaceful when you're describing God's help.

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Today we're going to meet King David, and we're going to learn about a time when he had very big feelings!

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*[Walk to one side of the horseshoe]*

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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.

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*[Use frustrated facial expression and voice]*

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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!

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*[Walk to other side of horseshoe, change tone to worried]*

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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.

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*[Move to center, speak with calm authority]*

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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!"

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*[Move to side, sound like David praying]*

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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.*

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*[Pause and look around at each child]*

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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.

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*[Move to center, speak with gentle wisdom]*

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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.

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*[Walk slowly around the horseshoe]*

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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.

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*[Stop walking and face the children directly]*

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And you know what happened? David's heart started to feel peaceful! God helped David's big angry feelings become smaller and calmer.

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*[Speak with excitement]*

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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!

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*[Pause dramatically]*

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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.

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*[Speak directly to the children]*

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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.

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*[Move closer to the children]*

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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.

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*[Speak warmly and encouragingly]*

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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.

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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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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!

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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.

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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.*

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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?

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20. How does God give us peace when we're upset?

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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."

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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

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*Dear God, thank you for caring about all our feelings, even the really big ones.*

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*[Pause]*

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*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.*

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*[Pause]*

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*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.*

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*[Pause]*

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*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?"**

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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!

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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. 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

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- Speaking up when family members treat each other poorly versus keeping peace

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- Confronting friends about destructive choices versus accepting them as they are

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- Sharing personal struggles on social media versus protecting others from emotional burden

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- Responding to injustice in your community versus minding your own business

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- Setting boundaries with demanding people versus always being available to help

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**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?"

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- "What helps you discern between enabling someone and genuinely helping them?"

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- "How do you decide when to step in versus when to step back?"

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- "What's the difference between being nice and being loving?"

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### 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.

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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.

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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?

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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?

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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.

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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.

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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.

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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]*

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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]*

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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!

*[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.

*[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?"

*[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!

*[Pause dramatically]*

God wants the same thing for us! God wants us to love our neighbors by being kind and helpful, not mean or hurtful.

*[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.

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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!

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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.

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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.*

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1. How do you want friends to treat you when you're feeling sad?

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  2. What's one way you can be kind to someone at school?

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  3. How did Paul's friends feel when they learned about loving neighbors?

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  4. What would you do if you saw someone sitting alone at lunch?

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  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."

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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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