

Loving the Unlovable

Lesson Overview

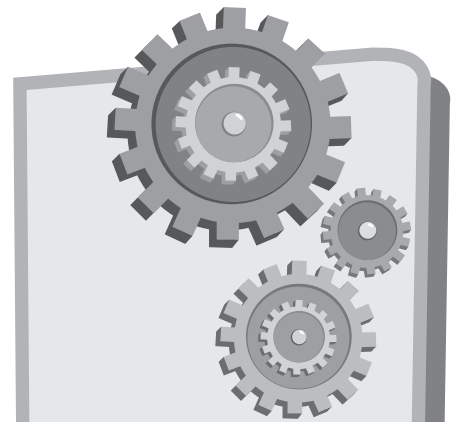
Negative reactions to abuse or injustice include: feeling intimidated and withdrawing from their enemies; thirsting for violent revenge; and cultivating hate, bitterness and resentment in your heart. All of these responses are natural, and we can understand them from a human point of view—but they are unhealthy.

Jesus told us very clearly in the Bible how to deal with our enemies: we are to love them and pray for them. Sounds simple, huh? So why is it so hard to do? And if we as adults only with great difficulty are able to love and pray for our enemies, how can we expect children to act in this manner? For example, how do we get children to want to love and be good to someone who has hurt or bullied them? Look in 1 Corinthians 13:4–8: the magnificent passage in God’s Word that explains the true meaning of love.

First, we ourselves need to experience the power of God’s transforming love. Once we were enemies of God, but in his mercy God has brought us near to him through the blood of Christ (see Rom. 5:10). Next, we need to work into our own and our kids’ understanding God’s definition of true love. When the love of Christ is at work in our lives, we don’t look at people from a mere human perspective any longer (see 2 Cor. 5:14). We realize that all human relationships are infected by sin. We realize that people both sin and are sinned against. And we realize that when people sin against us, it can get ugly if we allow our “natural” (or unredeemed human) responses to kick in. As a result, can empathize both with the hurting—and those doing the hurting. Both types of people need someone to show them the unconditional love of God. Only the love of God can soften a hardened, hurting heart. God wants us to be people who can see beyond others’ offenses and reach out to both offended and offenders, offering them God’s unconditional love.

Going Deeper

To prepare yourself to lead this lesson, take some time to reflect on your past or present hurts. Think about how you react when others hurt you. How can you act differently? Ask God to help you forgive whoever needs it. Hard to do? Spend some time in the Word, focusing on Jesus’ crucifixion. If Jesus could forgive those who crucified him (including us), we can follow His example. It may not be instant or easy, but it is what God calls us to do.



Power Point

I will bless even those who do wrong to me.

Scripture Memory Verse

“But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who mistreats you.”
—Matthew 5:44

Bible Lesson

Naaman’s servant girl blessed her new master even though she was taken from her family as a captive.
—2 Kings 5:1-17

Everything You Need

Note: For a listing of basic supplies to keep on hand, see page 13.

Game #1: Foam football, toy goal posts (or prop resembling goal posts) and masking tape.

Game #2: Foam football, tire (or hula hoop), masking tape.

Praise and Worship: *Bible & Praise* DVD.

Lesson Introduction: Script from page 100.

Scripture Memory Verse: Lesson 7 Scripture Memory Verse from *Leader Resources* CD-ROM, stopwatch or watch with second hand, Scripture Memory Verse written on various poster boards, cut into puzzle pieces, and mixed up on tables, small prizes.

Bible Connection: Lesson 7 Bible Connection video segment from *Bible & Praise* DVD.

Bible Story: Bibles, military uniform, broom, dustpan, bowl, wooden spoon, hand fan.

Object Lesson #1: None.

Object Lesson #2: Small rubber mallet, desk.

Today's Life Story: Lesson 7 Today's Life Story from *Leader Resources* CD-ROM.

Welcome

Start your service with high energy as you welcome the kids and open in prayer. See page 18 in this *Leader's Manual* for helpful welcoming tips.

Game #1

Football Field Goal

Review Questions

(Ask the following questions to help children review last week's lesson. Choose one boy and one girl who answer the questions correctly to participate in Game #1.)

- ▶ What did the king in last week's Bible story forgive the man for? *(A very large amount of money that the man owed the king.)*
- ▶ What did the man who had just been forgiven of his debt do? *(He found a man who owed him a small amount and had that man thrown in jail.)*

Props: Foam football, toy goal posts (or prop resembling goal posts) and masking tape.

Participants: One boy and one girl.

Playing the Game

Position the goal posts so the football will travel away from the audience when it's kicked. Testing during pre-service setup is recommended for the best positioning of the goal and kicking area. Mark a kicking line with masking tape.

Today we're going to have our own field goal competition! *(Encourage the players to get their kicking foot in gear! Have the audience come up with a team name for each child. Allow children in the audience to call out their favorite team names and come to a consensus about which names will be used to address the boy and girl. Encourage children in the audience to cheer for their favorite team.)*

To play, have the tallest player go first. You can spot and hold the ball for each player. Each player will have three chances to score a field goal. The player with the most field goals wins. Add up the total points *(3 points per field goal)*. If there is a tie, have a one-shot kickoff. Continue until a winner is declared.

Game #2

Football Hoops

Review Questions

(Select one boy and one girl who answer the following review questions correctly to be participants in Game #2.)

- ▶ What happened when the king found out that the man he had forgiven his debt went after someone else who owed him a small amount? *(The king was upset and had the man tortured and thrown into jail.)*

- What was last week's Power Point? (*I will forgive because I've been forgiven.*)

Props: Foam football, tire (or hula hoop), masking tape.

Preparation: If space permits, consider using rope to suspend the tire from the ceiling. To add more excitement, spray-paint the tire a bright color. Mark a throw line with masking tape. Testing during pre-service setup is recommended for the best positioning of the throw line.

Participants: One boy and one girl.

Playing the Game

Since we're on a football theme for our games we'll mix it up a little bit with football hoops? What's that? It's a combination of football throwing and basketball shooting!

To play, have two helpers hold the tire as the players attempt to throw the football through the tire. Position the tire so that the football will be passed away from the audience. Each player will have four chances to throw the football through the tire. Score two points for each successful throw. The player with the most points wins. If there's a tie, continue with one-throw rounds until a winner is determined.

Praise & Worship

Lead the children in a powerful time of entering God's presence using the worship songs from the *Bible & Praise* DVD.

Lesson Introduction

Props: Script from page 100.

Preparation: Beforehand, select a boy and a girl (or helpers) to practice and present the skit from page 100. Make two copies of the script.

Presentation

(*Present lesson Introduction skit from page 100. Thank children and have them return to their seats.*) Today's Power Point is ***I will bless even those who do wrong to me.*** Looking at why

someone might do the things they do is a good way to build sympathy for someone who is unkind. Rochelle didn't like how Tommy acted but she chose to try love and forgiveness instead of hate or revenge. That's what Jesus wants us to do. Rochelle showed this toward Tommy, even though he treated her meanly. Rochelle followed Jesus' teachings. Let's explore the verse she mentioned in the skit.

Scripture Memory Verse

“But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who mistreats you.”
—**Matthew 5:44**

Props: Lesson 7 Scripture Memory Verse from *Leader Resources* CD-ROM, stopwatch or watch with second hand, Scripture Memory Verse written on various poster boards, cut into puzzle pieces, and mixed up on tables, small prizes.

Preparation: Beforehand, create poster board puzzles, mix the pieces up and set them out on desks.

Practice it

(*Say today's Scripture Memory Verse aloud a few times with the large group. At random, choose several children and send them to the desks in pairs to assemble the poster board puzzles. If possible, award small prizes to the pairs that finish their puzzle assembly first.*)

Understand it

What does this verse say we are to do to our enemies? (*Love them.*) What should we do to people who mistreat us? (*Pray for them.*) What are some ways people could mistreat us? (*They could take our books or backpacks and throw them, they could trip us, they could laugh at us, they could say untrue things, etc.*) Is it hard to pray for people who do these kinds of mean things? Explain. (*Allow responses.*) What do you think might happen if you did pray for them? (*Allow responses.*)

Live it

Boys and girls, today's Scripture Memory Verse tells us that God wants us to do a simple thing—but a very difficult thing. This verse helps us to live out our Power Point: ***I will bless even those who do wrong to me.*** You know, some days

it's difficult to be kind even to people who are our family or friends, isn't it? We get in a bad mood, and we don't give our family and friends a break. If they do anything we don't like, we get upset.

But Jesus didn't just love those who were close to him; He even loved people who were His enemies. He gave His life for people who were cruel to Him and asked God to forgive them while He was suffering on the cross. What should this mean if we want to follow His example? *(Allow responses: Widening our circle of friends to people we might not think could be our friends. Praying for others who aren't nice to us.)*

Bible Lesson

Naaman's servant girl blessed her new master even though she was taken from her family as a captive.
—2 Kings 5:1-17

Bible Connection

Use the Bible Connection DVD segment before your Bible Lesson as a way to introduce the point of today's lesson.

In this humorous segment, a talk-show host is interviewing the Alphabet Man. He speaks every word with each successive letter of the alphabet. In between nonsense "filler-words," he speaks some specific truths: "Doing everything for God's Holiness—it's Jesus" and "Love makes new opportunities possible." The host reads a card that says the Alphabet Man wanted to talk about how we should love each others more the way Christ loved us. The Alphabet Man responds with "Accurate! Because Christ died, everyone forgiven, God has inspired joy, kingly love manifested—now other people—queens, rock stars, toymakers; unfold victory." The host summarizes the Alphabet Man's points before the interview breaks down while the man uses nonsense words in random sentences.*

Note: *Not absolutely "everyone including non-believers who hate God," but "everyone who would put their trust in Christ."*

Ask the questions below to discuss the DVD segment.

- ▶ What was the first truth the Alphabet man said? *(Doing everything for God's Holiness.)*
- ▶ What was a second truth? *(Love makes new opportunities possible.)*
- ▶ What did the host say we should do in response to God's love for us? *(Love others.)*

The Alphabet Man had an unusual way of telling others about God's truths. He said that because Christ died for us, we should love others. Today's Bible story is about a girl who had an opportunity to do this. Let's discover her story and find out what she did.

Bible Story

Props: Bibles, military uniform, broom, dustpan, bowl, wooden spoon, hand fan.

Preparation: Have a boy volunteer dress up in the uniform to play the part of Naaman. Review the lesson beforehand so that the volunteer will be able to pantomime as you narrate the story.

Presentation

Use your imagination, and let's pretend that we are all living in Bible times. We are Israelites, and we often find ourselves at war with other countries. One country we don't get along with too well is Aram. Aram is considered the "bully" of the area and the commander of this bully Aramean army is a man named Naaman. *(Have the "Naaman" volunteer come to the front of the room.)* Naaman was very important and highly respected. After all, he was one of Aram's greatest warriors. But he had a big problem! Listen carefully to find out what it was. *(Read aloud 2 Kings 5:1.)*

You see, Naaman—the mighty warrior of the bully Aramean army—had a terrible skin disease called leprosy. Does anyone know what leprosy is? *(Allow responses.)* Leprosy begins with white specks on the eyelids and on the palms of the hands. *(Have Naaman begin acting as if he's discovering the disease as you talk.)* Gradually it spreads over the body, causing terrible sores and swelling. Thousands of people are still affected by leprosy today, but we have medicine now so it isn't as severe. In Naaman's day there was no cure and

no medicine. Though he still could do his job, Naaman was in serious trouble.

The Arameans were fierce and strong. They enjoyed picking on people weaker than them, especially the Israelites. They were expert raiders – going around attacking camps and towns – killing the defenders, stealing sheep, cattle and goats, and making slaves of whomever they could catch. People who lived near the Arameans had to be on constant guard against these raids. One day, they raided an Israelite settlement and kidnapped a little girl. (*Have all the girls stand up. Choose one to be your “victim” and have the rest sit back down.*) This innocent little girl, just like you, was taken to be the servant of Naaman’s wife. (*Send the girl to stand next to Naaman.*)

Can you imagine being taken away from your family and forced into slavery? You might have to do things such as clean like cleaning up after them (*Naaman makes the girl sweep the floor*); cooking for them (*Naaman makes the girl stir a bowl of food*); or fanning them when it’s hot—and in that part of the world, it’s hot a lot! (*Naaman makes the girl fan him.*) Can you imagine being beaten hard for not doing your chores? We don’t know what it was like for this little Israelite girl, but that’s what it was like for many slaves. But think—how easy would it be for you to be nice in that kind of situation? It would be really hard wouldn’t it? And yet, this little girl showed God’s love to the very man that took her away from her family. (*Read aloud 2 Kings 5:3.*)

Naaman was in desperate need of God’s healing power, and this girl knew the Healer! She could have kept that information to herself and let him suffer but she was so full of God’s love she knew that she was to love and care for her neighbor (Lev. 19:18) and that same love could be extended even to enemies. So she told Naaman’s wife all about Elisha the man of God and how he would be able to help Naaman. So Naaman’s wife told Naaman; Naaman made the trip to Israel; Naaman found Elisha and Naaman got healed. Guess what else? According to Luke 4:27 Naaman was the only person cured of leprosy during Elisha’s time. All because a little girl was willing to love her enemy! That’s what the servant girl did and that is what you can do to, too.

What are things children sometimes do that aren’t nice or are even mean? (*Invite responses. Some ideas are: take things that don’t belong to them, say unkind things, gossip, spread rumors, push or shove, make fun, exclude certain children from playing, etc.*) How does it make you feel when someone is unkind to you? (*Invite responses. Hurt, mad, revengeful, upset, frustrated, etc.*)

Object Lesson # 1

Preparation: Ask someone in your church who works as a restaurant server or customer service representative to visit during today’s service and share their story of “serving people.” (Ask them to wear their uniform, if they have one.)

It’s truly amazing that this little girl could put aside all of the “gunk”—the anger she could have felt from being kidnapped, the sadness of missing her home and family, the resentment over being made into a slave, the fear she could have experienced while caring for the wife of a man who had a frightening disease—and still display love and kindness! But you know what, boys and girls? Life is like that...full of gunk. There are people who have to do this kind of thing every day. We have a special guest who is going to tell you a little about her job. (The guest could make some of the points below.)

- ▶ Who she is and where she works.
- ▶ How she serves people in her work.
- ▶ Examples of people who are nice and make her job fun.
- ▶ Examples of people who are mean or rude and make her job hard.
- ▶ Her secret for learning to be nice to rude people.

Most of us are hurt when people are mean to us. What we would really like to do is be mean to them. But as our guest showed us, it is possible to put those desires aside and do the right thing! We too must learn to love and serve even our enemies, as our Power Point encourages us: ***I will bless even those who do wrong to me.***

Object Lesson #2

Props: Small rubber mallet, desk.

Preparation: Obtain a small rubber mallet. If you can't find a mallet an open palm will do.

Presentation

Have any of you had a doctor check your reflexes? (*Allow responses.*) One place with a sensitive reflex is just under the kneecap. (*Have a volunteer come forward and sit on top of the desk with his leg dangling [not touching the floor]. Use the soft rubber mallet or fingers from an open palm to tap his leg just under the kneecap. His leg will probably jerk up unexpectedly. [You may need to do this a few times before you get the reflex reaction you want.] Ask the volunteer if he tried to move his leg or if it just jerked up on its own. Mention that this reaction is called a reflex. Some other reflexes are blinking when an object, [like dirt blowing in the wind] is coming at us, or ducking when someone throws something at us. Reflexes are responses that come naturally; they aren't something we even think about. Allow the volunteer to return to his seat.*)

When someone is unkind to us, sometimes we let our reflexes take over. We just react and yell back or immediately take back whatever it was our little sister took from us. That is a normal reaction (or reflex) that takes place when we are hurt or upset...but it isn't what God wants from us. Instead of reacting to our emotions...He wants us STOP. Stopping our natural reflexes isn't easy...but we can learn to do it. After we stop and pause, He wants us to love and pray. Not the typical reaction when someone spreads nasty rumors about you, is it? But, in time, and with practice it can become your first reaction and will come naturally. So, next time you're excluded from a birthday party, don't call your best friend to gossip...instead STOP, love and pray. You'll feel better and in time the person hurting you will take notice, too. Our Power Point encourages us: ***I will bless even those who do wrong to me.***

Today's Life Story

Egbert's Embarrassment

Well kids, in case you ain't never heard, everything's bigger in Texas! Why, most of the tall tales you heard growing up started in Texas. And if-un you ever go to Texas, it would do you well to remember that they don't call it the Lone Star State fur nuthin'! Possibly the biggest, the most-alone star in the state of Texas was born and reared in a little town called Hoop and Holler, Texas. Put your lips in the air, and let's whoop it up for Egbert Eagle, here with his flock of seagulls (not really) to perform his latest musical, "Egbert's Extravaganza."

Illustration 7-1



► Of all the birds that lived in the national park, none was more impressive than Egbert "Score" Eagle. There was nothing Egbert couldn't do. Other birds could fly high—but Egbert could always fly higher. Other birds could fly fast—but Egbert could always fly faster. Other birds could see sharply—but none saw more sharply than Egbert. Other birds could sing—but none sang more beautifully than Egbert. His lovely voice had won him a recording contract and he sold tons of copies of his very own music CD. And as far as looks go, Egbert was by far the best-looking bird in Hoop and Holler, Texas—thanks to his fine coat of feathers. No one really liked Egbert, because he always acted so proud of himself. But deep down inside, all the other birds wished they could be as grand and as mighty as Egbert Eagle.

Illustration 7-2



► But then something happened that made them all glad they weren't Egbert. One morning Egbert woke up and, to his shock and horror, discovered his CDs were no longer selling. Not only that, but his feathers were starting to fall out. "Oh, no!" he cried. "My beautiful, beautiful feathers! How can I look regal and impressive if I don't have my feathers? Why is this happening to me? Oh, please, let this just be a bad dream!" But sad to say, it wasn't a bad dream. Egbert found himself singing a new, sad song that day: "I was grand, until my feathers fell away. I was grand, but they fell off night and day. I couldn't make them stay."

Illustration 7-3

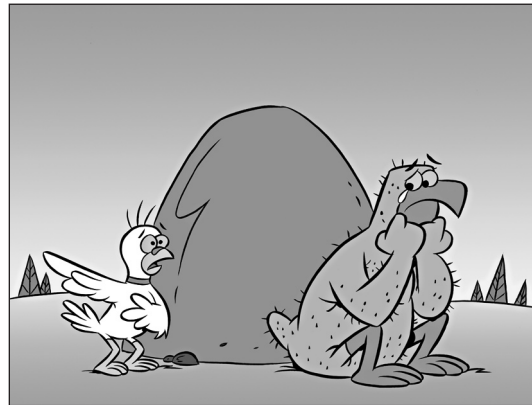


► Egbert's feathers kept falling off, first one by one, then two by two, then in tiny clumps, then in great big patches, until finally there were more of Egbert's feathers on the ground than on poor Egbert himself! And no matter what he tried to do,

he just couldn't make them stop falling out. Some of the other birds saw him and laughed, saying, "He doesn't look so grand and mighty now."

Boys and girls, some people are hard to love, aren't they? Some people are so mean, or so full of pride, or so selfish that it's hard to be nice to them. And when something bad happens to them (maybe they get in trouble, get a bad grade or lose a competition), we don't feel the least bit sorry for them. Instead, we really think they got what they deserve. But let me ask you: Is that really the kind of attitude that Christians are supposed to have? Of course not!

Illustration 7-4



► Thankfully, there was one bird in this flock who was a Christian. His name was Douglas Dove. And even though all the other birds were being mean to Egbert Eagle (because he had been proud acting toward them), Douglas Dove cared about how Egbert was feeling. Poor Egbert! He felt all alone—not just friendless and embarrassed, but scared, too. You see, without his feathers, he couldn't fly. And if he couldn't fly, how would he live? Douglas Dove saw how sad and lonely Egbert was, and even though Egbert had not been nice to Douglas in the past, Douglas decided he would be a good friend to Egbert now. "There's a forest ranger living in the valley," said Douglas. "He may have some medicine that can help you. Come on, I'll take you there."

Illustration 7-5



► Egbert didn't want to go at first, because even though he was scared and lonely, he was still a proud eagle at heart. But soon he changed his mind, because he knew none of the other birds could help him. So he followed Douglas down to the ranger station. And once he got there, Egbert didn't act proud and mighty at all! Oh, no, he fell on his knees, crying and pleading to the forest ranger: "Please cure me! Please, oh please, oh please! I'll do anything you want if only you'll make my feathers grow back!" Egbert begged.

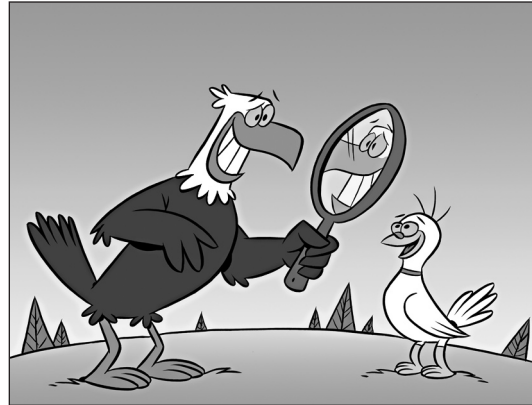
Illustration 7-6



► The forest ranger said, "I have some medicine that will help you, but you don't have to do anything. God put people here to be good stewards of the earth, and it is my duty to help wild animals as part of God's plan." So the ranger rubbed salve on Egbert and—yuck!—did it ever feel goeey

and did it ever smell stinky! But Egbert stood still because anything was better than losing his feathers!

Illustration 7-7



► Egbert had a hard time falling asleep that night because he was so anxious. But the next morning, he was delighted to see his feathers already starting to grow back! "Douglas! Douglas! Come look at this!" he shouted. "The forest ranger's medicine worked! My feathers are growing back!" Douglas Dove flew over and chirped merrily when he saw how Egbert was starting to recover. Over the next week or so, Egbert's feathers grew back until finally he had a coat just as magnificent as ever.

Illustration 7-8



► But while Egbert looked the same on the outside, there was a big change on the inside. Now Egbert wasn't proud acting—he was grateful to his friend Douglas (and to the forest ranger). He even wrote a song to show his gratitude. He called it the "Space Age Dove Song." But most of all, he was grateful to God. "As long as I fly," Egbert said, "I will thank God for my cure!" Do you know who else was happy? Douglas Dove! Douglas was happy because he had been able to lead his new friend to God's help.

There are a lot of people out there who could use a friend like Douglas Dove. They may be mean and cruel. They may be full of pride. They may have hurt you or put you down in some way. But honestly, those are the people who need you the most! Think of someone in your school or neighborhood who could use a friend. Let's pray and ask God to show you how to love that person.

Closing Prayer

Today's Power Point is ***I will bless even those who do wrong to me***. That isn't easy to do...but can help you throughout your life to live peacefully with others.

Dear Lord Jesus,

It's hard to love and pray for people who act like enemies. When people do wrong to us we sometimes want to do wrong back...help us to remember your words to us and to live by them.

Thank you for always loving us even when we sin. Forgive us of our sins and help us to love others and pray for them.

In Jesus' name. Amen.

Small Group Lesson

Using the *God Encounters Small Group Lessons* (see page 10 in this *Leader's Manual*), divide your children into one of three elementary-age groups: ages 6-7, ages 8-10, ages 11-12. These groups allow deeper exploration of the Power Point and life application.

Instruct small-group leaders to hand out this week's Take-Home Challenge.

Lesson Introduction Skit

Characters:

Tommy

Rochelle

Tommy: (Teasing voice) Hey Rochelle... you tripped yet today?

Rochelle: (Embarrassed.) I didn't really trip...you put your foot out remember?

Tommy: Well, you are a klutz. Since you normally are falling down anyways, I thought it would be funny.

Rochelle: (Quietly) Well...it wasn't. I hurt my leg and...it hurt my feelings.

Tommy: Next time...watch where you're going. I have long legs you know...(Exit.)

Rochelle: (*Walks away.*) (*Say aloud but to yourself.*) Why does Tommy have to be so mean? I am clumsy but he just makes things worse by making fun of me or putting something in my way. I wish he would just quit this school. It would make my life so much better...I wonder why he acts like that...maybe his parents always fight or never tell him they love him. At church we just learned the Bible verse Matthew 5:44. It goes "But I tell you to love your enemies and pray for anyone who mistreats you." I guess I could try praying for Tommy and see if that helps. (*Exits.*)