

IT'S NOT MY FAULT!

BUT I WANT IT!

IT'S NOT
FAIR!

I'M NOT
THAT BAD

MAKING OUR THOUGHTS OBEY JESUS

MINE!

YOU'RE NOT
THE BOSS
OF ME!

THEY STARTED IT!

YOU JUST DON'T
GET IT!

MEMORY VERSE

2 Corinthians 10:3-5

For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ.

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Scripture Quotations are the NIV translation.

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Taming the Tongue?

We've all been there. Something wells up inside of us, and we just say it.

The words that we know we shouldn't say. In the moment it might feel good, but later (sometimes much later) we feel guilty about it. James 1:26 says,

"Those who consider themselves religious and yet do not keep a tight reign on their tongues deceive themselves, and their religion is worthless."

And that can be an incredibly discouraging verse! How can I be a Christian when my words get me into trouble all the time? It is so hard to control what words we speak. And even more difficult: **How can we teach our children to control their words?**

Children, especially, struggle to filter the words that come out of their lips. But as adults, we still find plenty of opportunities to "put our foot in our mouth," don't we? We can sometimes make our words more polite, but the words that pop out of our mouth can often leave us with regret.

Indeed, later in James 3:7-8, it empathizes:

"All kinds of animals, birds, reptiles and sea creatures are being tamed and have been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison."

Is it hopeless? Is our religion worthless? James gives us a clue in verses 9-12:

"With the tongue we praise our Lord and Father, and with it we curse human beings, who have been made in God's likeness. Out of the same mouth come praise and cursing. My brothers and sisters, this should not be. Can both fresh water and salt water flow from the same spring? My brothers and sisters, can a fig tree bear olives, or a grapevine bear figs? Neither can a salt spring produce fresh water."

James points out that yes, it is unfitting for sinful words to come out of the same mouth as righteous words. That's the problem we want to solve. But he's doing more here. James uses two metaphors (springs of water and plants) to drive home an important truth: **You can't control the result if you don't first deal with the source.**

It's not just fitting that fresh water and salt water flow from the spring – it's not possible! If it's a salt spring, salt water comes out. If it's a fresh spring, fresh water comes out.

It's not just annoying if your fig tree produces olives, it's telling you that you are confused about what kind of tree you have. If your tree is producing olives, it's an olive tree. If it produces figs, it's a fig tree.

In the same way, if your tongue is saying sinful words, it's not really a problem with the tongue, it's a problem with the source of those words. **It's a problem with the heart.** Jesus used this same analogy in Luke 6:43-45:

*"No good tree bears bad fruit, nor does a bad tree bear good fruit. Each tree is recognized by its own fruit. People do not pick figs from thornbushes, or grapes from briars. A good man brings good things out of the good stored up in his heart, and an evil man brings evil things out of the evil stored up in his heart. **For the mouth speaks what the heart is full of.**"*

The words we say are ultimately the fruit of the beliefs we already have rooted in our heart. So if we want to change our words, **we have to change our hearts.**

Change My Heart, O God!

One problem with changing our own hearts – that’s even more impossible than taming the tongue! Jeremiah 17:9 says,

“The heart is deceitful above all things and beyond cure. Who can understand it?”

We are desperately wicked, and dead in our transgressions. **The only person that can change our hearts is God himself.**

Ezekiel 36:26 describes the process like a heart transplant:

“I will give you a new heart and put a new spirit in you; I will remove from you your heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh.”

This is something we are incapable of doing on our own. We are powerless to save ourselves. But this is where the good news of the gospel comes in: what we were powerless to do, God did.

God sent his son, Jesus, to earth as a man. Jesus lived a perfect life and never sinned. His heart was completely righteous, and therefore his words and actions were completely righteous too. **The fruit that came from the rooted beliefs in his heart was absolutely holy.**

Then, Jesus died on a cross. At the time, the death felt tragic and disappointing to his friends and disciples. It looked like a failure. But it was primary to his mission and purpose on earth. Jesus’s death on the cross paid the penalty for our sin. Jesus’s death on the cross reconciles us to God. And **Jesus’s death on the cross is the reason we can have a new heart.**

1 Peter 2:24 tells us Jesus

“‘himself bore our sins’ in his body on the cross, so that we might die to our sins and live for righteousness; ‘by his wounds you have been healed.’”

How do we change our hearts? We accept the gift of grace from God through believing him.

As Ephesians 2:8-9 says:

“For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith—and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God—not by works, so that no one can boast.”

Did you catch that? It’s not anything I do. Even the faith I have to believe in Jesus is a gift from him. The righteousness of God comes from faith, from first to last.

Be Transformed

I hope that at this point, you are feeling a tension. If we can’t tame our tongue, because the words we speak are just the overflow of our hearts... And we can’t change our hearts because that’s God’s job...

...What are we supposed to do?

If I believe God has changed my heart, and I am still saying words I shouldn’t, what can I do about it? Even more difficult: how can I parent my kids to change their words, when I know myself (from scripture and my experience) ...it’s ultimately impossible?

PARENT INTRODUCTION

This is the central focus of this Family Discipleship Kit. And this is the purpose of discipleship in general. It turns out that the "work" of becoming more like Jesus is less about controlling behaviors, and more about controlling our thoughts.

Look at how the Bible describes the project of sanctification:

Colossians 3:2 *"Set your **minds** on things above, not earthly things."*

Romans 8:5 *"For those who live according to the flesh have their **minds** set on what the flesh desires; but those who live in accordance with the Spirit have their minds set on what the Spirit desires."*

Romans 12:2 *"Do not conform to the patterns of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your **mind**."*

Do you see how central the role of the mind (and by extension, thoughts and beliefs) is to the process of becoming like Jesus?

In each of these cases, by the way, these phrases are sandwiched between the truths we already established above. In each case above, there is a declaration of God's salvation. He has done the heart change:

Colossians 3:1 *"Since you have been raised with Christ..."*

Romans 8:1 *"Therefore, there is no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus..."*

Romans 12:1 *"Therefore, in view of God's mercy..."*

And then, after the instruction to control our thoughts, instructions for the words and behaviors that ought to flow out of us follow.

There is a pattern: 1.) Since your heart has been changed 2.) Change your thoughts 3.) Then these behaviors and words will flow from you



In other words, the task before us is to constantly monitor our thoughts (which will be revealed by our words) and continually remind ourselves of what is already true in our hearts. Then, we take our thoughts and make them align with the truth. We set our minds on the truth. We renew our minds with the truth. We make ourselves new through changing our attitude (Ephesians 4:24).

We have to learn to control our thoughts.

Making Our Thoughts Obey Jesus

So we have established that our primary course of action is learning to control our thoughts, and that is the focus of this Family Discipleship Kit. **But how, practically, is this done?**

Lots of voices in this world want to find ways to help you control your thoughts: this app will help you calm your thoughts when you are anxious; this Instagram account will give you perspectives to help you control your thoughts when you want to lose weight; the education system believes that they can produce healthy, productive members of society by teaching them how to think.

But as our memory verse for this Family Discipleship Kit reminds us, the way we, as Christians, control our thoughts is more powerful than these other methods:

2 Corinthians 10:3-5:

"For though we live in the world, we do not wage war as the world does. The weapons we fight with are not the weapons of the world. On the contrary, they have divine power to demolish strongholds. We demolish arguments and every pretension that sets itself up against the knowledge of God, and we take captive every thought to make it obedient to Christ."

The weapons we fight our thoughts with are powerful weapons. **They have the power to demolish strongholds – to take strong, insidious, wicked lies that our minds believe and destroy them, so that every thought we have can be made obedient to Jesus.**

What are these weapons? The armor of God. The belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation, and the sword of the Spirit. While you won't find those same labels in the study, they are all still there. Using prayer, scripture, and reminders to place your faith in the Gospel, this study endeavors to guide your family through learning how to demolish strongholds.

Included in this Family Discipleship Kit

Memory Verse

At the beginning of each chapter is a small portion of the memory verse. If desired, your family is encouraged to add a phrase on to the memory verse each week so that at the end of the 12 week study, you have committed the entirety of 2 Corinthians 10:3-5 to memory.

A Story about Evelyn and Aiden

Each chapter with a story of a fictional family who might have conversations not too different from your own family (hopefully it's not just mine!). In each story, one of the children finds themselves in a situation that leads them to say the title of the chapter. Then, there are discussion questions to guide your family through situations in which you have heard or said the same words. Then the family is encouraged to pray for the Holy Spirit's help to have clarity about this sin in their lives.

Identify the Lie

After you have read and discussed the story, the study seeks to identify what the words reveal about what the speaker believes in his or her heart. In John 8:32, Jesus said, "You will know the truth, and the truth will set you free." The first step of controlling our thoughts is identifying the lies that we are believing and correcting them

PARENT INTRODUCTION

with truth. Again, discussion questions guide your family through how this mindset or attitude brings forth the words in question. A prayer prompt encourages the family to ask God for help to agree with him about what is true and what is false.

Submit to Scripture Truth

For the third section, the family is encouraged to open in prayer, asking the Holy Spirit to illuminate scripture as you read it together. In other words, we want God to make the meaning clear to us so that we are understanding it the right way. Then, there is a list of verses for the family to read together.

I would recommend that, if your children are old enough, they are assigned to look up the verses in their own Bibles, and read the to the family. This not only clarifies that the truth is from God's Word itself (not just a paper the church sent them), but it gives the children an opportunity to interpret the scripture themselves and teach the family.

After all or a portion of the scripture is read (again, tailor this to fit your family's needs and maturity!), there are discussion questions to help you synthesize the information.

Finally, at the end of the section, the family is encouraged to pray again, this time asking God to change your hearts to submit to the truth you just read.

Believe the Gospel

The final section of each chapter uses the gospel as a lens to help us think correctly about the topic at hand. The gospel is especially powerful at controlling our thinking because it reminds us of all the pertinent facts: **We Lost it All, Jesus Did it All, We Get it All:**

We must remember that **We Lost it All** because we need to keep in mind that changing our own hearts and controlling our own behaviors is impossible. This relates to our first discussion about taming our tongue. It's impossible for us to change the outcome of our hearts, because our hearts are full of sin.

We must remember that **Jesus Did it All** because Jesus is our perfect example of how to think and act rightly. But even more importantly, we must remember that work of our salvation was done totally and completely by Jesus. He alone is righteous. This relates to our previous discussion about changing our heart. We needed a new heart, and Jesus did the work of getting us one. It's impossible for us to change our heart on our own, but what we were powerless to do, Jesus did!

And finally, we must remember that **We Get it All** because when Jesus did the work of giving us a new heart, his righteousness was credited it our account. Now, when we stand before God, we really are clothed in Jesus's righteousness, and we really do have the power to change our thoughts and say "no" to sin. When we stumble and fall, it's only because we are forgetting (or not believing) what is really true in our hearts. We have been set free from sin and made alive in Christ.

And we need to admit – over and over – that we are sinners in utter dependence on God's grace. When we lose sight of any one of the three aspects of the gospel detailed above, we begin to rest on our own righteousness or our own power to control our thoughts, and that will never work!

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Try it Yourself!

Once you have completed the first eight chapters of this Family Discipleship Kit, the last chapter challenges your family to take a sinful phrase or attitude not previously mentioned and complete the exercise of Identifying the Lie, Submitting to Scripture Truth, and Believing the Gospel on your own. It is my prayer that the process of taking every thought captive and making it obedient to Christ would become a natural and familiar process to your family!

How to Use This Family Discipleship Kit

My aim in writing this Family Discipleship Kit is to provide tools for families to help disciple each other as they seek to identify sin in their lives, and change their thoughts so that fruits of the spirit can replace the fruits of the flesh.

This study was designed to be used in a variety of ways and is intended to be customized by the parents to fit their family's age and needs. One possibility is that the readings can be broken into 5 days to be read at dinner or bed time for Family Devotions:

Monday: Introduction Story & "Identify the Lie"

Tuesday: "Submit to Scripture Truth"

Wednesday: "Believe the Gospel: We Lost it All"

Thursday: "Believe the Gospel: Jesus Did it All"

Friday: "Believe the Gospel: We Get it All"

Alternatively, the sections could be grouped differently to allow your family to go through the study more quickly or slowly than one chapter a week. Maybe your children are small, so you can only read one or two of the verses in the "Submit to Scripture" section. **Please do not let this stop you from using the study or prompt you to feel guilty.**

As always, Family Discipleship Kits are tools that we provide for parents who are seeking to help in discipling their children. Read that again: tools! Not acts of righteousness that earn us salvation, not guilt-inducing burdens. God placed you as the parents of your home, and he is equipping you for the task.

Please use this study in any way that helps your family become more like Jesus!



*For though we
live in the world...*

MINE!

Selfishness vs. Stewardship

"Aiden!" Mom called from the front door. "A package is here for you!"

"Really?" six-year-old Aiden shouted excitedly as he raced down the steps to meet his mom. Evelyn, his eight-year-old sister was close behind him.

"What package did I get? Where is it from?" Aiden asked. Aiden's mom examined the label.

"Oh, it's from your Aunt Sue! I bet it's a gift for your birthday." Now Aiden was really excited. Aunt Sue always gave him great presents, and since his birthday was last week, he wasn't expecting any more presents. Mom carried the package into the kitchen and used a pair of scissors to open the package. Once Mom had loosened the tape, Aiden pried the cardboard open while Evelyn looked over his shoulder.

"Oh wow! I've never seen a box of crayons this big before!" exclaimed Aiden, pulling out the orange and green box. Both Aiden and Evelyn loved art. Aunt Sue did know how to give great presents.

"And look!" Evelyn added digging through the packaging peanuts, "There's a huge pad of construction paper and other art supplies!" Aiden stopped admiring the crayons and looked up to see the pad of paper that Evelyn was holding.

"Hey! Hands off!" Aiden snapped, jerking the pad of paper out of Evelyn's fingers. "This is MY present."

"I just want to look," Evelyn replied.

But Aiden returned the crayons and paper to the box. "I'm going to open the rest of it upstairs."

"But can I please use some of the crayons too?" Evelyn asked.

"No! They're MY crayons. You'll probably break them." Aiden accused.

"Aiden," his mother warned. "The art supplies are your birthday present, but that doesn't mean you can't share them. You know your sister would be careful with them."

"The crayons are MINE!" yelled Aiden. "I shouldn't have to share MY things!"

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Aiden did in the story?

Do you think Aiden did or said anything wrong?

How do you think Evelyn felt when Aiden didn't share his crayons with her?

Is it true that the crayons really belonged to Aiden? Why or why not?

What are some other situations where people might say "Mine!" when they are older than Aiden? (Even adults?)

What's a scenario in which someone in your family might have said "Mine!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say "Mine!" we are **believing a lie** that we deserve to have control over the things we own and that we have the right to be selfish.

But the truth is we don't really own anything anyway. This is God's world, and everything he has made is his. God has called us to be *stewards* of the things he has given us. That means we are supposed to take care of the things we have and use them the way he wants us to use them.

DISCUSS:

Are Aiden's crayons really his?

How do you think God wants Aiden to use his crayons?

What are the things you are a steward of?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that it is sin when we are selfish, rather than good stewards of God's gifts.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Psalms 24:1 "The earth is the LORD's and everything in it, the world and all who live in it."

Deuteronomy 10:14 "To the LORD your God belong the heavens, even the highest heavens, the earth and everything in it."

Haggai 2:8 "'The silver is mine and the gold is mine,' declares the LORD Almighty."

Psalms 3:9 "Honor the LORD with your wealth, with the first fruits of all your crops;"

1 Peter: 4:10 "Each of you should use whatever gift you have received to serve others, as faithful stewards of God's grace in its various forms."

Romans 12:13 "Share with the Lord's people who are in need. Practice hospitality."

Proverbs 11:24-25 "One person gives freely, yet gains even more; another withholds unduly, but comes to poverty. A generous person will prosper; whoever refreshes others will be refreshed."

Matthew 6:21 "For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also."

Luke 6:38 "Give, and it will be given to you. A good measure, pressed down, shaken together and running over, will be poured into your lap. For with the measure you use, it will be measured to you."

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about who owns the things we have?

Why does everything belong to God?

How does God want us to use the things we have?

What will happen if we use our things the way God wants us to?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

God created the heavens and the earth and owns everything in it. God gave Adam and Eve the garden to live in, and the job to be good stewards of the things that he had given him.

But we have failed miserably at our job of stewarding God's gifts. We hoard God's gifts. We hold tightly to possessions and think that we have the right to control what we have and use it whatever way we like. When we do this, we are worshipping things (or ourselves) instead of worshipping God. We refuse to share, we refuse to give, and sometimes we even steal what we want.

Jesus Did it All

Colossians 1:16 tells that all things were created in Jesus, both through him and for him. Jesus really can look at everything in the universe and say, "Mine!" and not be wrong. But as Philippians 2:7 tells us, Jesus traded all the splendor of heaven for poverty on earth. When Jesus was born, his cradle wasn't in a king's palace as he deserved – it was an animal's food trough. Matthew 8:20 tells us Jesus didn't even have a home.

The reason that Jesus left his throne in heaven was to die on the cross for us, the selfish ones. The ones who had God's gifts and selfishly lost it all.

We Get it All

In Christ, we can see possessions the right way. We can finally understand the purpose of our possessions – to bring glory to God!

Jesus taught his disciples to not worry so much about hoarding possessions on earth, but instead store up treasures in heaven. These are the treasures that will last forever. (Matthew 6:19-24)

God also gives us the grace to share and be generous with the things we have with others so that we can experience even more of his generosity in return! (Luke 6:38)

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times that you have been selfish, or a bad steward of God's gifts.

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that everything belongs to God.

DISCUSS:

How was Jesus a good steward?

Can you think of any times that Jesus shared what he had with others?

Was Jesus ever selfish?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for being our example and the one who generously sacrificed himself for us so that we could be reconciled to God.

DISCUSS:

Why are we able to be better stewards of the God's gifts, once we are in Christ?

What are ways that we can store treasures in Heaven?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising God for the riches of his mercy, and asking him to make it clear how you, as a family, can be better stewards of his gifts to you.

YOU'RE NOT THE
BOSS OF ME!

MEMORY VERSE

...we do not wage
war as the world
does.

Rebellion vs. Submission

"Mom! Mom! Mom! Mom!" Evelyn shouted excitedly as she ran across the church parking lot to her mother. Even though it was in the evening, Evelyn was full of energy. The last night of Vacation Bible School had just ended and she had had so much fun. She had even made a new friend named Sarah!

"MOM!" Evelyn said once more, grabbing onto her mother's arm. "My new friend Sarah just asked me to spend the night on Saturday. Can I go? Please? Please? Please?"

"Oh that sounds like fun," replied Mom. "But maybe another night. You know our family's rule. I don't want you to go to a friend's house the night before church."

"But Mooooom!" Evelyn whined. "Can't I go just this once? Please?"

"I already answered you. What about next Friday? You could invite her to our house." Mom replied. But Evelyn wasn't listening. She was annoyed. "I can't wait until I make my own rules," she thought.

When Evelyn and her family got home from church, the sun was dipping low in the horizon. "Ok everyone," Mom said as they got out of the car, "Everyone needs to take a shower and then head to bed!"

"Oh wait," Dad said. "I need Evelyn to put away her bike. It's behind my car and I won't be able to pull my car out in the morning."

"Ok, that works well." Mom replied. "Aiden, you take a shower first. Evelyn, put away your bike." As Dad, Mom, and Aiden went inside, Evelyn was still

sulking as she yanked her bike out of the way of her dad's car. "Put away your bike. Take a shower. Go to bed. I never get to make my own decisions!" she fumed.

When Evelyn came inside, her mother handed her a basket of laundry. "Can you please bring these towels upstairs to the linen closet on the way to your shower?" mom asked.

This was the last straw. Evelyn slammed the laundry basket on the floor. "Stop telling me what to do!" she shouted at her mother.

"Evelyn!" Dad said, surprised. "Why are you so angry?"

"All you guys ever do is tell me what rules I have to follow, and when I have to do things, and I'm sick of it!" Evelyn retorted. "You're not the boss of me! I should be able to do whatever I want!"

DISCUSS:

Is it true that Evelyn's parents are not her boss? Why or why not?

What are some other situations where a person might say "You're not the boss of me!"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "You're not the boss of me!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say “You’re not the boss of me!” we are **believing the lie** that we deserve to have control over our own lives and that we know enough to make our own decisions.

But the truth is we know only a small amount of the information we need to make the best decisions. *God knows everything, is in control of everything, and has our best interest at heart.* We should trust his rules and obey him. God placed authorities in our life – like teachers and parents – who also know more than us and want the best for us. When we obey these authorities, we are ultimately obeying God.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

1 John 5:3 “In fact, this is love for God: to keep his commands. And his commands are not burdensome,”

Luke 11:28 “He replied, ‘Blessed rather are those who hear the word of God and obey it.’”

Psalms 18:7-9 “The law of the LORD is perfect, refreshing the soul. The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple. The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart. The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes.”

Romans 13:1 “Let everyone be subject to the governing authorities, for there is no authority except that which God has established. The authorities that exist have been established by God.

Hebrews 13:17 “Have confidence in your leaders and submit to their authority, because they keep watch over you as those who must give an account. Do this so that their work will be a joy, not a burden, for that would be of no benefit to you.”

Ephesians 6:1-3 “Children, obey your parents in the Lord, for this is right. ‘Honor your father and mother’ – which is the first commandment with a promise – ‘so that it may go well with you and that you may enjoy long life on the earth.’”

DISCUSS:

Do you think Evelyn knew enough to make good rules for herself?

Why do you think Evelyn’s parents had the rules they had?

Who are some authorities that your family should submit to?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that we should obey Him, and submit to the authorities in your lives.

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about who we should submit to?

Why should we obey God?

Why does God want us to obey authorities?

What do these verses say will happen if we submit to authorities?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

God gave Adam and Eve one rule: do not eat from the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. But Adam and Eve told God, "You're not the boss of me!" and made ate the fruit anyway. They thought they knew enough to make a good decision – but it turned out to be the worst decision in history. When they disobeyed God, they were thrown out of the life-giving garden and began to die.

Every person since Adam and Eve have made the same decision to "be their own boss" and rebel against God. This rebellion is called sin. The punishment for our sin is the same as the punishment for Adam's and Eve's sin – death.

Jesus Did it All

Jesus had all authority (Matthew 28:18). He knew everything, and he had the right to be his own boss. But John 6:38 tells us that even Jesus chose to submit to his Father's will. On the night that Jesus would be nailed to the cross, he prayed to his father, "If it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will." (Matthew 26:38) In this, Jesus shows us how we should submit to those in authority over us: even when it's difficult, we can obey!

Here's something even more amazing: the reason Jesus submitted to God's will is to take us (God's rebellious enemies) and pay for our punishment (death!)

We Get it All

In Christ, all of the punishment and guilt that we deserve for our rebellion is wiped away! We even get the credit for Jesus's righteous acts of submission to God! (Romans 8:1-3) If Jesus did that for us, shouldn't we submit to one other, out of reverence for him? (Ephesians 5:21)

God also gives us the grace to submit to his authority for the first time, and we will find that it is life-giving – not the heavy burden we expected. Romans 6:22 says, "But now that you have been set free from sin and have become slaves of God, the benefit you reap leads to holiness, and the result is eternal life."

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times that you have been rebellious and not submitted to the authorities God has placed in your life.

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we should submit to God's authority.

DISCUSS:

How did Jesus show us how to submit to authority?

Was Jesus ever disobedient?

Why did Jesus choose to submit instead of rebel?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for being our example and submitting himself to the Father's will so that we could be reconciled to God.

DISCUSS:

Why are we able to submit to authority better, once we are in Christ?

What are some ways we can be blessed by obeying God?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising Jesus for his loving sacrifice for us, and asking God to make it clear how you, as a family, can submit to one another out of reverence for Christ.

YOU JUST DON'T
GET IT!

*The weapons we
fight with are not
the weapons of
the world.*

Our Wisdom vs. God's Wisdom

One of Aiden's favorite things to do was to help his dad build things out of wood in the garage. Already this summer, Aiden and Dad had built a bird house for Mom, and a box for Evelyn's art supplies. Now Aiden had a new project for them.

"Hey Dad," Aiden said one morning during breakfast. "Could we build a case to store my matchbox cars in?"

"That's a cool idea," Dad agreed. "We can look for the wood and other supplies this weekend."

"Aw man, I don't want to wait until the weekend. Couldn't we just use scrap wood behind the garage? I could get started on it this morning!"

"We could maybe use scrap wood, but you're going to have to wait until I get home from work tonight. You're not old enough to use the tools without me."

"Yes I am!" Aiden argued. "I know a lot about your tools! Can't you just trust me?"

"You're too young, and it's not safe, Aiden. Wait until I get home." Dad answered.

"Oh, ok." Aiden said, disappointed. He didn't want to wait, and he hated that his Dad thought he was too young to do things by himself. The more he thought about it, the more upset he got. *"Dad doesn't know anything. When we built the bird house for mom, I cut all the wood myself! Dad just watched me! I don't need his help."*

Even after lunch, Aiden was still annoyed. Then he got an idea. Maybe he could prove to his dad that he was old enough. He would build the case all by himself – *without* Dad's help. Aiden found some wood from the back of the garage and then

headed inside the garage to cut them into pieces with the power saw.

"This will show him," thought Aiden. "I'm a lot better at this than Dad knows."

Just as Aiden was plugging in the saw, the garage door opened.

"What are you doing?" Mom asked, alarmed. "Didn't Dad say to wait until he got home from work?"

"I'm old enough to use the tools, Mom! You and Dad should just trust me!" Aiden retorted.

"You aren't old enough, Aiden. You need to trust us." Mom answered.

"You and Dad just don't get it! I know better than you!" Aiden yelled as he threw the wood on the floor. "You don't understand anything!"

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Aiden did in the story?

What did Aiden do that was wrong?

Is it true that Aiden's parents don't understand the situation? Why or why not?

What are some other situations where a person might say "You just don't get it!" or "I know better!"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "You just don't get it!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we tell God (or our parents) “you just don’t get it!” we are **believing the lie** that we know better (or understand things better) than God does, because we are refusing to trust his (or our parents’) wisdom.

But the truth is we are all foolish. In fact, we are so foolish, that we can’t even tell we are foolish. God’s wisdom is defined as “being skilled at knowing what is right and wrong.” We don’t have this skill, and that is why we need to trust God’s wisdom more than we trust our own thoughts and understanding.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Job 28:28 “And he said to the human race, ‘The fear of the Lord – that is wisdom, and to shun evil is understanding.’”

Psalms 37:30-31 “The mouths of the righteous utter wisdom, and their tongues speak what is just. The law of their God is in their hearts; their feet do not slip.”

Proverbs 1:7 “The fear of the LORD is the beginning of knowledge but fools despise wisdom and instruction.”

Proverbs 3:5-7 “Trust in the LORD with all your heart and lean not on your own understanding; in all your ways submit to him, and he will make your paths straight. Do not be wise in your own eyes; fear the LORD and shun evil.”

Proverbs 12:15 “The way of fools seems right to them, but the wise listen to advice.”

1 Corinthians 1:18 “For the message of the cross is foolishness to those who are perishing, but to us who are being saved it is the power of God.”

James 1:5 “If any of you lacks wisdom, you should ask God, who gives generously to all without finding fault, and it will be given to you.”

DISCUSS:

Do you think Aiden knew enough to decide whether he was ready to use his dad’s tools?

What are some reasons you think Aiden’s dad might think he’s not ready yet?

How can we know what the wise thing to do is?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that we should trust Him, and not ourselves, to be wise.

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about our ability to recognize what is wise and what is foolish?

What are the things these verses describe as wise?

According to these verses, what is wisdom?

How do we become wise?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

Adam and Eve sinned when they trusted their own understanding more than they trusted God. They decided that God “just didn’t get it” and that they knew better than he did. They, like us, were very wrong. God’s wisdom is perfect, and our thinking is broken.

In fact, the Bible says our thinking is useless (Romans 1:21, Ephesians 5:17). And the more we sin, the worse our understanding is (Romans 1:28). We should never be “wise in our own eyes”, or “lean on our own understanding” – but we do it all the time.

Jesus Did it All

Wisdom means being skilled at knowing what is right and wrong, and Jesus was perfectly wise (Colossians 2:3) and he taught others that he was the Way and the Truth (John 14:6). King Solomon was known as a wise man, but Matthew 12:42 tells us that Jesus was even wiser than he was.

In fact, 1 Corinthians 1:24 tells us that Jesus is the “power of God and the *wisdom* of God.” Jesus never did anything foolish or sinful – but he did something that others might think is foolish. He died on the cross to save us: sinful and foolish people who refused to trust God’s wisdom.

We Get it All

In Christ, we have the wisdom of God. 1 Corinthians 1:30 says, “It is because of [God] that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God – that is, our righteousness, holiness, and redemption.” Being saved by Jesus means that we become wise! Romans 12:1-2 puts it another way: instead of conforming to this (foolish) world, we can be transformed by the renewing of our minds. Then we can understand and know God’s will (wisdom!)

God gives us the grace to be saved from our foolishness. Titus 3:3-7 reminds us that even though at one time we were “foolish, disobedient, deceived and enslaved” God saved us through his mercy. Now we can be wise like Jesus.

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you have “been wise in your own eyes” or “leaned on your own understanding.”

If you can’t think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we need God’s wisdom.

DISCUSS:

How did Jesus show us how to be wise?

Why do some people see the cross as foolish?

What should we do when we disagree with God’s wisdom?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for being our example and the wisdom of God.

DISCUSS:

Why does our wisdom depend on being in Christ?

What does it look like when someone has been “transformed by the renewing of their mind”?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising God for his wisdom, and asking him to give you the mind of Christ.

IT'S NOT MY FAULT!

*On the contrary,
they have divine
power...*

Blaming Others vs. Accepting Responsibility

"Evelyn!" Mom's voice was shocked and upset. "We do NOT use that kind of language in our house!"

It was dinner time, and Evelyn had just used a word she knew wasn't good.

"It's not my fault, Mom!" Evelyn said. "It just popped out of my mouth! My friends say it all the time."

"Well, we don't say it." Dad answered. "It's an impolite word, and could hurt other people's feelings."

"Ok, I won't." Evelyn answered, rolling her eyes.

"Don't roll your eyes, Evelyn. You should listen to what your Dad says. Please help me clear the table now." Mom said, as she and Dad picked up their plates and headed to the kitchen. Evelyn picked up her knife and fork and placed it on her plate. As she reached to stack the rest of the plates, she thought to herself, *"So what if I roll my eyes? The only reason I did it is because Dad is annoying me. I can't help it if I feel annoyed."*

Before she could finish her thought, she noticed her feet were getting cold and wet. Her brother, Aiden had knocked his milk glass over and now milk had spilled across the table and was dripping on the floor.

"Ugh, AIDEN!!!" Evelyn moaned. "You ALWAYS do stuff like this! You're such a klutz!"

"Hey, no I'm not!" Aiden shouted back, his face getting red with embarrassment.

"You are! And I can't stand you!" Evelyn retorted, stomping her foot.

"Hey, hey, hey!" said Dad, returning from the kitchen. "What is going on in here?"

Evelyn clenched her jaw. "I can't help it, Dad! He makes me so mad!"

"No one can make you mad, Evelyn," Dad reminded her. "Please apologize to your brother for your unkind words."

"Sorry." Evelyn muttered sullenly. But inside, she was still angry. She grabbed all the glasses and plates she could hold and carried them to the kitchen. *"If Aiden doesn't want me to yell at him, he should be more careful."* When Evelyn got to the kitchen, she dropped the dishes into the sink in a huff.

CRASH! One of the glasses shattered into the sink.

"Evelyn!" Mom shouted, dismayed.

"What?!" Evelyn shouted back. "IT'S NOT MY FAULT!"

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Evelyn did in the story?

Who did Evelyn blame for the things that she did and said?

What are some other situations where a person might say "It's not my fault"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "It's not my fault"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say "it's not my fault" we are **believing the lie** that we aren't responsible for our own actions, and that someone else should take the blame for the things that we did. We are thinking we are innocent – even when it's not true. Sometimes blaming others reveals that we believe God is responsible for our sin!

But the truth is we are responsible for words we say, and the things we do. We do deserve to take the blame for our responses, even if others around us are also doing wrong. God is holy, so he never does anything wrong. No one can say that God is responsible for their sin.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Proverbs 19:3 "A person's own folly leads to their ruin, yet their heart rages against the LORD."

1 Corinthians 10:13 "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to mankind. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can endure it."

James 1:13-14 "When tempted, no one should say, 'God is tempting me.' For God cannot be tempted by evil nor does he tempt anyone; but each person is tempted when they are dragged away by their own evil desire and enticed."

Romans 9:19: "One of you will say to me: 'Then why does God still blame us? For who is able to resist his will? But who are you, a human being, to talk back to God? 'Shall what is formed say to the one who formed it, 'Why did you make me like this?'"

Psalms 51:3-4 "For I know my transgressions, and my sin is always before me. Against you, you only, have I sinned and done what is evil in your sight; so you are right in your verdict and justified when you judge."

DISCUSS:

Do you think Evelyn was innocent in the story?

Why is it so easy and tempting to blame others?

What should have Evelyn done, when she was confronted about her sin?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that we have sinned, and should not blame others for our actions.

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about who is responsible for the words we say and the actions we take?

According to these verses, can we blame others for giving in to temptation?

How should we respond when we are confronted with our sin?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

Blaming others is as old as the first sin. When God confronted Adam about eating the forbidden fruit, Adam blamed Eve. Then, Eve blames the snake. But *they* are the ones who chose to give in to temptation.

We blame others all the time because even though we cannot deny our sin, we hope that we can find a way to escape punishment. We want to point to other people or circumstances to justify ourselves....and when we do this, we are blaming God for our own rebellion against him!

Jesus Did it All

Jesus is not like Adam and Eve. Jesus resists temptation and never sins. Even after fasting for forty days in the desert, Jesus resists Satan's temptations and passes the test that Adam failed so miserably. Hebrews 4:15 says, "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to empathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are – yet he did not sin." Jesus is that high priest. He underwent temptations, but he always did the right thing.

Jesus was blameless. But then he willingly took *our* blame. 2 Corinthians 5:21 says, "God made him who had no sin to be sin for us, so that in him we might become the righteousness of God."

We Get it All

Jesus was blameless, then took our blame, so that we could become blameless too! In Christ, we become the very righteousness of God. And rather than blaming us for the things we have done wrong (as he has every right to do) Jesus calls his brothers and sisters! (Hebrews 2:11)

When we do sin, we can humbly accept our responsibility because we know that if we confess our sins, Jesus is faithful and just to forgive us (1 John 1:9)

God gives us the grace to be like Jesus. Instead of blaming others, we can help take the responsibility for helping them, like Boaz did for Ruth and Naomi.

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you have blamed God (or other people) for something you did or said.

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we should admit our responsibility for our sin humbly before him.

DISCUSS:

How did Jesus show us how to resist temptation?

How does it feel to know that Jesus knows what it's like to be tempted?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for being our example and the perfect, spotless Lamb of God.

DISCUSS:

How does it feel to know that we can be blameless in Christ?

What does it look like when someone humbly confesses their sin?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising Jesus for saving us so totally, and asking him to help you humbly repent when you have sinned.

BUT I WANT IT!

...to demolish strongholds.

Covetousness vs. Contentedness

Aiden loved going over to his friend Titus's house because Titus always had the coolest toys. Titus had his own chemistry set and microscope, a huge matchbox car racetrack that zigged and zagged all through his bedroom, and all the latest video games.

Aiden's favorite thing to play with at Titus's house was his collection of remote-control cars. On this particular afternoon, Aiden and Titus were racing two of remote control cars up and down Titus's driveway.

"Aha! I won again!" Aiden crowed as his car reached the edge of the yard that Titus and Aiden were standing in.

"Aw man! Let's race again!" Titus challenged, spinning his car around to head to the top of the driveway.

Just then, Titus's mother called from the garage door. "Titus! Aiden! Time to put toys away. Aiden's mom is on her way to pick him up." Aiden's heart sank. He was having so much fun. He didn't want to go home. As Aiden and Titus put all the toys away, Aiden began to feel jealous. "*Titus has so many cool things.*" Titus thought. "*My house is so boring.*"

By the time Aiden's mom's minivan had pulled into the driveway, Aiden was feeling sorry for himself. "Thanks for letting me play, Titus. Maybe you could come to my house next time. Except I don't have any good things to play with."

"Oh come on," said Titus. "Don't you have remote control cars?"

"No!" Aiden griped. "I don't even have any good video games. My system is too old. My parents NEVER give me anything I want. Anyway, see you

later." Aiden climbed into the minivan, buckled his seatbelt and heaved a big sigh.

As Mom waved to Titus and his mother and pulled out of the driveway, Aiden asked her, "Mom? Can I get some remote control cars like Titus has?"

"Hmmm...maybe someday," Mom replied. "You could ask for some for your birthday."

"But my birthday is three months away!" Aiden whined. "Can I at least get a new video game system?"

"No, probably not right now. Maybe if you saved up your money."

"I *never* get anything cool. Can't I have this one thing?" Aiden begged.

"Aiden, you have a lot of toys and video games." Mom reminded him. "You don't need any more."

"But I want it!" Aiden demanded. "If you loved me, you would give it to me!"

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Aiden did in the story?

What things did Aiden say he wanted? Why do you think he wanted these cool things?

What are some other situations where a person might say "But I want it!"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "But I want it!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say "But I want it!" we are **believing the lie** that all our wants and desires deserve to be filled, or that it would be a good thing to receive what we think we want. We think we are a good judge of what we do and do not need. When God doesn't give us what we want, we doubt his love for us.

But the truth is we don't even deserve the good things we already have, and some of the things we want aren't good things for us to have anyway! God loves us and provides gracious blessings for us all the time." We should be grateful for the things we have, rather than coveting the things we don't have.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Exodus 20:17 "You shall not covet your neighbor's house. You shall not covet your neighbor's wife, or his male or female servant, his ox or donkey, or anything that belongs to your neighbor."

Psalms 23:1 "The LORD is my shepherd, I lack nothing."

Psalms 37:4 "Take delight in the LORD, and he will give you the desires of your heart."

Luke 12:15 "Then he said to them, 'Watch out! Be on your guard against all kinds of greed; life does not consist in an abundance of possessions.'"

Philippians 4:11-12 "I am not saying this because I am in need, for I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want."

Hebrews 13:5 "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, because God has said, 'Never will I leave you; never will I forsake you.'"

James 4:2 "You desire but do not have, so you kill. You covet but you cannot get what you want, so you quarrel and fight. You do not have because you do not ask God."

DISCUSS:

Do you think Aiden deserved to receive more things? Why or why not?

Why do you think Aiden's mom said no to his requests for more things?

What should Aiden's response have been when he saw all of Titus's cool stuff?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that coveting is wrong, and that we should be content with the things God

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about wanting things we do not have?

What do these verses tell us about how to be content?

What should we do when we want something that belongs to someone else?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

Adam and Eve wanted something they did not have. Even though God provided them with a beautiful garden that supplied all their needs, Satan was able to convince Eve that the fruit would give her something that she deserved: “to be like God.” When Eve ate the fruit, her actions revealed that her heart didn’t trust that God loved her and wanted the best for her.

We do the same thing as Adam and Eve when we think we deserve more than what God has given us. Our coveting leads us to more and more sin, as we chase after things we think we deserve. The saddest part is that God has already punished less – and given us more – than our sins deserve. (Ezra 9:13)

Jesus Did it All

Even though Jesus *did* deserve to have all things, he had very little here on earth. (Matthew 8:2; Luke 9:58) But Jesus never coveted the things he did not have. In fact, when tempted to be given glory on earth by Satan, Jesus refused. He was content, and trusted God’s will for his life.

When Jesus died on the cross, he received all sorts of punishments he *did not* deserve: he experienced extreme suffering (Isaiah 52:14), his friends deserted him (Matthew 26:56), and he was separated from God (Mark 15:34). These are the punishments *we* deserved, but Jesus took them willingly on himself so that he could give us something we *did not* deserve: peace with God.

We Get it All

In Christ, we can be content with what we have. With renewed minds, we will see that all our needs have been met, and the things that we have been withheld are withheld for a purpose. (Philippians 4:11-13, 19)

We are able to be content because God’s presence is with us (Hebrews 13:5-6) and that is enough. We know it is enough, because we know his grace is sufficient for us (2 Corinthians 12:9).

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you have coveted something you thought you deserved.

If you can’t think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we should trust God that he is our good father.

DISCUSS:

How did Jesus show us to be content?

What did Jesus deserve? What did he actually get?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for taking the punishment we deserved.

DISCUSS:

What purpose might God have for the things he has withheld from us?

How does God’s presence help us be content?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising Jesus for meeting all our needs, and asking him to help us be content with the gifts he has already given us.

*We demolish
arguments and
every
pretension...*

IT'S NOT FAIR!

Our Plans vs. God's Plans

Even though it was early Saturday morning, Evelyn's jumped out of bed. She had exciting plans today! Aunt Sue was taking Evelyn and her cousin Mikayla to an amusement park! Evelyn dressed as quickly as she could and raced down the stairs to eat breakfast.

Aiden was already at the kitchen table, gulping down his cereal. He had exciting plans today, too. His soccer team had won their championship and now the coach was hosting a pool party to celebrate.

"Wow, such early risers!" Dad teased as he sipped his coffee. "I wonder why you can't get out of bed like this on school days?"

"Because sleeping is more fun than school, and sleeping is less fun than an amusement park, I guess," Evelyn shrugged, spreading butter on her piece of toast.

"Oh is that it," Mom chuckled, as she reached for her cell phone which had just started to ring. "Hello? Oh, Hi, Sue... Oh really? ...Oh no... Oh no. I bet she's disappointed...yeah..."

Evelyn's heart began to sink as she listened to her mother's side of the conversation. Whatever news Aunt Sue had, it wasn't good. Finally, Mom hung up her cell phone.

"Evelyn, I'm sorry but I have bad news. Mikayla woke up with a high fever this morning. She's just too sick to go to the amusement park. You are going to have to go another time."

"Oh mom, really?" Evelyn said, tears welling up in her eyes. "I wanted to go so bad!"

"I know sweetie, but you'll make another plan. Aunt Sue and Mikayla are disappointed too."

Evelyn tried not to cry as she nibbled at her toast. "My whole day is ruined! Why did this have to happen to me?"

Meanwhile, Aiden had finished his cereal and had run upstairs to pack his bag for the pool party.

"It's almost time to leave, Aiden," Dad called. "Don't forget to grab a towel!" Suddenly Evelyn realized that Aiden's plans were not cancelled. "How come Aiden gets to go to his party and I have to stay home? It's not fair!"

"Mom, what am I going to do all day while Aiden's at his party?" Evelyn asked.

"Hmm, I don't know." Mom said, rinsing out Aiden's cereal bowl. "Dad and I had planned to do some gardening today."

"Gardening!?" Evelyn whined. "This is getting worse and worse! Why does Aiden get to do something fun and I can't? IT'S NOT FAIR! If I have to stay home, than he should too!"

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Evelyn did in the story?

Do you think what happened to Evelyn was fair?

What are some other situations where a person might say "It's not fair!"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "It's not fair!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say "It's not fair!" we are **believing the lie** that we have the understanding to know what is just and fair, and that we should have the control to make what we view as "fair" happen. We are rejecting God's control of the situation and demanding that he do what we want.

But the truth is our view of justice is broken. We favor our own wants over the needs of others. God is perfectly just and fair. Our plans may fail, but his never do. God is sovereign, which means he is the one who tells us what to do, we shouldn't tell him what to do. But God is also loving, so we can trust him that his plans really are best for us.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Psalms 33:10-11 "The LORD foils the plans of the nations; he thwarts the purposes of the peoples. But the plans of the LORD stand firm forever, the purposes of his heart through all generations."

Psalms 103:10 "he does not treat us as our sins deserve or repay us according to our iniquities."

Proverbs 16:11 "Honest scales and balances belong to the LORD; all the weights in the bag are of his making."

Proverbs 19:21 "Many are the plans in a person's heart, but it is the LORD's purpose that prevails."

Job 42:2 "I know that you can do all things; no purpose of yours can be thwarted."

Romans 2:11 "For God does not show favoritism."

Romans 5:3-5 "Not only so, but we also glory in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; perseverance, character; and character, hope. And hope does not put us to shame, because God's love has been poured out into our hearts through the Holy Spirit, who has been given to us."

Romans 8:28 "And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose."

DISCUSS:

What did Evelyn think would make her situation fair?

Do you think Evelyn's solution actually was fair?

What should Evelyn's response have been?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that our view of fairness is broken, and that we should trust God that he is always just and fair.

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about our plans and God's plans?

What do these verses tell us about how God views fairness?

According to these verses, what should we do when we feel we are being treated unfairly?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

When Adam and Eve chose to disobey God and eat the fruit, they were questioning God's goodness and fairness. We do the same thing when we are bitter when our plans change or we feel God isn't giving us what we deserve.

Romans 3:23 and 6:23 make it clear that what we deserve – what would be fair to us – is to receive the punishment of death. Instead of being angry that things aren't going the way we want them to, we should rejoice that we are not treated fairly.

Jesus Did it All

Even though Jesus deserved honor, Jesus came to earth as a servant. (Matthew 20:28) He was a king, but knelt to wash his disciples' feet. He was Lord of all, but allowed himself to be arrested on false charges.

If you want to consider fairness, remember that Jesus was treated more unfairly than we could ever be. Do you remember the thieves who were crucified next to Jesus? One of them mocked Jesus, but the other said to him, "Don't you fear God? We are punished justly, for we are getting what our deeds deserve. But this man (Jesus) has done nothing wrong."

We Get it All

In Christ, we are able to rejoice when we experience hard things, because we recognize that while our plans can fall apart, God's plans never do. Sometimes God calls to experience discomfort so that we can grow and become even more like Jesus (James 1:2-4).

When we recognize God's grace in all things...even being treated unfairly...we can trust that God really is in control.

Remember Joseph? He was treated unfairly by his brothers, but in the end realized that God used that situation for good. (Genesis 50:20)

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you complained about not being treated fairly. What do you think about that situation now?

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we should thank God for his great mercy to us.

DISCUSS:

How did Jesus act when he was treated unfairly?

What did Jesus deserve? What did he actually get?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for being treated unfairly, so that we could be treated better than we deserve.

DISCUSS:

Can God use our broken plans for his ultimate plan?

How does it feel to know that God is always in control, even when we don't like what's happening?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising God that his plans are perfect, and asking him to help us trust him when our plans fail.

...that sets itself
up against the
knowledge of
God...

THEY STARTED IT!

Revenge vs. Peacemaking

"I got it! I got it! I got it!" Aiden yelled, chasing after the yellow frisbee his sister, Evelyn, had thrown him from across the yard. After making an athletic dive into the bushes, Aiden was just able to grab the frisbee just before it sailed over the fence into the neighbor's yard. "YES!" he said triumphantly. But when Aiden emerged from the bushes, Evelyn began to laugh.

"What's so funny?" Aiden said, brushing leaves and sticks from his shirt.

"Look at your shorts!" Evelyn giggled, pointing. "You're covered in mud!"

Aiden looked down. His shorts were indeed smeared with the dirt under the bushes that was still wet from last night's storm. He felt his cheeks get hot with embarrassment.

"It's not such a big deal!" Aiden muttered, trying to brush the thick mud off his shorts. But Evelyn couldn't stop laughing.

"It was...just...so...funny!" Evelyn sputtered. "The way you dove into those bushes...you looked like you were trying to dive into that mud! Or did you think you could fly?"

Now Aiden was getting angry. He thought he had made a great catch. But now his shorts were muddy and he noticed some new scrapes and cuts on his legs that were beginning to bleed. He felt tears well up in his eyes. "Stop laughing, Evelyn. I don't think it's funny."

"I...I can't!" Evelyn said holding her sides and doubling over in laughter.

This was too much for Aiden. "I'll show her" he thought. Stomping over to mud under the bushes he grabbed a handful. Running at his sister with

shout of rage, he angrily rubbed the mud into her hair and began wrestling her to the ground. Evelyn began to scream.

"What is going on out here?" Mom shouted, emerging from the kitchen door to see what all the noise was about. "Aiden! Evelyn! Quit it! Why in the world are you fighting!"

"Mom, I didn't do anything. Aiden rubbed mud in my hair for no reason!" Evelyn cried.

"NO I DIDN'T! She was being mean! SHE STARTED IT!" Aiden yelled back.

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Aiden did in the story?

Do you think Aiden had a right to do what he did?

What are some other situations where a person might say "They started it!"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "They started it!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say "They started it" we are **believing the lie** that if we have been wronged, we have the right to retaliate or exact revenge. We think that we understand a situation well enough to decide what the just punishment would be, and that we are the appropriate person to carry out that punishment.

But the truth is God wants us to be peacemakers, and to let him worry about revenge. Sometimes we are the right person to carry out consequences (like a parent has the authority to punish a child) but many times it is not our job. In these cases, we should overlook the offense and trust God to bring justice...*not* to take things in our own hands.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Proverbs 20:22 "Do not say, 'I'll pay you back for this wrong!' Wait for the LORD, and he will avenge you.

Matthew 5:9 "Blessed are the peacemakers, for they will be called children of God."

Matthew 5:38-39 "You have heard that it was said, 'Eye for eye, and tooth for tooth.' But I tell you, do not resist an evil person. If anyone slaps you on the right cheek, turn to them the other cheek also."

Matthew 6:15 "But if you do not forgive others their sins, your Father will not forgive your sins."

Luke 6:27 "But to you who are listening I say: Love your enemies, do good to those who hate you."

Romans 12:17-21 "Do not repay anyone evil for evil. Be careful to do what is right in the eyes of everyone. If it is possible, as far as it depends on you, live at peace with everyone. Do not take revenge, my dear friends, but leave room for God's wrath, for it is written: 'It is mine to avenge; I will repay,' says the Lord. On the contrary: 'If your enemy is hungry, feed him; if he is thirsty, give him something to drink. In doing this, you will heap burning coals on his head.' Do not be overcome by evil, but overcome evil with good."

DISCUSS:

What did Aiden think was a good punishment for Evelyn?

Was Aiden the right person to carry out a punishment for Evelyn?

What should Aiden's response have been?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with God that our view of justice is broken, and that we should trust God about how we carry out the punishment for others.

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about how God wants us to respond to our enemies?

What do you think looks like when people are "peacemakers"?

What do you think would have happened if Aiden had been a peacemaker in the situation we read about earlier?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

When we take revenge, we are showing God that we don't trust him to provide justice for us. When someone hurts or insults us, our first impulse is to hurt and insult them back, because we are loving ourselves more than we are loving God.

We are so convinced of our own rights and so preoccupied with our own pride that we don't even stop to think if our actions will even bring the justice we seek – or if we are actually the one who has done wrong and deserves punishment.

Jesus Did it All

Jesus is the ultimate peacemaker. (Colossians 1:20) Jesus was wrongly arrested, beaten, and killed even though he was the one who had the right to punish. But Jesus didn't take revenge, he took the punishment himself. While being terribly mistreated, Jesus didn't even fight back (Isaiah 53:7). Instead – even in the moment of deep humiliation and pain, Jesus asked his father to forgive the very people hurting him. (Luke 23:24) Jesus loved his enemies.

After Jesus rose from the dead, he didn't hold a grudge or try to exact revenge on those he died for. Instead, he calls them (us) his brothers and sisters! (Hebrews 2:11)

We Get it All

In Christ, we are able to love our enemies like Jesus did. Left to ourselves, we would never "turn the other cheek" or "pray for those who persecute" us. But Jesus makes it possible, he shows us how much we have been forgiven for.

Do you remember the parable of the "Unmerciful Servant" that Jesus told in Matthew 18? We have been shown great mercy by God. When we understand that, it is easy to forgive the things other people do for us. No one will ever owe us a debt as big as the one we owe Jesus.

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you took revenge when you should have been a peacemaker instead.

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we should trust God to bring about justice at the right time.

DISCUSS:

How did Jesus act when he was mistreated by enemies?

How was Jesus a peacemaker?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for dying on the cross, so that we could have peace with God.

DISCUSS:

Has God forgiven us for a lot or a little?

How does God's great mercy influence our thinking about how we give mercy to others?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising God for loving us, his enemies... and asking him to help us love our enemies too.

I'M NOT
THAT BAD

MEMORY VERSE

...and we take
captive every
thought...

Our Righteousness vs. Jesus's Righteousness

It was pizza night, but the family wasn't enjoying it like they normally would. Right before dinner, Mom had discovered a broken lamp in the living room, and Aiden had confessed to using his soccer ball in the house. Again.

"Aiden," Dad said in a serious voice, "I'm very disappointed in you. I want you to leave the dinner table and go to your room." Aiden slammed his glass on the table and stomped up to his room, while Evelyn watched quietly. *"Aiden's in trouble again,"* she thought. *"I'm glad I'm not as disrespectful as he is."*

Dad, Mom, and Evelyn ate in silence for a little bit before Evelyn ventured, "Aiden is always breaking the rule about kicking his soccer ball in the house. I never do that."

"No, you don't kick soccer balls in the house, that's true," Mom agreed. "But I can think of some other rules you break. Aren't those your shoes lying on the sofa? Those aren't supposed to be there."

"Well, yeah, but...nothing's getting *broken* from my shoes" Evelyn pointed out.

"What about our 'lights out at 9:00' rule? I had to tell you three times to turn your light off last night," said Dad.

"I was in the middle of a chapter! I couldn't put my book down," Evelyn exclaimed. "Besides, I still have never broken anything."

"Evelyn," Mom said, carefully. "This might be a good time to talk to you about something else. You might not break things the same way Aiden does. But lately I have noticed a disrespectful attitude in your words and actions that is just as

destructive as a broken lamp."

"An attitude?" Evelyn interjected. "But how could words be worse than a soccer ball?"

"When Aiden kicks a soccer ball inside the house, he is showing that he doesn't respect our home. That's why he is in his room right now. When your words and tone show that you don't respect your mother, you deserve a punishment too." Dad explained.

Evelyn almost laughed. "This is just great. Aiden breaks a lamp, and I just say a few things the wrong way and I'm the one in trouble?"

"See," Mom interrupted. "Even now, your attitude is not respectful towards us."

"I don't get it! I'm not that bad! Can't you see that Aiden is worse than me?"

DISCUSS:

Have you ever felt the way Evelyn did in the story?

Do you think Evelyn was right that she was "better" than Aiden?

What are some other situations where a person might say "I'm not that bad!"?

Would an adult ever feel that way?

Can you think of a time where someone in your family might have said "I'm not that bad!"?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

When we say "I'm not that bad!" we are **believing the lie** that we have the ability to be righteous on our own, or that our righteousness is determined by how we stack up next to other people

But the truth is we are all desperately wicked, and incredibly skilled at justifying ourselves. Our "righteousness" is like a "filthy rag", because we aren't supposed to compare ourselves with other sinful people... we are supposed to compare ourselves to Jesus. Most dangerously, when we believe that "we're not that bad," we don't recognize our need for Jesus to save us.

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Isaiah 64:6 "All of us have become like one who is unclean, and all our righteous acts are like filthy rags; we all shrivel up like a leaf, and like the wind our sins sweep us away."

Mark 7:20 "He went on: 'What comes out of a person is what defiles them.'"

Romans 2:1 "You, therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgement on someone else, for at whatever point you judge another, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same things."

Romans 10:3 "Since they did not know the righteousness of God and sought to establish their own, they did not submit to God's righteousness."

Ephesians 2:8-9 "For it is by grace you have been saved, through faith – and this is not from yourselves, it is the gift of God – not by works, so that no one can boast."

Titus 3:5 "He saved us, not because of righteous things we had done, but because of his mercy. He saved us through the washing of rebirth and renewal by the Holy Spirit,"

1 John 1:8 "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us."

DISCUSS:

Why did Evelyn think she was "not that bad"?

What were some of the excuses she gave to her parents when they confronted her about her sin?

What should Evelyn's response have been?

PRAY: Ask God to help your family agree with him that we are indeed sinful, and that we should humbly repent when confronted with our sin.

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about our sin?

What do you these verses tell us about our righteous acts?

What do you these verses tell us about how we are saved?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

It feels good to us when we judge the sins of others while overlooking our own sins (Matthew 7:5). And when we're judging others we use our own standards instead of God's Word. (Matthew 23:23)

We are more concerned about looking good on the outside than they are with changing on the inside. (Matthew 23:28) The Pharisees who opposed Jesus did good things that other people could see, but when it came to their hearts – the part of them only God would know about – they were selfish and arrogant. Jesus even called them "white-washed tombs"... on the outside they looked pretty, but on the inside, they were full of dead bones.

Jesus Did it All

Jesus wasn't just righteous compared to his own standard or compared to other people. Jesus is the pure and spotless Lamb of God (John 1:29; 1 Peter 1:19). Jesus fulfilled every requirement of God's law and followed it perfectly. (Matthew 5:17)

And even though he had every right to do so, Jesus did not come into the world to condemn the world (John 3:17). In fact, one of the things that made the Pharisees so angry at Jesus was that he continued to talk and eat with people that the Pharisees deemed "sinful."

One more thing: the reason we know that our sins really are that bad is that Jesus had to die for it. (Luke 22:42)

We Get it All

Once we are in Christ we become the righteousness of God. We aren't just "not that bad" we are "perfectly righteous". Not by the good works that we do, but by the great work that Jesus did on the cross. (2 Corinthians 5:17-21)

At one time, our righteous acts were like filthy rags, but in Christ, we can carry out works of real righteousness for his name's sake! As Ephesians 2:10 says, "For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do."

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you have been self-righteous or hypocritical.

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we really have lost it all.

DISCUSS:

How does Jesus show us how to be righteous?

How did Jesus treat people who were sinful?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for dying for us, while we were still sinners.

DISCUSS:

Why is it such good news that our righteousness does not depend on us, but Jesus?

How does it make you feel to think about the fact that God has prepared good works for you to do?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising God for redeeming us, and our actions.

???

*...to make it
obedient to
Christ.*

Try it Yourself!

You've had eight chapters to practice, now it's your turn!

What's a careless phrase that gets tossed around your home? What words pop out of your mouths when you're angry or annoyed? Is there a pattern of behavior that you are struggling with?

Choose one and write about it here.

DISCUSS:

What do people feel like when they say this phrase or act this way?

How do people feel when this phrase or behavior is directed at them?

Why is the phrase or behavior wrong?

What are some other situations where a person might use the same phrase or show the same behavior?

Can you think of some specific times when these words or actions happened?

IDENTIFY THE LIE

Fill in the blanks:

When we

we are **believing the lie** that:

But the truth is :

PRAY: Ask God to help your family:

- 1.) Agree with him about what is true
- 2.) Change our behaviors and actions

SUBMIT TO SCRIPTURE TRUTH

Use a concordance to help you look up verses and Bible stories that pertain to this topic. Write them here:

PRAY: Before you begin, ask God to make the meaning of the scripture clear to your hearts as you read it.

DISCUSS:

What do these verses tell us about what we should believe?

What do these verses tell us about how we should act or speak?

PRAY: After you have read and discussed the scripture, ask God to change your hearts so that you submit to the truth.

BELIEVE THE GOSPEL

We Lost it All

Describe how this sin demonstrates how we lost it all:

DISCUSS:

Share ways and times you have been guilty of this sin

If you can't think of any examples, ask your family to help you.

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, confessing your sin and acknowledging that we really have lost it all.

Jesus Did it All

Describe how Jesus shows us how to do things the right way, and how his death on the cross pays the penalty for our sin:

DISCUSS:

How is Jesus our example (in a way that we can imitate him)?

How is Jesus our savior (in that he does something we cannot do on our own)?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, thanking Jesus for being our example, and for being our sacrificial savior.

We Get it All

Describe how we are able to act and feel in Christ, now that he has covered us with his righteousness:

DISCUSS:

How does our identity change influence the way we view this topic?

What has God given us grace to do in response to this topic?

PRAY: Spend time in prayer as a family, praising God for making us new in Christ, and giving us the grace to please him!

