PREPARING

A. THE SOURCE

**Philippians 3:12-14 (NIV)** • “Not that I have already obtained all this, or have already arrived at my goal, but I press on to take hold of that for which Christ Jesus took hold of me. Brothers and sisters, I do not consider myself yet to have taken hold of it. But one thing I do: Forgetting what is behind and straining toward what is ahead, I press on toward the goal to win the prize for which God has called me heavenward in Christ Jesus.”

**1 John 1:8 (NIV)** • “If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us.”

**Colossians 1:28, 29 (NIV)** • “He is the one we proclaim, admonishing and teaching everyone with all wisdom, so that we may present everyone fully mature in Christ. To this end I strenuously contend with all the energy Christ so powerfully works in me.”

**1 Thessalonians 5:23 (NIV)** • “May God himself, the God of peace, sanctify you through and through. May your whole spirit, soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ.”

**Exodus 23:4, 5 (NIV)** • “If you come across your enemy’s ox or donkey wandering off, be sure to return it. If you see the donkey of someone who hates you fallen down under its load, do not leave it there; be sure you help them with it.”

**Psalm 119:57-61 (NIV)** • “You are my portion, Lord; I have promised to obey your words. I have sought your face with all my heart; be gracious to me according to your promise. I have considered my ways and have turned my steps to your statutes. I will hasten and not delay to obey your commands. Though the wicked bind me with ropes, I will not forget your law.”

**1 Corinthians 6:7, 8 (NIV)** • “The very fact that you have lawsuits among you means you have been completely defeated already. Why not rather be wronged? Why not rather be cheated? Instead, you yourselves cheat and do wrong, and you do this to your brothers and sisters.”

**2 Corinthians 13:7-9 (NIV)** • “Now we pray to God that you will not do anything wrong—not so that people will see that we have stood the test but so that you will do what is right even though we may seem to have failed. For we cannot do anything against the truth, but only for the truth. We are glad whenever we are weak but you are strong; and our prayer is that you may be fully restored.”

**Matthew 5:38-48 (NIV)** • “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. And if anyone wants to sue you and take your shirt, hand over your coat as well.”
If anyone forces you to go one mile, go with them two miles. Give to the one who asks you, and do not turn away from the one who wants to borrow from you. You have heard that it was said, ‘Love your neighbor and hate your enemy.’ But I tell you, love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you, that you may be children of your Father in heaven. He causes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the righteous and the unrighteous. If you love those who love you, what reward will you get? Are not even the tax collectors doing that? And if you greet only your own people, what are you doing more than others? Do not even pagans do that? Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.”

(See additional passages in student material.)

B. WHAT’S TO BE SAID ABOUT “BEING PERFECT”

The lesson this week considers the high standard set by Christ for citizens of His kingdom. Jesus calls His children to react to hostile encounters with a “new way” that is out of this world. Not only is the response foreign, but His final summary of His expectations for our personal growth is outrageous. First of all, we are challenged to avoid retaliation, bury our plans for revenge, and even dismiss our own rights if they get in the way of others coming to know and understand the Father’s love. The last command is the final straw, however: “Be perfect, therefore, as your heavenly Father is perfect.” This lesson is about the power of God’s way versus the way of the world and how God expects His children to do the seemingly impossible.

If someone strikes you on the right cheek . . .
If someone wants to sue you and take your shirt . . .
if someone forces you to go one mile . . .

We can compare how the world would finish these “if” scenarios with the way Jesus commands us to finish them. It is going to require “new, clear reactors” to live like this. While this is not a “new teaching,” it is so foreign it looks new. And it is impossible to do this without a crystal-clear understanding of why this way works in God’s world.

C. WHERE WE’RE GOING WITH “BEING PERFECT”

As a result of this lesson we would like the students to be able to:
1. Discuss the effects of evil or injustice on human relations in light of the biblical view of the great controversy between God and Satan.
2. Construct alternative responses to hurtful or unkind behavior based on the example of Christ and others throughout history.
3. Formulate a healthy sense of responsibility for their own emotions, even if others behave badly toward them.
4. Understand and integrate unconditional love into their personal experience.

D. MATERIALS NEEDED

Beginning • (Activity A) sponge; large, smooth stone; food coloring in several colors; (Activity B) paper, pens or pencils.

Connecting • Bibles, student lessons, handout (p. 14), paper, pens or pencils.

BRIDGING

A. THE WEEK IN REVIEW

Allow 10 minutes as students are arriving to:
1. Share anything that was meaningful to them in this lesson.
2. Engage in a discussion about the topic of the lesson in connection to the belief highlighted this week.
3. Say the Bible memory text either individually or in a group.

B. OTHER SABBATH SCHOOL COMPONENTS

>> Song service
>> Mission emphasis (find a link for Adventist Mission for youth and adults at www.realtimefaith.net)
NOTE TO TEACHER: Put together your own program with options from the categories below—Beginning, Connecting, Applying, and Closing. Please keep in mind, however, that the students need to have an opportunity to be interactive (participate actively and with one another) and to study from the Word.

A. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • The purpose is to demonstrate how unhealthy it is to absorb the bad behavior others display toward us, by demonstrating how different elements (stone and sponge) react to damaging liquid. You will need a sponge, a large, smooth stone, and several different colors of food coloring or any liquid that will stain or discolor the sponge.

Get set • Say: Here is a stone and here is a sponge. These represent different approaches to adversity and unkind behavior.

Go • Fill the sponge with drops of the different colors. (You can name the drops for things that commonly happen to teens—red drops for when your friends betray you and talk behind your back; green drops for when people demean you in public by saying nasty things to you; blue drops for when people falsely accuse you or physically try to hurt you, etc.) Do the same to the stone. Obviously, the drops roll off the stone, while the sponge absorbs the liquid. (You may remind students of the first-quarter lesson on our identity in Christ.)

Debriefing • Ask: What are some lessons we can learn from this? What can we learn from the illustration about the stone? (We shouldn’t allow other people the power to fill us up with bitterness, anger, or hatred.) What is similar and what is different about the way each substance reacted to the liquid? (The sponge absorbed the liquid, and the liquid changed its color. It filled up with the “bad stuff,” and when you squeeze it, it all comes out. The rock is marked also, which can demonstrate that when people hurt you, it does leave a mark, but it doesn’t have to change the truth about you—what you really are inside. The rock will be a rock no matter how it gets marked up. The sponge tends to inflate and deflate with all the things that it absorbs. And when it is squeezed, it spills out all of what makes it full. The liquid doesn’t completely go away after you squeeze the sponge either—you have to rinse it for a long time to get it clean again. When you hold on to anger and give it back, it stays with you.)

Say • How we retaliate or react when people mistreat us can either mark us or make us. We have the ability to decide how much power others will be allowed to have in our lives.

B. BEGINNING ACTIVITY

Get ready • Give everyone pen/pencil and paper.

Get set • The purpose of this exercise is to get students to try to draw perfect shapes. The outcome is to get them to discuss what “perfection” is and how our ideas of perfection might be different from God’s.

Go • Say: Freehand, see who can draw a perfect circle, square, and triangle. Give students a few moments to come up with their best. Then put the shapes on a table and have the students vote on the perfect shape. (Have them decide which is closest to perfection.)

Debriefing • Ask: Which shape is the hardest to draw and why? Which shape can be drawn more easily and why? What criterion do we use to judge whether a shape is perfect? Is there any confusion as to what the shapes are? To what degree do you think God expects perfection from us? What kind of perfection is it? The best ever? The best we can do? Better than someone else? (When a toddler begins walking, are they expected to walk as well as their parents?)
C. BEGINNING ILLUSTRATION

In your own words, tell the following story:

Building Bridges. Once upon a time two brothers shared adjoining farms. For more than 40 years they worked side by side, sharing equipment and helping each other out whenever needed. Then one day a rift developed. It began with a small misunderstanding, it grew into a major difference, and finally it exploded into an exchange of bitter words followed by months of angry silence.

One day the eldest brother, Pete, was out in his fields when a truck pulled up. Out jumped a man who approached Pete carrying a carpenter’s toolbox. “I’m looking for a few days’ work,” he said. “Perhaps you would have a few small jobs I could do for you?”

“Well, yes, I do,” said Pete. “See that creek down there? It’s the border between my brother’s farm and mine. My brother keeps it nice and deep to stop me from setting one foot on his beloved farm. Well, I’ll oblige him. I want you to take that timber over there by the barn and build me a new fence, a real tall one, so I don’t have to look over at my brother and his farm any more.”

The carpenter was glad to have the work. “No worries, mate. I understand. Just point me to your posthole digger, and I’ll get the job done.”

So the carpenter set about working. Meanwhile farmer Pete drove into town to the local cattle auction. When he returned at sunset, he was shocked to see what the carpenter had done.

There was no fence. Instead the carpenter had built a bridge, and walking across it was Pete’s younger brother. He held out his hand and spoke to his brother, “Mate, after all I’ve done to you these past few months I can’t believe you’d still reach out to me. You’re right. It’s time to bury the hatchet.”

The two brothers met at the middle of the bridge and embraced. They turned to see the carpenter hoist his toolbox on his shoulder.

“No, wait! Stay a few days. I’ve a lot of other projects for you,” said farmer Pete.

“I’d love to stay on,” the carpenter said, “but I have more bridges to build.”—http://storiesforpreaching.com/building-bridges/.

Debriefing • Ask: What does this story have to do with our topic of being perfect? If it is a good thing to be fair, why isn’t it a good thing to make sure people get what they deserve? (The very point of grace is giving people what they don’t deserve. No one will ever deserve God’s grace and salvation. The only beings who finally “get what they deserve” are those who won’t accept from God what they don’t deserve, but are freely offered. God asks us to pattern our own dealings with others on His dealings with us.)

A. CONNECTING TO THE KINGDOM

Present the following ideas in your own words:

While it is true that all kingdoms have rules, Jesus sets the standard for His kingdom seemingly out of reach. It seems impossible. Usually when someone quotes “an eye for an eye and a tooth for a tooth” it is right before they are going to hit back. There is a fine line between choosing a way other than retaliation and enabling bad people to continue doing bad things. Have students find and read Matthew 5:38-48.

Ask: What problems might arise if someone mindlessly applies the conditions set forth in the Sermon on the Mount? What specific challenges do you see in practicing these commands? What did Jesus want us to understand when He asked His citizens to be like Him?

Say: While there are very few people who would admit to being perfect—even as God is perfect—maybe a look into what it means to be perfect would help. Noah, Abraham, and Job were all considered “blameless.”

Ask: What does “being perfect” mean to you? Help students think of and list definitions
and synonyms of “perfect.” Be sure the list includes the concepts of flawless, without defect, pristine, etc.

Have students find and read the following verses: Colossians 1:28, 29; 1 Thessalonians 5:23; 2 Corinthians 13:7-9.

Ask: Is it possible to arrive at such a place with our definition?

Say: The word “perfect” doesn’t necessarily always mean “flawless, pristine, or without defect” but can also mean “mature, full grown, attaining full potential.” Have the students reread the verses, paraphrasing this other meaning into them. Ask if they can see the application of these principles in their lives more readily with the second set of definitions.

Conclude with the following ideas in your own words:

What is perfection? To Jesus you are perfect the moment you repay evil with good, hatred with love, and injustice with doing the right thing. This doesn’t mean you are sinless, but it does mean that you have perfectly modeled what Christ has asked you to do. Could we be more like God on our knees praying with our eyes closed? Or maybe singing in a choir? What if we memorized the entire book of Psalms? Every good deed pales in comparison to loving your enemies because it is the most out-of-this-world behavior known to man.

B. CONNECTING TO THE LESSON ILLUSTRATION

Ask someone beforehand to read or tell the story from Sabbath’s section of the lesson. Follow up by discussing the following questions:

1. What was Naomi’s problem?
2. What did she need to get past her problem?
3. What convictions, beliefs, or experiences do you need to be able to forgive?
4. What character qualities are present in someone who forgives?
5. Who wins when you forgive?
6. What are the benefits of reacting the way Christ commands us to react?

C. CONNECTING TO LIFE

Pose the following:

Two men go shopping for a gift for their firstborn children. One man believes in God and is a Christian, and the other is someone who does not believe in God.

Ask: Who do you think will buy the better gift? How can you know? Which father will probably behave in the more loving manner toward his child? (Even the unbeliever loves his child and will do his very best to find the best present possible, just as the Christian would.)

Pose the following:

Now imagine that the two men are standing on a busy street corner with their children. Both children step out into the street as a speeding car approaches.

Ask: Which father will step out and risk his life for his child—the Christian or the unbeliever? (probably both) Why? (God created them both with the capacity to love, and even those who reject Him most often still love their own children.) What difference, then, does it make whether you believe or disbelieve? Both can love unconditionally, can’t they? (Yes, and we have God to thank for wiring that into us.) But is loving your own children an indicator of being a “good person”? (Jesus would say, “Even the pagans know how to do that!”)

Say: What makes God’s kingdom stand out above and beyond all the rest is the fact that God’s love can cause us to love not only those who are easy to love but those who seem impossible to love—our enemies.

Ask: How long could hate last in a kingdom where people loved those who were nasty
and malicious? How long would prejudice last in a kingdom where people suspended their own rights to value others? How long would injustice live if people simply loved others the way God does? (The Lord’s Prayer requests that we be given the power to live on “earth as it is in heaven.”)

**D. CONNECTING TO THE WORD**

Invite the students to read the story in the handout (see 1 Samuel 24:1-22) on page 14.

**Discuss the following questions:**
1. Was David a perfect person?
2. When have you had a chance to retaliate but chose not to? What happened? How did you feel?
3. What is the danger of David’s behavior?
4. What promises are present in this story for people who get attacked by others?

**E. CONNECTING TO THE WORLD**

If you haven’t already done so, call attention to the student lesson. Ask students, in groups of two or three, to consider the verses in Wednesday’s Bible Insight section of the student lesson.

**Ask/Say:** If you had an opportunity to change the world by simply writing three simple rules, what would they be? What behaviors do you think could change the world? Remember that they need to apply to the whole world, so consider different cultures, peoples, and environments.

Have students work on their rules and then share them with the rest of the class. Comment on the similarities as well as the differences. Ask them why they think the rules they have come up with would make such a difference.

**Say/Ask:** In order for rules to work, they need to be enforced. How would your rules be enforced? Could they be enforced? On a scale of 1 to 5 (1 being very difficult, and 5 being very easy), how hard would it be to think of five people in our church who treat their enemies the way Christ commands in Matthew 5:38-48? What about you? What do you think would need to change in your life to enable you to react that way?

### A. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Present the following in your own words:

Imagine the new Christian believers being persecuted for their faith in Christ. They sang as they were thrown into arenas where the lions devoured them. The spectators hoped to see the Christians retaliate. The testimony of historians reveals that the Christians sang. It was a new kingdom with new rules that the iron might of Rome could not match. The spectators became dismayed and frustrated by the response of the Christians. The might of Rome was conquered, not by anger or revenge, but by the power of kingdom believers proving that their faith made them stronger than death itself.

**Ask/Say:** How does our faith in Christ strengthen us against the “lions” we face? Think about the following statement and share why this may be true: “Any fool can hit back, but it takes incredible strength to walk away.”

### B. APPLICATION ACTIVITY

Using the graphic from Friday’s Applying section of the student lesson, decide which questions would apply to the experience of some of the characters in the stories you have read or told today, or of some other story the students choose.

When finished, have the students choose the verse from the student lesson that challenges them the most, and the one that is the most encouraging.

### C. APPLICATION QUESTIONS

1. What do you think Christ means by “be
perfect, even as your heavenly Father is perfect”?

2. Does God give commands that are impossible to obey? Does God set goals for us that are impossible to achieve? Explain.

3. Agree or Disagree: Loving our enemies is the most difficult thing God will ever ask us to do. (Say why you agree or disagree.)

4. What are some examples of seemingly unforgivable offenses? Have there been people who have forgiven even similar kinds of actions?

5. What are some things that have happened to you that you think God is calling you to let go of and be more forgiving about?

6. Why do you think most people view revenge as an appropriate reaction? What do you think is their rationale for retaliation?

7. Can you think of any stories you’ve heard in which the quest for revenge was not as sweet as they thought it would be?

---

**CLOSING**

**SUMMARY**

In your own words, conclude with the following ideas:

What Christ calls us to is exciting, liberating, and world-changing! Think about what would have happened if Jesus had reacted to injustice the way we tend to. We would be lost. Christ not only liberated us by His unconditional loving reaction, but He compels and gives us the power to live the same way. Imagine how much more you will appreciate God’s grace and forgiveness for you when you give the same kind of perfect love away. We might think perfection is all about being flawless and pristine, but in God’s kingdom you will find perfection in those who pass out a full-grown kind of unconditional love to those who don’t deserve it. That’s it! If you want to really be perfect, act like God did to you and give someone who hates you a break. Give someone who doesn’t deserve your friendship or love some kindness and grace. When you forgive a wrongdoing you never thought you could forgive, you couldn’t be more perfect than you are in that moment.
“When Saul came back from fighting the Philistines, he was told that David was in the wilderness near Engedi. Saul took three thousand of the best soldiers in Israel and went looking for David and his men east of Wild Goat Rocks. He came to a cave close to some sheep pens by the road and went in to relieve himself. It happened to be the very cave in which David and his men were hiding far back in the cave. They said to him, ‘This is your chance! The Lord has told you that he would put your enemy in your power and you could do to him whatever you wanted to.’ David crept over and cut off a piece of Saul’s robe without Saul’s knowing it. But then David’s conscience began to hurt, and he said to his men, ‘May the Lord keep me from doing any harm to my master, whom the Lord chose as king! I must not harm him in the least, because he is the king chosen by the Lord!’ So David convinced his men that they should not attack Saul.

“Saul got up, left the cave, and started away. Then David went out after him and called to him, ‘Your Majesty!’ Saul turned around, and David bowed down to the ground in respect and said, ‘Why do you listen to people who say that I am trying to harm you? You can see for yourself that just now in the cave the Lord put you in my power. Some of my men told me to kill you, but I felt sorry for you and said that I would not harm you in the least, because you are the one whom the Lord chose to be king. Look, my father, look at the piece of your robe I am holding! I could have killed you, but instead I only cut this off. This should convince you that I have no thought of rebelling against you or of harming you. You are hunting me down to kill me, even though I have not done you any wrong. May the Lord judge which one of us is wrong! May he punish you for your action against me, for I will not harm you in the least. You know the old saying, “Evil is done only by evil people.” And so I will not harm you. Look at what the king of Israel is trying to kill! Look at what he is chasing! A dead dog, a flea! The Lord will judge, and he will decide which one of us is wrong. May he look into the matter, defend me, and save me from you.’

“When David had finished speaking, Saul said, ‘Is that really you, David my son?’ And he started crying. Then he said to David, ‘You are right, and I am wrong. You have been so good to me, while I have done such wrong to you! Today you have shown how good you are to me, because you did not kill me, even though the Lord put me in your power. How often does someone catch an enemy and then let him get away unharmed? The Lord bless you for what you have done to me today! Now I am sure that you will be king of Israel and that the kingdom will continue under your rule. But promise me in the Lord’s name that you will spare my descendants, so that my name and my family’s name will not be completely forgotten.’ David promised that he would.

“Then Saul went back home, and David and his men went back to their hiding place.”

1 Samuel 24:1-22 (GNT)
Sabbath
FOR STUDY


» Our Beliefs, no. 10, The Experience of Salvation: “Through the Spirit we are born again and sanctified; the Spirit renews our minds, writes God’s law of love in our hearts, and we are given the power to live a holy life. Abiding in Him we become partakers of the divine nature and have the assurance of salvation now and in the judgment.”

» Ellen G. White, Thoughts From the Mount of Blessing, pp. 74, 75

THE HEALING POWER OF FORGIVENESS

Naomi had come to Dr. William Wilson for more than a year. Abused as a child, she struggled with uncontrollable anger, despite having reached middle age. . . .

One day Dr. Wilson listened to Naomi talk once again about all the people she was mad at. He felt helpless. . . . But then it occurred to him—if this woman could somehow find it in her heart to forgive those who had wronged her, she just might find healing. He realized that the power to forgive came exclusively from God.

Naomi needed God! . . .

Dr. Wilson talked to Naomi about how her own resentment and bitterness were imprisoning her. Naomi started to weep. Dr. Wilson asked about her religious convictions. Naomi was hungry to know Christ. She just didn’t know how to accept Him.

Dr. Wilson explained how she could receive the forgiveness that Jesus offered from the cross.

Accepting Jesus’ forgiveness, Naomi began to change. Now she and Dr. Wilson were able to work on forgiveness as a cure for her chronic anger. . . . Naomi had to confront painful things in her past, and she had to consciously forgive.

But now . . . she had the forgiveness that Christ had given her. In time, Naomi was freed from the anger that had plagued her emotional life. She began to enjoy healthy relationships with coworkers and family members for the first time in decades. . . .

When Jesus hung upon the cross, unjustly treated and cruelly crucified, He prayed, “Father, forgive them, for they do not know what they do” (Luke 23:34, NKJV).

Forgiveness opens the door of the mind to receive God’s love for those who unjustly treat us. Forgiveness is not an emotion; it is a choice. Is there someone who has wronged you, who has hurt you deeply? Are you harboring resentment toward another person? Now is the time to choose to forgive. The anger and resentment and bitterness will destroy you. If Jesus could forgive those who unjustly crucified Him, you can forgive those who have unjustly wounded
you. Right now, will you ask the Holy Spirit to give you the spirit of forgiveness for anyone who has wronged you? —Mark Finley, Solid Ground, pp. 43, 44.

Sunday
RESPONDING

» Read Proverbs 20:22.

» The following scenario comes from summer camp: In the cafeteria Phil made a comment about Samantha that humiliated her in front of everyone. Many of the boys and girls laughed out loud while those who were closest to Samantha were mortified. What made it worse was that Phil seemed to be completely unaware that he had humiliated her. He continued through the day as though nothing were wrong. She wanted to do the same to him at an opportune time. Her counselor noticed and encouraged her to have a talk with Phil. What are some of Samantha’s options? What will bring her the most satisfaction? What would help Phil change how he treats others? What would you advise Samantha to do?

Monday
BIBLE ANSWERS ON THE EXPERIENCE OF SALVATION

» Read Titus 3:3-7; 2 Corinthians 5:19, 20; John 16:8.

» Jesus died to save us from sin and our sinful nature. Through Him we are made clean and whole. When we accept God’s grace and forgiveness, it is our responsibility as God’s representatives to share His grace and forgiveness with others. We are to show His love for the unlovely by loving them. It is not for us to judge, condemn, or retaliate. Judgment belongs to God. In response to God’s love and forgiveness, we should help others learn of His love and forgiveness too.

» What are some steps you can take today to show God’s love and forgiveness to someone who has hurt you?

» How does God want us to react to the situations listed below? Read God’s advice and then write how we should respond in each situation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Situation</th>
<th>God’s Advice</th>
<th>Our Reaction</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Your “enemy” is hungry</td>
<td>Proverbs 25:21, 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your “enemy” is thirsty</td>
<td>Proverbs 25:21, 22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone hurts you</td>
<td>Proverbs 20:22</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your “enemy” destroys your reputation</td>
<td>Proverbs 24:29</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Your “enemy” is always after you</td>
<td>Matthew 5:44</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Someone is bullying you</td>
<td>Romans 12:14</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>You are angry and want revenge</td>
<td>Romans 12:19</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Tuesday
REFLECTING

» Read 1 Peter 3:8.

» Let’s be honest. While it is easy to say the words “I don’t care what others think of me,” it simply isn’t true. When others mistreat us or put us down we get hurt or angry. Jesus uses the illustrations of someone striking us on the face or stealing what belongs to us or even using their authority to belittle us. And yet His goal is for us to experience the freedom of loving others unconditionally, even those who are hateful. He promises He will give us the power to do that through His grace.
The nature of human pride is such that when someone mistreats us, we deeply want to hurt them back, at least the same, if not more. God knows that when we hang on to the injustice done to us, it only damages us. He also knows the most potent response is the loving response. Jesus has the secret to our joy. He commands us to “be perfect.” His goal is to get us to try another way than the way of this world. How can you try this “other way” with everyone you meet?

**Wednesday**

**BIBLE INSIGHTS**

Fill in the blanks after looking up the texts in the New International Version (go to Biblegateway.com).

1. “Do not hate a fellow Israelite in your_______. Rebuke your ________ frankly so you will not _____ in their _________. Do not seek ______ or bear a _______ against anyone among your ______, but love your neighbor as _______. I am the Lord” (Leviticus 19:17, 18).

2. “Do not say, ‘I’ll ______ you back for this ______!’ Wait for the Lord, and he will ______ you” (Proverbs 20:22).

3. “Finally, all of you, be ____________, be ________, love one ____________, be ________ and humble. Do not ______ evil with ______ or insult with _______. On the contrary, repay evil with ________, because to this you were called so that you may inherit a blessing. For, ‘Whoever would love life and see _______ days must keep their _______ from _______ and their _______ from _______ speech. They must turn from evil and do _______; they must seek _______ and _______ it. For the eyes of the Lord are on the _______ and his ears are attentive to their _______, but the face of the Lord is against _______ who do evil” (1 Peter 3:8-12).

4. “Do not say, ‘I’ll ______ ______ done to me; I’ll pay them ______ ______’” (Proverbs 24:29).

**Thursday**

**CONNECTING**

» Read Matthew 5:38-48.

» Review the memory text.

It has been said that what makes Jesus so compelling is that He believes the best about us while knowing the worst about us. Despite the sinful nature we have inherited, Jesus loves us. Through His power, we are capable of loving others unconditionally. God asks you to practice selfless love even toward those who are mean. If someone hates you, you can be certain God loves you. If someone mistreats you, you have the option either to chain yourself to that unfortunate moment or to live generously and not be bound by the anger.

To do this, we must ask the Spirit to help us think as God does. God looks at our mistakes and our awful tendencies and sees a precious child who is acting foolishly, but who has the potential to be better. God sees our mean behavior and says, “There is a better way to handle your own pain than hurting others.” Are there some people that you need to set free from your anger? Are there some events that you just need to let go of? Pray and ask God to give you the power to do it.

**Friday**

**APPLYING**

» Read Romans 12:14-21 (NIV).
Apply the questions that appear in the diagram on the right to one of the stories mentioned in this lesson or in one that you are familiar with that addresses the topic of revenge. See if you can discover these questions at work, or how they might help defuse the situation and bring something good out of the bad.

**Consider the source**—some people behave badly because they have been mistreated. Why would this person be treating me this way? Is this about me or them?

**Have I done the same thing before to someone else?** What has God done for me when I have wronged Him? What will I gain by retaliation? What will I gain by loving unconditionally?

**What response will help my offender to become the person God wants them to be?** How can my response help them see what God is like?

---

**The “Other Way”**

Ask the questions around the diagram and see if they help you arrive at a better way to handle being mistreated.