

KIDS of INTEGRITY

Compassion



Invoke the mercy rule during a water fight, go on a worm rescue mission, or turn your stuffed animals into “lepers” to find out how Jesus treated outcasts!

There are loads of fun ideas in this lesson to help kids:

- have sympathy for the suffering of others
- want to share what they have to meet others’ needs
- be considerate of others’ feelings and be quick to comfort and encourage others.

You’ll find this lesson helpful for addressing selfishness, materialism, insensitivity to the plight of others and an unwillingness to forgive.

Lesson contents

Parents’ prayer	2
Kids talk with God	3
Speak a blessing	4
Memory verses	4
Kick-off craft	5
Bible stories	6
Creative discipline	10
Hands-on options	10

Scripture verses in this lesson are quoted from the English Standard Version.

Parents’ prayer

As you spend time in private prayer preparing for this lesson, use the following prayer to help you talk to God about your own need to grow in showing compassion to others.

If you prefer to personalize your prayer, read through the additional verses provided under “Scripture-guided prayer” for direction and inspiration.

Sample prayer

God of mercy, who is a God like You, who forgives my sins? You do not stay angry forever but delight to show mercy (Micah 7:18). Thank you for the sacrificial blood of Jesus, the richness of Your grace and free pardon for my sins (Ephesians 1:7). I humbly come before You, knowing that it is not because of my righteousness that I can make requests of You – it is because of Your great mercy (Daniel 9:18). Your compassion never ends. With the coming of each new day, I experience Your faithfulness, love and kindness (Lamentations 3:22-23). Thank you for being a God of endless grace and tender mercy (Nehemiah 9:31, Luke 1:78).

I ask You to help me see and love others as You do. I want to have a compassionate and merciful heart. My prayer is that You would fill me with Your wisdom so that I can be pure, then peace loving, considerate, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruit, impartial and sincere. Please give me gentle sensitivity and a humble willingness to do the things You ask me to do. I’d like my children to see in me an eagerness to open my arms to those who are poor and needy (James 3:13,17, Proverbs 31:20). Please teach me how to live and parent as You do, with a perfect blend of grace, compassion and justice.

Thank you for the caring hearts that You have given my children. Please pour Your love into _____ and _____, filling them with a Jesus-like tenderness and compassion. Let them recognize the mercy You extend to them daily and, in turn, remind them to be quick to offer grace and forgiveness to others. My prayer is that _____ and _____ will live peaceably with everyone because they are sympathetic, compassionate and humble (1 Peter 3:8).

Please help _____ and _____ to appreciate how blessed they are and be willing to make sacrifices in order to bless others. My prayer is that their worldviews would be such that they can comprehend the needs of those living beyond our comfortable community. As _____ and _____ care for others, I ask that they will experience true joy – the joy of knowing that, whatever they did for one of the least of these brothers, they did it for You (Matthew 5:7).

Lord Jesus, I know that You secure justice for the poor and uphold the cause of the needy (Psalm 140:12). As a family, we want to be available to be used as an avenue of Your generosity and mercy. Please show us where we lack concern and increase our awareness of the suffering of others. Help us to be quick to do what You ask of us, to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with You, our God (Micah 6:8). May we count it our privilege to share what You have given us, and to serve those less fortunate in our community and around the world. Amen.

Scripture-guided prayer for parents

Read and pray through one or more of the selected Scriptures under each heading. Focus on listening to God and allowing His Spirit to direct you as you pray.

Character focus

Begin by thanking God for His mercy.
Nehemiah 9:30-32 | Psalm 103:9-14 | Isaiah 54:10 | Micah 7:18-19 | 1 Peter 1:3-5

Heart search

Acknowledge the areas in your life where you are lacking in compassion.
Isaiah 55:6-9 | Daniel 9:4-5,17-19 | Hosea 6:6 | Luke 6:32-37 | James 2:12-13

Gratitude

Thank God for ways you have seen family members display compassion and mercy to others.

Family requests

Ask God to help you and your children be compassionate, as He is.

Proverbs 22:9 | Proverbs 14:31 | Ephesians 4:32 | Colossians 3:12-14 | James 3:17

Kids talk with God

These sample prayers all begin with “Dear God,” but you may use any other names of God your children are comfortable with, (i.e. Father God, Lord Jesus, Heavenly Father, Abba Father, etc.)

If your children are ready to pray original prayers, you may wish to use the Bible verses provided under “Scripture-guided prayer for children.”

Sample prayers

Dear God, please help me to notice when people are hurting and show me how to share Your love with them. Amen.

Dear God, thank you for showing me mercy every day. Please help me to be merciful to others. Amen.

Dear God, right now I feel like paying back wrong for wrong. Please help me to choose to be merciful instead. Amen.

Dear God, even when I don't feel like forgiving, please help me to remember that You show mercy to those who show mercy to others (Matthew 5:7). Amen.

Dear God, I don't feel like caring about anyone but myself right now. Please send Your Holy Spirit to help me love others like You do. Amen.

Dear God, thank you for loving me and forgiving my sins. Help me to forgive others as You have forgiven me (Matthew 6:12). Amen.

*Note: For an additional prayer idea, see the activity “caring hearts” in the **hands-on options** section of this lesson which guides you in writing your own version of a Celtic prayer.*

Scripture-guided prayer for children

Read through one of the selected Scriptures under each heading and help your children pray based on the verse you read. Encourage them to listen to God and allow His Spirit to guide them as they pray.

Character focus

Begin by exalting God for being compassionate.
Psalm 103:13 | Psalm 145:8-9 | James 5:11b

Heart search

Acknowledge times when you have trouble showing mercy to others.

Isaiah 55:7 | Luke 6:36-37 | 1 John 4:20

Gratitude

Thank God for ways you have seen your family members share His love with others.

Family requests

Ask God to help you, your siblings and your parents be merciful.

James 3:17 | 1 Peter 3:8 | 1 John 4:21

Speak a blessing

Encourage your children throughout your lesson on compassion by being quick to commend them whenever you notice them making an effort to show compassion or mercy to others. Simple statements like these mean a lot to your child.

- That was very compassionate. When we show compassion we are showing others what God's love is like.
- _____ is a merciful boy / girl.
- _____, you are showing compassion! It's awesome that you are being like Jesus!
- God is pleased when we show mercy as you have, _____.
- The Bible says, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy" (Matthew 5:7). God is pleased when you show mercy.
- You have such a kind and tender heart. Thank you for being so caring.
- Thank you for being like a cuddly stuffed toy – a comfort to me / your friend / your sibling. (See the **hands-on option** "camping in the kitchen" in this lesson for details.)

Memory verses

Memorizing Scripture with your children helps God's Spirit bring about lasting change. Choose a verse that your children can learn in a pre-determined period of time and aim to review the verse at least once every day.

Psalm 86:15 "But You, O Lord, are a God merciful and gracious, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love and faithfulness."

Psalm 116:5 "Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful."

Psalm 140:12 "I know that the Lord will maintain the cause of the afflicted, and will execute justice for the needy."

Psalm 145:8 "The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love."

Psalm 145:9 "The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made."

Proverbs 14:31 "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors Him."

Proverbs 19:17 "Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed."

Proverbs 22:9 "Whoever has a bountiful eye will be blessed, for he shares his bread with the poor."

Proverbs 29:7 "A righteous man knows the rights of the poor; a wicked man does not understand such knowledge."

Isaiah 30:18 "Therefore the Lord waits to be gracious to you, and therefore He exalts Himself to show mercy to you. For the Lord is a God of justice; blessed are all those who wait for Him."

Micah 6:8 "He has told you, O man, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?"

Zechariah 7:9 “Thus says the Lord of hosts, Render true judgments, show kindness and mercy to one another . . .”

Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Matthew 25:40 “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.’”

Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

James 3:17 “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

1 Peter 3:8 “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

1 John 3:16 “By this we know love, that He laid down His life for us, and we ought to lay down our lives for the brothers.”

1 John 3:17 “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

1 John 4:20 “If anyone says, ‘I love God,’ yet hates his brother, he is a liar; for he who does not love his brother whom he has seen cannot love God whom he has not seen.”

1 John 4:21 “And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”

Kick-off craft

Plan to do this kick-off craft early in your lesson on compassion. You’ll begin by making a special poster – a poster that encourages your children to fast from junk food for a week so you can use the money saved to buy food for your local food bank. (If your family already lives junk food free, consider fasting from another privilege instead.)

Your goal is to put into practice the concept of “true fasting” from Isaiah 58:6-7, with particular emphasis on the Scripture verses that say:

“Is not this the fast that I choose . . . to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him . . .?”

Junk-food fast poster

Directions

- 1 First, explain the concept of fasting to your children, and your goal of fasting to help others. If you wish, you can use an explanation like this one:
 - Fasting is giving up a need or desire in order to honour God. Many people fast by not eating any food at all for a period of time – they might give up food for a day, or a week, or sometimes even a month.
 - God asks us to care for the needs of others when we fast. So for this part of our lesson on compassion, we’re going to help others in a special way – by giving up junk food for a week. Then we can use the money we saved on junk food to buy food for people in our area who don’t have enough food to eat.
- 2 Have your children cut pictures of their favourite treats from a grocery store flyer – treats such as sugary cereal, cookies, candy, chocolate, chips or ice cream.
- 3 Write your chosen memory verse for this lesson on compassion on your poster.
- 4 Next, help your children glue their pictures of treats on the poster.
- 5 Hang your poster in a prominent place. When your children choose to forgo their usual treat, such as dessert, have them place a check mark beside the image of that treat on their poster. Use this as an opportunity to review the memory verse together too.

- 6 When your week of fasting is complete, take a celebratory trip to the grocery store to buy food for the food bank. Many grocery stores have donation bins for the local food bank in-store.

Relevant Scripture

Isaiah 58:6-7 “Is not this the fast that I choose: to loose the bonds of wickedness, to undo the straps of the yoke, to let the oppressed go free, and to break every yoke? Is it not to share your bread with the hungry and bring the homeless poor into your house; when you see the naked, to cover him, and not to hide yourself from your own flesh?”

Bible stories

This section provides a number of Bible stories with the theme of compassion, along with questions you can use to guide family discussions. Choose one or more stories that are appropriate for your children.

If the Bible passage is too complex for your children, paraphrase the story yourself or use the summary provided under “key concepts.”

Hungry mouths and hungry hearts

Read Mark 6:34-44 and Matthew 15:29-39.

Questions for discussion

1. Have you ever seen a stray dog?
2. What does a stray dog look like?
3. How do you feel when you see an animal that is lonely or hungry?
4. What do pets need from people?
5. Would your pet be happy if you fed it, but never loved it?
6. Why did Jesus have compassion for the people?
7. What kind of miracles did Jesus do for the people?
8. What would happen to sheep that did not have a shepherd to care for them?

Key concepts

When we care for our pets we don't just feed them, we also love them. To care deeply for the needs of another person or creature is an expression of our love for them. This tender concern is called compassion.

The Bible tells us that Jesus had compassion for people. We know that Jesus was concerned about those who were sick and hurting, because He healed those who were blind, crippled and unable to speak.

Jesus was also concerned about the physical needs of people who were not ill. In this story, Jesus told His disciples that He was concerned that the people had not eaten for a long time and might collapse on their way home, so He fed them before He sent them home (Matthew 15:32).

Jesus was concerned about people's spiritual needs too. He saw that the people were like sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34). Mark says, “He began to teach them many things.” Although we don't know exactly what He taught them, based on what Jesus said elsewhere in the Bible, we can guess that He was likely telling them about God's amazing love, eternal life and the importance of loving and obeying God, and of loving each other.

Note: The verses below give some examples of Jesus' teaching.

Relevant Scripture

John 3:16-17 “For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life. For God did not send His Son into the world to condemn the world, but in order that the world might be saved through Him.”

Matthew 7:21 “Not everyone who says to Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ will enter the kingdom of heaven, but the one who does the will of My Father who is in heaven.”

Mark 12:29-31 “Jesus answered, ‘The most important is, “Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your mind and with all your strength.” The second is this: “You

shall love your neighbor as yourself.” There is no other commandment greater than these.’ ”

John 14:2-3 “In My Father’s house are many rooms. If it were not so, would I have told you that I go to prepare a place for you? And if I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again and will take you to Myself, that where I am you may be also.”

John 14:5-7 “Thomas said to Him, ‘Lord, we do not know where You are going. How can we know the way?’ Jesus said to him, ‘I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me. If you had known Me, you would have known My Father also. From now on you do know Him and have seen Him.’ ”

Generous hearts

*Note: This Bible story works well in conjunction with the **hands-on option** “walking in their shoes.”*

Read Acts 10:1-8 and Acts 9:36-43.

Questions for discussion

1. How was Cornelius’ family described?
2. What did Cornelius do regularly?
3. How was Dorcas described?
4. Why do you think the people were sad when she died?
5. How would you describe your family?
6. Can you think of some ways we can care for the needs of people in our community?

Key concepts

The Bible says that Cornelius’ family was careful to try to live in a way that pleased God. It also says that Cornelius gave generously to those in need and prayed to God regularly (Acts 10:2).

Dorcas was another person who was well known for all the kind things she did for others and for the way she showed concern for the poor. When Dorcas died, the widows came and showed Paul all the clothing she had made for them.

If you ask God for ways that your family can care for others within your town or city, expect that God will show you a special job that He wants your family to do. It might be shovelling a snowy sidewalk for a widow or helping her with yardwork. You might also want to search out organizations that distribute used clothing and household items to people who need them.

Relevant Scripture

Matthew 25:40 “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.’ ”

Worse than dirt!

Note: Kids will have fun acting out this Bible story with stuffed toys. Sprinkle a stuffed animal with some baking soda to represent it being “unclean.” Have the sprinkled stuffy call out Unclean! Unclean! to warn the other animals to stay away or risk becoming “diseased.” Let another stuffed animal who is playing the part of Jesus use a vacuum cleaner to “heal” the diseased stuffed animal.

Read Leviticus 13:45-46 and Luke 5:12-13.

Questions for discussion

1. If you rolled in the mud, what would your mom or dad say?
2. Would your mom hug you if you were covered in mud?
3. What would she ask you to do?
4. How would you feel if you got dirt on your skin that wouldn’t come off, even after a bath?
5. In Bible times, where did the people who had skin diseases have to live?
6. Why did they have to go and live by themselves?
7. How would you feel if you could not live in your home with your family?
8. Why do you think Jesus touched the man who had leprosy?

9. Do you know anyone who could be considered an outcast?
10. How can you share Jesus' love with him or her?

Key concepts

When we are dirty, others generally don't want to touch us. But we can get clean by taking a bath. Leprosy is a highly contagious skin disease. Having leprosy is like having permanently dirty skin that no one wants to touch.

In Bible times, people who had infectious skin diseases like leprosy had to live outside the city so their disease would not be passed on to other people. Luke tells a story of a man with leprosy who came to see Jesus, begging Jesus to cure his leprosy. The Bible says that Jesus was filled with compassion for the man and that He reached out His hand and touched the man. Jesus said, "Be clean!" and the man was healed (Luke 12:13).

Jesus did more than feel sorry for the man. He saw the man's painful situation and did something about it. When we show concern for and meet the needs of those who are hurting, we are being like Jesus.

Relevant Scripture

1 John 4:21 "And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother."

Forgiving others shows compassion

Read Matthew 18:21-35, Ephesians 2:4-5, 1 Timothy 1:15-17 and Titus 3:5.

Questions for discussion

1. How did the servant's master take pity on him?
2. Did the servant then take pity on his fellow servant?
3. What happened to the servant who refused to have pity on his fellow servant?
4. How does God show us mercy?
5. Can you think of a real-life example of when we could be like the unkind servant?

6. How does God expect us to show mercy to each other?

Key concepts

Jesus' disciples asked Him how many times they should forgive each other. In reply, Jesus told a story about a king who was settling accounts with his servants.

One servant owed the king a great deal of money. When the king asked for the money, the servant begged for mercy and the king had pity on him and cancelled his debt. But just after having his debt cancelled, that same servant went and found another servant who owed him a small amount of money. He demanded that his money be paid back immediately. The indebted servant asked for some time to get the money, but the other servant had him thrown in prison.

As you can imagine, when the king heard about this, he had the first servant thrown in prison himself. Jesus ended the story by saying, "So also My heavenly Father will do to every one of you, if you do not forgive your brother from your heart" (Matthew 18:35).

At times we can be tempted to be like the unmerciful servant. Imagine if a child spilled milk on their father's work papers by mistake, and the father forgave the child. What if, moments later, a sibling accidentally spilled water on that same child's toy, but they were unwilling to forgive their brother or sister?

To refuse to forgive is being unmerciful. Jesus tells us that God is like the king: He shows us compassion by forgiving us all our sins. God wants us to forgive others as He has forgiven us. When Jesus taught the disciples to pray He prayed, "Forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors" (Matthew 6:12). We show compassion when we forgive each other.

Relevant Scripture

Matthew 6:12 ". . . and forgive us our debts, as we also have forgiven our debtors."

Ephesians 4:32 “Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, as God in Christ forgave you.”

God's gift of mercy

Read Luke 2:1-32.

Questions for discussion

1. What does a mother or father do when their child is sick?
2. Why did Mary and Joseph take Jesus to the temple?
3. Who was Simeon?
4. Who was Simeon waiting for?
5. What did Simeon say when he saw Jesus?
6. Do you know what the word “salvation” means?

Key concepts

It's natural for parents to care compassionately for their children. When a child is not well, their parents ensure they get proper medical treatment. Sometimes the child needs bedrest. Other times, they need medicine. In some cases, the sick child must be taken to a doctor.

Romans 3:23 tells us that we have all sinned. Our sin is like a sickness in our hearts and Jesus is like the doctor. He offers us mercy in the form of forgiveness. God forgives our sins and can help us get rid of the sin in our lives.

In the story of Simeon, when Simeon saw Jesus, he said he had seen God's “salvation” (Luke 2:30). This reference to the word for salvation in the Greek language is *soteria* or *soterion*, meaning *deliverance*, *safety* and *health*. God sent His Son, Jesus, to deliver us. Jesus is the “cure” for the “sickness” of sin in our lives.

Relevant Scripture

Mark 2:17 “And when Jesus heard it, He said to them, ‘Those who are well have no need of a physician, but those who are sick. I came not to call the righteous, but sinners.’”

Romans 3:22b-24 “For there is no distinction: for all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified by His grace as a gift, through the redemption that is in Christ Jesus.”

1 John 1:9 “If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”

Soft-hearted and open-handed

Read Deuteronomy 15:7-11.

Note: Have a coin or some other small treasure for each child to hold in their hands during this story.

Questions for discussion

1. Imagine you have a treasure in your hand and that I am going to take it from you. What are you going to do to stop me?
2. How did God say the Israelites were to treat those who are poor?
3. What do you think being “open-handed” means?
4. How is being hard-hearted connected to being tight-fisted?
5. Do you think there are any poor people in the world?
6. How about in our own town/city? Do any poor people live here?
7. Can you think of something we can do to help the poor people?
8. What does the Bible tell us that God will do for those who are generous?

Key concepts

If we are trying to hold on to something small, we usually protect it by making a clenched fist. The Bible uses the terms “hard-hearted” and “tight-fisted” to describe someone who is unwilling to share with the poor. Alternatively, a person who is generous is called “open-handed.”

God wants us to find joy in sharing what we have with others, especially with those who have very little. When we show compassion and kindness through giving to the poor, God notices and it pleases Him.

Relevant Scripture

Deuteronomy 15:7 “If among you, one of your brothers should become poor, in any of your towns within your land that the Lord your God is giving you, you shall not harden your heart or shut your hand against your poor brother . . .”

Proverbs 19:17 “Whoever is generous to the poor lends to the Lord, and He will repay him for his deed.”

Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

Creative discipline

When you need to discipline your child, reinforce the concept of compassion by giving them a small taste of God’s mercy.

Biblical basis

Romans 6:23 “For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life in Christ Jesus our Lord.”

Suggested disciplinary action

The next time your child needs to be disciplined, choose a consequence as you normally would, but serve the “sentence” along with your child. For example, if a time-out is called for, sit with your child for the duration of the time-out. If the discipline is a service, such as cleaning up extra toys, then work alongside your child.

While you are doing this, explain to your child that you are treating him or her as God does, with less severity than is deserved. He or she “deserves” to bear all the discipline on their own, but you are sharing the pain of the discipline with him or her.

Also remind your child that God’s Word says that we have all sinned and deserve to die (Romans 6:23). Emphasize that God forgives us and doesn’t make us pay the penalty for our sins. Instead, He chose to take the punishment for our sins through Jesus’

death. Jesus didn’t just serve a discipline alongside us – He took our place!

Affirmation

Explain to your child that when God knows that he or she is truly sorry for doing wrong, God is willing to forgive him or her. Talk with your child about how we can go to God and ask for mercy when we have sinned. Encourage your child to pray a simple prayer such as, *Dear God, I have sinned by _____ . Please forgive me. Thank you for showing me mercy. Amen.*

Encourage your child by telling them that God wants to help us in our “time of need” (when we are tempted to sin). Affirm your son or daughter by letting him or her know that when they ask for God’s help, He will provide the strength that they need to avoid sin.

Hebrews 4:16 “Let us then with confidence draw near to the throne of grace, that we may receive mercy and find grace to help in time of need.”

Hands-on options

These fun ideas require very little preparation, making it easy for you to share some simple but memorable lessons with your kids. Choose just one or two ideas that will appeal to your children.

Compassion clips

drama / role play

Have your children stage a series of mini puppet shows to help them practice verbalizing sympathy and support.

First, encourage your children to gather some stuffed animals or dolls to use as puppets. Then, give each child a scenario to act out where one of their “puppets” is in distress. The remaining children in the audience are to have their toy puppets come alongside to offer help and kind words of encouragement. (You may want to video the action to review this lesson together at another time.)

Here are some suggested scenarios for the puppets to act out:

- falling down and getting hurt
- losing the ice cream from an ice-cream cone

- concern over a sick or dying pet
- feeling left out or lonely after not being invited to a birthday party
- feeling apprehensive about an upcoming dental or medical exam
- feeling upset about a broken toy
- feeling hurt by something someone said.

As the mini-dramas take place, have your children practice saying simple phrases to show their concern and support. Here are some suggestions:

- *You seem worried. What's wrong?*
- *I'm here for you. What can I do to help?*
- *Because you are so special to me, when I see you upset, it upsets me too. Can I give you a hug?*
- *I love you. How can I pray for you right now?*
- *Can I pray for you and ask God to help us get through this?*

Provide a “blessing” or “reward” for the stuffed animals who are showing compassion. Award them heart stickers or coupons as their ticket to attend a “theatre cast party” afterwards. Or allow compassionate stuffies to go along on the next family outing, to sleep in a special bed, or enjoy a privilege of your children’s choosing.

Relevant Scripture

Matthew 5:7 “Blessed are the merciful, for they shall receive mercy.”

The mercy rule

any time

Implement “the mercy rule” when you play board games like *Trouble* or *Sorry!*, and look for other ways to implement the same concept in your day-to-day life.

The mercy rule works like this: Typically, in the game of *Trouble* or *Sorry!*, when one player lands on a space

occupied by another player, the official game rules dictate that the player who was already on the space must give it up and return to the start.

The mercy rule comes into play when someone lands on a space already held by the player who is the furthest behind in the game. If you land on the player who is least likely to win, you simply take the space on the board behind them instead of sending them back to the start.

After the game, or during your next trip in the car together, use the discussion questions below to introduce your children to some real-life applications of the mercy rule.

Pray with your children, asking God to help you be a family who practices the mercy rule at all times – not just during family games.

Questions for discussion

1. Do you know what it means to “kick someone who is down”?
2. Can you think of some real-life examples of people who are hurting or “down”?
3. How can we apply the mercy rule in each of these situations?

Relevant Scripture

1 Peter 3:8 “Finally, all of you, have unity of mind, sympathy, brotherly love, a tender heart, and a humble mind.”

James 3:17 “But the wisdom from above is first pure, then peaceable, gentle, open to reason, full of mercy and good fruits, impartial and sincere.”

Open arms

servicing others

Packing an Operation Christmas Child shoebox is a great way to teach your children to care for others.

Operation Christmas Child is organized by Samaritan’s Purse, and gives you the opportunity to pack a shoebox with small gifts and toiletries for a needy child.

This activity is ideal for children because they can relate to the needs of a child their own age and they enjoy choosing the gift items. You don't have to wait for the Christmas season: you can pack a box any time of the year and tuck it away until November when the boxes are collected in communities across North America.

Alternatively, you can choose another way to serve others as a family, so you can be like the "wife of noble character" in Proverbs 31:20 who not only cares for the needs of her household, but also "opens her arms to the poor and extends her hands to the needy."

Whatever you choose to do, affirm your children with one of the Bible verses provided here to let them know that God is honoured when they care for others.

These discussion questions will help you introduce your children to the idea of helping those less fortunate.

Questions for discussion

1. How would you feel on Christmas morning if there were no gifts to open?
2. What would you want to pack in a shoebox for a child your age?
3. If you were packing some gifts for baby Jesus, what would you put in the box?
4. Why is it important for us to share with people who are poor?
5. How does it make you feel when you think about a child opening the shoebox you packed?

Key concepts

Caring for the poor and needy is an expression of our love for God and shows others that we have God's love in our hearts. The Bible tells us that whatever acts of kindness we do for anyone else is as though we have done it for Jesus. When we care for those in need, we honour God.

Relevant Scripture

Proverbs 14:31 "Whoever oppresses a poor man insults his Maker, but he who is generous to the needy honors Him."

Matthew 25:40 "And the King will answer them, 'Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.'"

Wet and wild water fight

physical activity

On a hot summer day, have a water fight with your children. Give each child a similar-sized small bucket or plastic cup.

As the parent, you will hold the refill hose. Play by the rule that your children can dump water on you or spray you, but you can only spray them if they forget to call *Mercy!* when they come for a refill.

Encourage your children to show mercy to you as well, by choosing not to soak you while you are refilling another child's arsenal.

Prior to having the water fight, review "merciful" ways to wet each other down. One "merciful guideline" could be "no water above the shoulders," since it can hurt to get water thrown in your face or ears.

After your game, remind your children that you were holding all the water power because you had the hose, but you chose to show them mercy.

Relevant Scripture

Luke 6:31 "And as you wish that others would do to you, do so to them."

Compassion starts small

getting into nature

It's important to teach children to be merciful when dealing with all living creatures, both plants and animals.

Share Luke 12:6 with your children, which tells us that God is aware when a bird is killed, and help your children understand that all God's creatures are precious to Him. Establish as one of your family's values the simple rule *If God made it, we don't hurt it.*

When you find an insect or spider in your home, put a glass over it and slip a piece of thick paper or cardboard under the glass to contain the creature. Then place the glass on a firm surface where your children can observe it.

Spend time with your children admiring the beauty of God's creation. Look with fascination at the coordination of its leg movements and at the intricacy of its features. Thank God for the beauty of the creepy crawly and then return it to the outdoors. Talk about how much happier it must be now that it has been allowed to go back to its home.

Relevant Scripture

Luke 12:6 "Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies? And not one of them is forgotten before God."

Seeking God's heart

drive time / any time

At a family mealtime, or while on a long drive, put your heads together to write a family prayer asking God to give you His love and concern for others.

If you wish, you can use this simple Celtic prayer as a model for your prayer:

A Celtic prayer

Call: Lord . . . open our eyes . . .
Response: May we see those around us.
Help us to notice those who are alone, hurting, and in need of prayer.

Call: Lord . . . open our hands . . .
Response: Make us generous people.
Create in us a giving spirit, ready to meet needs as we are able. Help us not to wait only for opportunities to be heroic, but to respond to the needs that are put before us.

Call: Lord . . . guard our lips . . .
Response: May we speak the truth, but always in love. May we be quick to listen, slow to speak, and

slow to become angry. May our speech be filled with praise for You, and encouragement for one another.

Call: Lord . . . guard our hearts . . .
Response: May we steer clear of anything which has the power to damage and destroy. Curb our selfish desires and protect our homes and our relationships.

Call: Lord . . . break our hearts . . .
Response: May we look at our neighbourhoods, county, city, and world with Your eyes. Break our hearts with that which breaks Yours.

Call: Lord . . . bend our knees . . .
Response: When we need guidance, may we look to You.
Make this church a house of prayer.

Call: Lord . . . wet our eyes . . .
Response: May we be a tender people.
Help us to pause long enough to listen to each other and to carry each other's burdens.

Call: Lord . . . use our feet . . .
Response: May we be willing messengers of the Gospel, quick to testify of Your mercy, goodness, and grace.

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To create your own prayer, read each "call" in the example Celtic prayer and ask your children to suggest a "response." You can also use the questions for discussion as prompts to inspire ideas. Here are some suggested responses for your prayer:

Call: *Lord . . . open our eyes . . .*
Response: *to see those around us who are sad, lonely or in need.*

Call: *Lord . . . open our hands . . .*
Response: *to share the things we would rather hang on to.*

Call: *Lord . . . guard our lips . . .*
Response: *from saying unkind words.*

Call: *Lord . . . break our hearts . . .*
Response: *with the things that make You sad.*

Call: *Lord . . . bend our knees . . .*
Response: *we want to pray for those who need You.*

Call: *Lord . . . wet our eyes . . .*
Response: *we want to cry with those who are hurting.*

Call: *Lord . . . use our feet . . .*
Response: *to carry blessings to others.*

Questions for discussion

1. Who would God want us to notice?
2. What would God want us to share?
3. Would God want us to share only big things or small things?
4. Is there anything happening in our home that would make God sad?
5. What are some things God wouldn't want us to say?
6. What do we have a lot of that we could share?

Love like a dog

drive time / any time

In this activity, you'll watch how your pet dog reacts when someone in the family is upset, and talk about body language cues that suggest someone is upset.

If you have a dog, see if you can catch them trying to lick the face or hands of someone who is sad or upset. Point out to your children that pets can sometimes set a good example of being sensitive to the needs and hurts of those around us.

Brainstorm together and come up with a list of signs that indicate a person may have inner hurts. For example, if a family member who is usually talkative is very quiet, that can be a sign that they are upset.

Discuss ways that you might console a distressed family member, and have each family member share ways they would appreciate being encouraged. Licking a person is not recommended (unless you are a dog)! But a hug, a hand on the shoulder or a pat on the back is a great way to encourage someone.

Relevant Scripture

1 John 4:21 *“And this commandment we have from Him: whoever loves God must also love his brother.”*

Come alongside

physical activity

While you are out walking together, this simple exercise will help you show your children the value of coming alongside a friend or family member to encourage them during a hard time.

When you are out on your walk, go ahead and allow a safe distance to separate you and your children. Hopefully at least one of your children will call out, “Wait for me!” Use the opportunity to discuss how simply walking beside someone can be an act of compassion. Use the discussion questions provided, if you wish.

You may want to follow up your discussion by reading the familiar poem *Footprints*. Talk about how God not only walks with us, He “carries” us during hard times.

Read Matthew 19:13-15 and point out that Jesus touched little children to let them know they were important to Him.

At the close of your discussion, pray with your children and ask God to give you opportunities to encourage others. Then watch for practical ways your children can put their suggestions into action.

Questions for discussion

1. Why do we usually want another person walking alongside us?
2. Can you tell about a time when you felt really sad or disappointed about something?
3. Who or what helped you feel better?
4. How can we “come alongside” a person who is having a tough time? (Examples of a tough time might be losing a pet or loved one, being sick, feeling lonely, moving to another place, getting injured, being laughed at or made the brunt of a joke, or feeling embarrassed over a mistake such as spilling food or drink.)
5. If a friend or family member is having a hard time, how can you remind them that God is with them?

Key concepts

Having another person walk alongside us is encouraging. To encourage simply means to help another person find the courage he or she needs to continue on. When we are miserable, it usually feels better if we know someone cares about our sadness.

We can encourage someone who is feeling sad, worried, scared, disappointed or hurt through a kind touch or by simply being with them. In Matthew 19:13-15 we read that Jesus touched little children to let them know they were important to Him.

God provides comfort through His Holy Spirit, but He also wants us to comfort and encourage each other.

Relevant Scripture

Romans 12:6-8 “Having gifts that differ according to the grace given to us, let us use them: if prophecy, in proportion to our faith; if service, in our serving; the one who teaches, in his teaching; the one who exhorts, in his exhortation; the one who contributes, in generosity; the one who leads, with zeal; the one who does acts of mercy, with cheerfulness.”

Matthew 19:13-15 “Then children were brought to Him that He might lay His hands on them and pray. The disciples rebuked the people, but Jesus said, ‘Let the little children come to Me and do not hinder them, for to such belongs the kingdom of heaven.’ And He laid His hands on them and went away.”

1 Thessalonians 5:11 “Therefore encourage one another and build one another up, just as you are doing.”

Child sponsorship

servicing others

Sponsoring a needy child is a wonderful way to introduce your children to caring for the needs of someone beyond their immediate community.

Many organizations offer child sponsorship. Some suggested organizations include Compassion Canada, Food for the Hungry and World Vision.

You can view photos and read short stories online with your kids about children in need of sponsorship.

To help your children fully comprehend the level of poverty elsewhere in the world, and what a difference your sponsorship can make, give your kids some understanding of how little it costs to care for a sponsored child for a month. For example, you could tell your child:

It costs \$35 each month to support a needy child. If we added up the money we would spend on buying a new toy (\$30), a bag of chips (\$2) and two cups of coffee (\$3), that would be enough money to pay for a child’s food and schooling for a whole month.

Relevant Scripture

1 John 3:17 “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

Operation worm rescue

getting into nature

Toward the end of a rainy day, venture outside to conduct a “worm rescue.”

Explain to your kids that worms come out of the ground during rainy periods to migrate. When the ground is wet, they can move safely over sidewalks and driveways. But when the sun comes out, they can dry out before they get a chance to return to the soil.

Using your bare hands, or wearing rubber gloves, help the worms that have been caught out on the sidewalk by returning them to the grass or garden. Say encouraging words to the worms, such as *Bye, bye little guy. Here you go, back to your home. Or, The sun is coming out; go home and stay safe!*

Use the questions for discussion to help your children connect the concept of compassion to this activity.

Note: A book or DVD version of the story Sara and the Starfish makes a nice complement to this activity.

Questions for discussion

1. What could happen to worms if it gets hot and sunny before they can get off the sidewalk?
2. Who has the power to make a difference for the worms?
3. How did you feel when you rescued the worms?
4. The worms had a problem. We noticed and we cared enough to help. Can you remember the word that describes the feeling we were demonstrating? (*Compassion*)
5. When we rescued the worms, how were we being like God?
6. What are some ways we can “rescue” people?

Key concepts

The worms faced a life or death issue. If they didn't get back into the cool, damp soil before the sun came out, they would have dried out and died. We noticed their problem and we were big enough to help, so we took the time to do so.

It feels good to help those who are in need – even if they are just small creatures. “Rescuing” or caring for people is even more rewarding. We show compassion or “rescue” people whenever we notice that someone has a problem and we care enough to do something to help. When we show compassion to anyone or anything, we are being loving and merciful like God is.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 145:8-9 “The Lord is gracious and merciful, slow to anger and abounding in steadfast love. The Lord is good to all, and His mercy is over all that He has made.”

Blanket tag

physical activity

Play blanket tag according to the following instructions, to emphasize the idea that “love covers a multitude of sins” (1 Peter 4:8).

As the parent, you have the task of being “it.” You will need a bath towel or a small blanket – a baby blanket is ideal. Have your children run around and tease you as you try to “catch” them by touching them with the blanket. As soon as you’ve caught a child, wrap the blanket around their head and shoulders like a shawl and give them a hug saying, *I forgive you for teasing me, because love covers sin!*

Play blanket tag for as long as you wish. When it's time to catch your breath and wind down, talk about how sad it is that we often forget to show compassion and forgiveness to others, and instead are quick to condemn others – even though we know we have been forgiven by God, and have received His mercy and forgiveness.

Follow-up by role-playing some familiar scenarios from your home to help your kids practice correcting someone else's behaviour with kindness and gentleness, rather than with harsh condemnation or an accusing tone.

Example scenarios might be when someone:

- refuses to share a toy
- speaks rudely

- insists on having their own way
- unkindly teases a sibling
- disobeys parental instructions.

Have your children suggest appropriate and inappropriate ways to correct family members, and act out some of their ideas.

*Note: For a related discussion see “condemnation is God’s job” in the **Bible stories** section of the **forgiveness** lesson.*

Relevant Scripture

Galatians 6:1 “Brothers, if anyone is caught in any transgression, you who are spiritual should restore him in a spirit of gentleness. Keep watch on yourself, lest you too be tempted.”

James 2:12-13 “So speak and act as those who are to be judged under the law of liberty. For judgment is without mercy to one who has shown no mercy. Mercy triumphs over judgment.”

1 Peter 4:8 “Above all, love each other deeply, because love covers a multitude of sins.”

My sweet baby

any time

Have fun showing your children photos of them when they were babies.

Tell some stories about your children when they were younger, and reminisce about how cute and treasured they were as infants. Describe how you had to feed, dress and carry your children when they were just helpless babies, and how you even had to help them hold their head up when they were newborns.

Explain that God puts a special love in a parent’s heart for their offspring, and that a parent’s deep desire to care for and protect their baby is a kind of compassion. Because of this compassion, a parent does everything they can to ensure that their children are kept safe and healthy.

Emphasize that the Bible likens God’s compassion for His children to that of a parent, but His love is so amazing that it goes far beyond even a parent’s love.

Relevant Scripture

Isaiah 49:15 “Can a woman forget her nursing child, that she should have no compassion on the son of her womb? Even these may forget, yet I will not forget you.”

Psalms 103:13 “As a father shows compassion to his children, so the Lord shows compassion to those who fear Him.”

Compassionate caregivers

drive time / any time

Talk to your children about the “caring professions,” such as doctors, nurses, paramedics, pastors and counsellors.

See if your children can name some caring professions without your help. As you drive around town, look for places where people in these occupations would work, such as hospitals, clinics, ambulance stations and churches.

Talk about how these people care for others, and use the discussion questions to discuss Jesus’ role as a compassionate healer. Point out that another name for God is Jehovah Rophe, meaning “Lord our healer” (Exodus 15:26).

Take time to pray and thank God for people who work in the caring professions. In the future, when you hear sirens or pass an accident scene, encourage your children to pray for the emergency workers and the people needing their help.

Questions for discussion

1. Who do you go and see if you are very sick?
2. When a person goes to the hospital with a broken leg, who cares for them?
3. How would you feel if a nurse was mean and callous to you?
4. Who comes to our home if we call an ambulance?

5. If we have some questions about God, or we need someone to pray for us, who can we go to for help?

Key concepts

We are very fortunate to live in a country where we have many sources for help and healing. If our bodies are hurt, we can get help from the paramedics working on an ambulance unit who take us to the hospital, or we can see a doctor. Medical professionals help us get the medicine or surgery needed to help our bodies fight germs or be mended.

We can also pray and ask God to help heal any injuries or illnesses we get. Not only does God promise to heal us physically, He also says He will heal us spiritually. Sin is a sickness of our hearts that only God can heal.

The Bible is full of stories about Jesus healing people physically and forgiving their sins. Jesus not only cares about our bodies being well, He also wants the spiritual part of us to be healthy too. (Our “spirit” is often referred to as our “heart.” You can also think of your spirit as being the quiet, private part of you that has the ability to talk with and know God.)

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 91:14 “Because he holds fast to Me in love, I will deliver him; I will protect him, because he knows My name.”

Psalm 103:1-3 “Bless the Lord, O my soul, and all that is within me bless His holy name! Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all His benefits, who forgives all your iniquity, who heals all your diseases . . .”

Matthew 14:14 “When He went ashore He saw a great crowd, and He had compassion on them and healed their sick.”

Matthew 20:34 “And Jesus in pity touched their eyes, and immediately they recovered their sight and followed Him.”

1 Peter 2:24 “He Himself bore our sins in His body on the tree, that we might die to sin and live to righteousness. By His wounds you have been healed.”

Note: For two related discussions see the **Bible story** “hungry mouths and hungry hearts” from this lesson and “a task requiring teamwork and determination” in the **Bible stories** section of the **cooperation** lesson.

Mercy tales

drive time / any time

Tell your kids about a time when you were short of money, or in need in some other way, and someone helped you.

Perhaps you can tell your kids about the time you had a flat tire and someone stopped to help. Describe in detail how their help made you feel. Or perhaps you can tell about a time when you received undeserved mercy or forgiveness.

If you don't have a story of your own, here's a story from our *Kids of Integrity* writer, Laurel Kirchner, for you to share instead.

Forgotten buns and a kind cashier

It was one of those days when there was too much to do and too little time. I'm usually very organized, but this particular day I let one important detail fall through the cracks. It was Bus Driver Appreciation Day at my boys' school and I had forgotten to bring the dozen cinnamon buns I had signed up to bring.

I only had a five-minute window of time to buy the buns at a nearby grocery store and get them to the school.

Fortunately my local bakery had fresh cinnamon buns available. Feeling great relief, I took two packages of six up to the cashier, only to find that I did not have my credit card with me. I only had enough money for one package.

When I explained the situation to the cashier, she let me take both packages and told me to come back later to pay for the second package. The mercy she offered me that day made a big difference for me. The bus drivers got their cinnamon buns and I was so grateful that I was able to fulfil my commitment to supply the buns.

I did go back and pay for the cinnamon buns and thanked the cashier for her trust and gracious

generosity. Had I not returned to pay, the cashier would have needed to pay for the second package of buns with her own money.

After you tell your story, read Proverbs 11:25 to your children. Let them know that when a person is kind to another person, it's not just the one who was helped who gets the benefits; the one who did the helping is blessed too.

Relevant Scripture

Proverbs 11:25 *“Whoever brings blessing will be enriched, and one who waters will himself be watered.”*

Walking in their shoes

physical activity

The idea behind this exercise is to let your children go barefoot awhile so they can have empathy and compassion for children who do not own a pair of shoes.

Begin by doing an inventory of all the shoes each member of your family owns. List all the different types of shoes you have, such as formal shoes, casual shoes, running shoes, golf shoes, tennis shoes, high heels, flip flops and summer sandals.

If it's seasonally appropriate, set up different barefoot experiences in your backyard by providing a variety of surfaces for your children to walk on. You might be able to include concrete, gravel, bare dirt, grass, and even “snow” made by shaving or finely crushing ice cubes.

If it's too cold to do the barefoot exercise outdoors, create a sensory experience for your children using a shag rug instead of grass, Lego blocks spread on a mat for a rougher surface, a cold concrete basement floor, and crushed ice or snow in a bathtub.

Finish with a foot bath where you get to soak your dirty, sore feet in a tub of warm water. While you are soaking your feet, use the discussion questions to help your children connect their experience to the harsh realities of life for other children who have no shoes at all.

Give your children an opportunity to show compassion by collecting shoes for those who need them. Begin by checking with inner-city churches or shelters to see if they are in need of footwear donations. Then ask at a local recreation centre or gym if you can collect used running shoes for the homeless in your community. Set up a large bin and a sign explaining that all donated footwear will be given to those in need. You may also want to canvas friends, family and neighbours for items they would like to donate.

Perhaps you'd like to broaden your scope of collection. When you are in contact with your local charities, ask for a list of items needed to help those less fortunate. Once you have gathered the items, make sure they are clean and in good repair and deliver them to the charity of your choice.

Questions for discussion

1. Even though it's fun to go barefoot, what are the dangers of walking around without shoes on?
2. What did it feel like to walk on the _____?
3. What was the softest surface? And the hardest?
4. Which surface did you walk on that made you wish you had shoes on?
5. What could you do if it was winter and you had to go outside, but you owned no shoes?
6. Would you like to help some people who don't own any shoes?

Note: If your children notice homeless people in your community, encourage your children to have compassion for them, rather than viewing them with fear or disdain. Tell your children that many of these people do not have jobs or homes to go to. Talk about what it must be like to live without warm clothes, shelter or access to water for hygiene. Explain that homeless people sometimes look dirty or unkempt, but that doesn't mean they are unkind or prone to criminal behaviour. Remind your kids that God loves the homeless just as much as He loves your family.

Relevant Scripture

1 John 3:17 “But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”

Matthew 25:40 “And the King will answer them, ‘Truly, I say to you, as you did it to one of the least of these My brothers, you did it to Me.’”

Camping with compassion

drama / role play

For this activity, you’ll set up a pretend campsite indoors and let your children practice offering comfort and reassurance to siblings and stuffed toys who are afraid of the dark.

Set up a pretend tent by throwing a blanket over a table, then have your children bring blankets, pillows and their favourite stuffed animal to go “camping” with them. Turn off all lights and pretend it’s nighttime, and use a flashlight inside your tent.

Let your children take turns prowling around outside the tent, growling like a wild animal. Encourage those inside the tent to comfort each other, and their stuffed animals, by saying, *Hush. There’s no need to cry. Jesus is with us.*

Celebrate by making s’mores and singing campfire songs that assure your children of God’s ongoing presence and protection. Finish by reading 2 Corinthians 1:2-4.

In the future, make it a family tradition to offer to “be a stuffy” for anyone who is discouraged or troubled. Remind your children of the talk you had in the tent about how much better it feels to have someone or something offering comfort when we are experiencing difficult emotions.

Questions for discussion

1. What do you do when you need comfort at night?
2. Which is your favourite animal, doll or blanket to use as a comforter?
3. Can you tell about a time when you needed a comforter?

4. When there’s no stuffed animal, parent or friend around, who can comfort you?
5. Why does God comfort us?
6. How can you comfort others?

Key concepts

Most of us find it comforting to be close to someone else if we feel lonely or scared. When children are frightened, it helps them feel better when they hug a stuffed animal, a pet or a parent. We can be a comforter or serve as a kind of “stuffed animal” for someone who is sad, alone or stressed by encouraging them with kind words and offering them a hug. The Bible tells us that God comforts us in our troubles so that we can share that comfort with others who are also experiencing difficulties. Offering comfort is a way of showing compassion for others.

Relevant Scripture

2 Corinthians 1:2-4 “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies and God of all comfort, who comforts us in all our affliction, so that we may be able to comfort those who are in any affliction, with the comfort with which we ourselves are comforted by God.”

Lent beyond the Easter season

drive time / any time

In this activity, you’ll help your children understand how well off they are and introduce them to the idea of making “Lent” sacrifices in order to bless others who are in need.

First, explain to your children the concept of Lent. (You’ll find help with this in the **key concepts** below.)

Next, decide with your kids how you can make a small monetary sacrifice for each day of the week, in accordance with how you have been blessed. Here are some ideas to get your kids truly “counting their blessings” as a means of deciding how much money to give to the poor, but feel free to choose other ideas too:

Monday: Donate a dime for each toy in the house.

- Tuesday: Give a loonie for each piece of candy you ate this past week.
- Wednesday: Donate a quarter for each CD, video, DVD, or Blu-ray disc you own.
- Thursday: Set aside a nickel for each pen, pencil and felt marker in your home.
- Friday: Donate ten cents for each pair of socks you own.
- Saturday: Contribute a nickel for each book your family owns.
- Sunday: Give 50 cents for each pair of shoes your family owns.

At the end of the week, deliver the money you've set aside to the person or the charity that God has directed you to.

Key concepts

Many Christians practice the tradition of Lent during the 40 days before Easter. During Lent, people often choose to fast, which means giving up food or certain activities – such as watching TV – in order to seek God more intently. As part of Lent, many people also look for special ways to serve others, or they put aside money to help others.

People choose to make these small sacrifices—like giving up their food, or their time, or entertainment – to remind them what a big sacrifice Jesus made when He gave up His life for us. It also helps them to practice being like Jesus.

We made our “sacrifice” of money so we could practice being like Jesus too, and to show our compassion for those who have much less than we have.

Relevant Scripture

1 John 3:17 *“But if anyone has the world’s goods and sees his brother in need, yet closes his heart against him, how does God’s love abide in him?”*

Salt water is special

science with a twist

Make a raw egg float in salt water to illustrate how much God cares about our tears and sorrows, and how God shows us His compassion by carrying us in our times of sorrow.

Note: This activity is repeated in the Kids of Integrity Easter lesson.

You will need a large bowl, four cups of water, plastic drinking cups, one raw egg for each child, stickers or permanent markers, tablespoons and 10 tablespoons of salt.

1. Have each child decorate a raw egg with stickers or markers to represent himself or herself.
2. Place the eggs in the bottom of a plastic bowl, then have your children take turns pouring in a cup of water at a time (four cups of water in total). As each cup of water is poured in, ask your children to list things that cause people to cry.
3. Observe the egg sitting on the bottom of the bowl, and explain that sometimes someone who is very sad says they feel as though they are “drowning in sorrow.” Mention that, just as we can’t breathe under water, sometimes our sorrows feel so heavy that we feel we can’t handle it.
4. Read Psalm 116:1-5, then have your children begin adding salt by the tablespoonful. Be sure each spoonful is stirred and dissolved before the next one is added. As you add the salt, work through the discussion questions below:

Questions for discussion

1. What do people do when they are sad?
2. How are tears different from drops of rain?
3. Have you ever cried so hard you felt like you were going to stop breathing?
4. Do you think God sees your tears?

5. When we feel just dreadfully sad, who promises to “carry” us through?
6. If a friend is sad, how can you encourage them?

Key concepts

God gave us tears as a way to help us cope with our sadness. Tears taste salty and they contain special chemicals that are released by our bodies when we are sad. *(To enrich your children’s understanding of the fascinating way God made our bodies, especially tears, you may want to do a little research on the Internet, or look through a children’s physiology book.)*

Even when our grief is so overwhelming that we feel we cannot bear it, we can be sure that God sees our tears and that He understands and cares. God is like the salt that “lifted up” the egg. He is described in the Bible as the “Father of compassion” and “the God of all comfort” (2 Corinthians 1:3). God promises to always be with us and to “carry us” through our trials and difficult days (Isaiah 46:4-5).

In Psalm 56:8, David asks God to keep track of his tears. When we cry and taste our salt tears, we can use it as a reminder of God’s care for us. If a friend or family member is experiencing sadness, we can remind them of God’s love by telling them that Jesus cares about and understands their sorrow.

Relevant Scripture

Psalm 116:1-5 “I love the Lord, because He has heard my voice and my pleas for mercy. Because He inclined His ear to me, therefore I will call on Him as long as I live. The snares of death encompassed me; the pangs of Sheol laid hold on me; I suffered distress and anguish. Then I called on the name of the Lord: ‘O Lord, I pray, deliver my soul!’ Gracious is the Lord, and righteous; our God is merciful.”

Psalm 56:8 “You have kept count of my tossings; put my tears in Your bottle. Are they not in Your book?”

Isaiah 46:4-5 “. . . even to your old age I am He and to gray hairs I will carry you. I have made, and I will bear; I will carry and will save. To whom will you liken Me and make Me equal, and compare Me, that we may be alike?”

Recommended resources

For a list of children’s stories that reinforce the theme of this lesson, consult the home page for the **compassion** lesson at Kidsofintegrity.com.