

Compassion, not Hard Heartedness

Two “Character Building Bible Lessons” from Every Child Ministries

Introduction: This unit of 2 lessons consists of two Bible stories showing a common character trait—one story from the Old Testament, and one story showing that trait in the person and life of Jesus Christ. Two Bible verses will be learned as a class for each unit of 2 lessons. The character traits are presented as desirable qualities in our lives, and Jesus Christ as the only one who ever fulfilled them perfectly. In the beginning of the series, refer to the word CHARACTER in the dictionary. Ask these thought questions: What are YOU really like? What is JESUS really like? We will be thinking a lot about both these questions during this series.

All Scriptures quoted are from the New King James Version. For purposes of unity and to minimize any possible confusion for student who may be new to the Scriptures, all our ministries will utilize this version alone. Please prepare your lessons from this version, teach and lead memory work from this version. Please be aware that the NEW King James Version, first published in 1979, is not the same as the King James Version, first published in 1611.

Teaching Aids for the Series:

Character trait words for flannelboard--

Teachers will have large word strips for each character trait. Each week the teachers will display or show the word strip and discuss the character trait under discussion.

Giant visualized dictionary

Class 3 and up may be provided in a giant, large print dictionary as available, with several important and difficult words from the lessons included, and pictures included in some cases. A printed version is found at the end of the lessons. Be sure to familiarize yourself with it. The lesson number is given in parentheses after each word. You can use the dictionary in the lesson or in review or pre-session. Let one of the students read if possible. It helps to “look up” the word in the dictionary or have a student do so, rather than just explaining it orally. This is because students in Africa tend to trust the printed page, so a definition looked up in a dictionary will be taken very seriously.

Introducing the series:

These lessons are about “Character Building from the Bible.” What is good character?

(Look it up in the dictionary.)

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 “Character Building from the Bible”

Character: What someone is really like on the inside, what someone is really like when no one is looking. Not what people THINK you are, but what God KNOWS you are.

There is good character and there is bad character—that is, someone may be really good on the inside, or he may be really bad. God sees our hearts. He knows the truth about all of us. (Sing one of the “Character” Songs.)

(Visuals are provided during training and we will learn one or more character songs as a group.)

The Bible shows us true stories of people who had good character and people who had bad character. We’re going to learn more about character from the Bible in the next couple weeks.

COMPASSION

Learning about the word COMPASSION:

Compassion is a good character trait. It is a feeling of pity, kindness, concern and love toward another person that results in action to help.

Opposite: hardhearted, a bad character trait
 (Children often understand unfamiliar words more easily by showing the opposites.)

Bible Memory Verses:

1 Peter 3:8 Finally, all of you be of one mind, having compassion for one another; love as brothers, be tenderhearted, be courteous. (NKJV) (Teach this verse for both lessons of the first week.)

Note on African pronunciation: In many African countries, the “teous” of courteous is pronounced as one syllable, not as two as is common in American English. It sounds roughly like “tchus”. Listen carefully to the way your teaching partner pronounces this word and try to imitate his or her pronunciation to aid the children in your class in understanding you.

Lamentations 3:22 Through the LORD s mercies we are not consumed, because His compassions fail not. Lamentations 3:22 (NKJV)
 (Teach this verse for both lessons of the second week.)

Bible Stories:

God showed compassion on the wicked people of Nineveh.
 Jonah 1:1-2, ch 3-4.

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Jesus showed compassion.

Unit Aim: At the conclusion of these lessons, the student will understand that God’s heart is tender and compassionate toward us. We all deserve God’s punishment, but that God wants to show us compassion, mercy and forgiveness. As a result, the Christian child will thank God for His compassionate hear and begin to care more deeply about others and show compassion for them.

Lesson 1

GOD SHOWED COMPASSION ON THE WICKED PEOPLE OF NINEVEH

Review for Older Students:

- What is character? (What someone is really like on the inside, what someone is really like when no one is looking. Not what people THINK you are, but what God KNOWS you are.)
- Is character good or bad? (It can be good or bad. There is good character and there is bad character.)

For Younger Students:

What do we call what someone is really like on the inside, when no one is looking?
 (Character)

Beginning the Lesson:

Who is the worst, most wicked person you have ever known? (Let the children respond briefly. Ask them to explain why they think the person is so wicked.) We know that God hates wickedness. So here is a question to think about: How does God feel about people who are very wicked? Does He hate them? Does He want to punish them?

*Transition to the Lesson--*Let’s look at a Bible story about some people who were very wicked. Let’s look at a Bible story about some people who hated God, and hated God’s people. Let’s look at the story of the wicked people of Nineveh.

God forgives the wicked people of Nineveh when they repent.

Jonah ch 1, 2:1-2a, 2:7a, 2:9-10, ch 3-4:11a.

Jonah’s Disobedience

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the son of Amittai, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry out against it; for their wickedness has come up before

Me." 3 But Jonah arose to flee to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD. He went down to Joppa, and found a ship going to Tarshish; so he paid the fare, and went down into it, to go with them to Tarshish from the presence of the LORD.

The Storm at Sea

4 But the LORD sent out a great wind on the sea, and there was a mighty tempest on the sea, so that the ship was about to be broken up. 5 Then the mariners were afraid; and every man cried out to his god, and threw the cargo that was in the ship into the sea, to lighten the load. But Jonah had gone down into the lowest parts of the ship, had lain down, and was fast asleep. 6 So the captain came to him, and said to him, "What do you mean, sleeper? Arise, call on your God; perhaps your God will consider us, so that we may not perish." 7 And they said to one another, "Come, let us cast lots, that we may know for whose cause this trouble has come upon us."

So they cast lots, and the lot fell on Jonah. 8 Then they said to him, "Please tell us! For whose cause is this trouble upon us? What is your occupation? And where do you come from? What is your country? And of what people are you?" 9 So he said to them, "I am a Hebrew; and I fear the LORD, the God of heaven, who made the sea and the dry land."

Jonah Thrown into the Sea

10 Then the men were exceedingly afraid, and said to him, "Why have you done this?" For the men knew that he fled from the presence of the LORD, because he had told them. 11 Then they said to him, "What shall we do to you that the sea may be calm for us?"--for the sea was growing more tempestuous. 12 And he said to them, "Pick me up and throw me into the sea; then the sea will become calm for you. For I know that this great tempest is because of me." 13 Nevertheless the men rowed hard to return to land, but they could not, for the sea continued to grow more tempestuous against them. 14 Therefore they cried out to the LORD and said, "We pray, O LORD, please do not let us perish for this man's life, and do not charge us with innocent blood; for You, O LORD, have done as it pleased You." 15 So they picked up Jonah and threw him into the sea, and the sea ceased from its raging. 16 Then the men feared the LORD exceedingly, and offered a sacrifice to the LORD and took vows.

Jonah's Prayer and Deliverance

17 Now the LORD had prepared a great fish to swallow Jonah. And Jonah was in the belly of the fish three days and three nights.

Jonah 1:1-17 (NKJV)

Then Jonah prayed to the LORD his God from the fish's belly. 2 And he said:

"I cried out to the LORD...
 When my soul fainted within me,
 I remembered the LORD;
 And my prayer went up to You,

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Jonah 2:1,7a (NKJV)

But I will sacrifice to You
 With the voice of thanksgiving;
 I will pay what I have vowed.
 Salvation is of the LORD. '
 Jonah 2:9 (NKJV)

So the LORD spoke to the fish, and it vomited Jonah onto dry land.
 Jonah 2:10 (NKJV)

Jonah Preaches at Nineveh

Now the word of the LORD came to Jonah the second time, saying, 2 "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and preach to it the message that I tell you." 3 So Jonah arose and went to Nineveh, according to the word of the LORD. Now Nineveh was an exceedingly great city, a three-day journey in extent. 4 And Jonah began to enter the city on the first day's walk. Then he cried out and said, "Yet forty days, and Nineveh shall be overthrown!"

The People of Nineveh Believe

5 So the people of Nineveh believed God, proclaimed a fast, and put on sackcloth, from the greatest to the least of them. 6 Then word came to the king of Nineveh; and he arose from his throne and laid aside his robe, covered himself with sackcloth and sat in ashes. 7 And he caused it to be proclaimed and published throughout Nineveh by the decree of the king and his nobles, saying, Let neither man nor beast, herd nor flock, taste anything; do not let them eat, or drink water. 8 But let man and beast be covered with sackcloth, and cry mightily to God; yes, let every one turn from his evil way and from the violence that is in his hands. 9 Who can tell if God will turn and relent, and turn away from His fierce anger, so that we may not perish?

10 Then God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God relented from the disaster that He had said He would bring upon them, and He did not do it.
 Jonah 3:1-10 (NKJV)

Chapter 4

Jonah's Anger and God's Kindness

1 But it displeased Jonah exceedingly, and he became angry. 2 So he prayed to the LORD, and said, "Ah, LORD, was not this what I said when I was still in my country? Therefore I fled previously to Tarshish; for I know that You are a gracious and merciful God, slow to anger and abundant in lovingkindness, One who relents from doing harm. 3 "Therefore now, O LORD, please take my life from me, for it is better for me to die than to live!" 4 Then the LORD said, "Is it right for you to be angry?"

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5 So Jonah went out of the city and sat on the east side of the city. There he made himself a shelter and sat under it in the shade, till he might see what would become of the city. 6 And the LORD God prepared a plant and made it come up over Jonah, that it might be shade for his head to deliver him from his misery. So Jonah was very grateful for the plant. 7 But as morning dawned the next day God prepared a worm, and it so damaged the plant that it withered. 8 And it happened, when the sun arose, that God prepared a vehement east wind; and the sun beat on Jonah's head, so that he grew faint. Then he wished death for himself, and said, "It is better for me to die than to live."

9 Then God said to Jonah, "Is it right for you to be angry about the plant?" And he said, "It is right for me to be angry, even to death!" 10 But the LORD said, "You have had pity on the plant for which you have not labored, nor made it grow, which came up in a night and perished in a night. 11 "And should I not pity Nineveh, that great city, in which are more than one hundred and twenty thousand persons who cannot discern between their right hand and their left?"

Jonah 4:1-11a (NKJV)

Main Ideas to Emphasize:

- The people of Nineveh were very wicked people who hated God and hated His people.
- They deserved punishment, but God loved them. In His great compassion, He sent a warning first by His prophet Jonah.
- When Jonah preached, the people repented, so God did not punish them.
- God must punish sin, but God is compassionate and merciful. He wants to forgive us if we will repent of our sins.
- God's heart is full of compassion, and He wants the hearts of His people to be like His own. He wants us to have kind, loving feelings that result in kind, helpful actions towards others.

Questions & Discussion:

- Ask if we have done some wicked things that need to be punished. Ask for examples.
- Ask if we deserve to be punished. (Yes, the Bible says we are all guilty--Rom. Ch. 3.)
- Ask how we know God wants to show compassion for us. (He sent Jesus to be our Savior, and He sent people to warn us and teach us His word, just like He did to the Ninevites.)

Application--Step of Growth for the Saved Child:

Follow up--Ask how they have seen someone show compassion for another person.

If you are a believer in Jesus, God has shown compassion on you by forgiving you for all your sins. Now you can show compassion to others.

Discuss—Ways in which they can show compassion (show they really care) for others. With older children, suggest specific groups that may be challenging to show compassion for, such as the mentally retarded, the handicapped, someone who is always dirty, someone who brags a lot, someone who is mean, someone who is very poor. Ask for ideas on specific ways to show compassion to members of each group. Choose one or two of these groups and ask students to act out showing compassion to them.

Invitation--Giving the Unsaved Child an Opportunity to Receive Christ

If you have not yet received Jesus, you are still in your sins. But God wants to forgive you. He wants to throw all your sins away. You deserve punishment. We all do. But God has compassion for you. He wants to show you mercy. Jesus has already paid the punishment for your sins. Now you have only to say yes to Him. If you have never received Jesus as your Savior, but today you would like to do so, pray this prayer in your heart right now. (Teacher, lead in the sinner's prayer, found in the preface to these lessons. Then ask those who prayed to raise their hands briefly. You pray for God's blessing on them.)

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